



# Nutrition Management:

## Taste Changes

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Taste changes are a common side effect from cancer treatments, chemotherapy medications, oral infections, poor oral hygiene and mouth care. Taste changes may lead to less interest in food, a decreased food intake and eventually weight loss. You may find foods that you usually love less enjoyable. The following strategies may be useful in decreasing "off" tastes from foods and beverages. Continue to eat small frequent meals and snacks that provide both calories and protein to maintain your weight and muscle mass.

- Rinse your mouth with teas, ginger ale, salted water or baking soda and water to clear taste before eating.
- Suck on lemon drops, mints or chew sugar-free gum to help get rid of bad tastes that may linger after eating. **(do not do this if you have a sore mouth or throat; avoid sugar-free gum and candies if you have diarrhea)**
- Practice good oral hygiene. Brush your teeth after eating and use a baking soda and water rinse (1 teaspoon of baking soda and 1 teaspoon of salt per quart water) at least three to five times a day. This can help keep the mouth clean and tasting better, enhance healing as well as keeping the mouth at a pH that might help decrease the growth of microorganisms or thrush.
- Take your anti-fungal medication regularly to prevent oral or esophageal thrush.
- Treat food like medication. Even if the food does not taste good, you need to eat because your body needs nutrients in order to heal and recover from treatments.

### **If you have sensitive taste buds, and are sensitive to strong odors:**

- Serve refrigerated or cold foods. Hot foods produce stronger smells and flavors.
- Cold foods numb the taste buds. Try sorbet, sherbet, fruit ice, frozen yogurt, blended milkshakes or smoothies with fresh or frozen fruit (like cantaloupe, grapes, oranges and watermelon).
- Cover liquid nutrition supplements (like Boost® or Ensure®) with a lid and drink through a straw, or drink from a child's covered drinking cup to avoid odors while drinking.
- Try foods that have minimal odors and short cooking time, such as scrambled eggs, French toast, pancakes, oatmeal and cream of wheat.

### **If foods taste metallic:**

- Avoid using metal eating utensils, and use plastic instead.
- Avoid drinking liquids directly from aluminum cans; use styrofoam or plastic cups instead.
- Tart food can mask a metallic taste. Try drinking orange, cranberry, or pineapple juice, and lemonade. Add vinegar, lemon juice, pickles, or relish to meats and vegetables, and other dishes.
- Marinate meat, chicken, turkey, tofu, or fish in wine, acidic dressings, or soy sauce. Try adding fresh or dried herbs (rosemary, thyme, basil, oregano, tarragon, or cumin), onion, garlic, chili powder, mustard, ketchup, barbecue sauce, or mint, as well.

### **If foods taste bland:**

- Increase the sugar in sweet foods, such as milkshakes and smoothies. This can also help increase pleasant tastes while decreasing salty, bitter or acidic tastes.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables may be more appealing to the taste buds.
- Experiment with textures and flavors. Try chopped nuts, seeds, or water chestnuts.

### **If foods taste too sweet:**

- Try making a sour, tart or mildly sweet shake or smoothie. Make the smoothie or shake with plain yogurt which has a slightly sour taste that may decrease sweetness of the smoothie.
  - Use frozen cranberries in liquid supplements such as Boost® or Ensure® which will make a tart shake that might taste better.
  - Add lemon juice to fruit juice. Try adding coffee or finely ground decaffeinated coffee to a sweet, milk-based supplement or buttermilk to a smoothie recipe.
  - Season foods with tart flavors such as lemon, citrus, vinegar and pickled items.
- Do not use these if you have a sore mouth or throat.**

This document is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Our aim is to promote active participation in your care and treatment by providing information and education. Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options should be discussed with your physician.

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Document #00303/ Revised 01/08

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### **Cancer Nutrition Program**

Ask your doctor or nurse for an appointment with a nutritionist, or call (877) 907-0859