

### Nutritional counselling

If food tastes different and it is hard to eat, talk to a nutrition specialist. They can give you simple tips to help you eat well and avoid losing weight or becoming weak.

### Further information on this topic

- **«Eat Well During Cancer»** (World Cancer Research Fund UK, 2020) – Easy recipes and tips for healthy eating
- **«Nutrition for People Living with Cancer»** (Cancer Council Australia, 2025) – Simple advice on nutrition for people with cancer, their families, and friends
- **«Understanding Taste and Smell Changes»** (Cancer Council Australia, 2025) – How cancer and its treatments can affect taste and smell, with practical tips to help manage these changes and maintain adequate nutrition

### See other Symptom Navi Flyers

- **«Inflamed lining of the mouth (oral mucositis)»**, Symptom Navi Flyer (2020)

## Changes in taste

### Good to know




Changes in taste can affect your appetite. Food or drinks may taste different: bitter or metallic, stronger (saltier or sweeter) or weaker (less taste). Changes in taste can have different causes:

- Tumour in the head or neck area
- Radiotherapy in the head or neck area
- Cancer therapy or other medication
- Mouth sores or dry mouth (oral mucosa)

Taste usually gets better a few weeks after treatment ends. Tell your treatment team if these changes make it hard to eat or lower your quality of life.



## Changes in taste

You feel...	Or you notice...	What you can do yourself...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You notice changes in taste but you do not need to change your diet.</li> <li>You keep eating your normal amount of food.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If strong smells bother you, choose cold food or food at room temperature. Use a straw for your drinks.</li> <li>Drink often. You can use sugar-free lozenges or xylitol chewing gum to keep your mouth moist.</li> <li>Keep your mouth clean as described in the flyer "Inflamed oral mucosa (oral mucositis)".</li> <li>Avoid alcohol and tobacco. If you smoke, rinse your mouth after. Do not use mouthwashes with alcohol.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You changed your diet because of taste changes.</li> <li>Your weight is stable or you eat enough calories.</li> </ul>	<p><u>If food tastes metallic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>avoid artificial sweeteners; marinate red meat or eat other protein such as chicken, fish, pulses, eggs, tofu, soya or quorn; choose fresh fruit and vegetables instead of food in metal cans or canned drinks; use plastic or glass glasses and cutlery instead of metal.</li> </ul> <p><u>If food tastes too salty</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>avoid salty, processed food and add a little sugar or lemon juice.</li> </ul> <p><u>If food tastes too sweet</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>add a little salt or lemon juice.</li> </ul> <p><u>If food tastes no flavour</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>choose strong flavour (onions, garlic, cheese, bacon) and use spices and herbs.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sudden loss of taste</li> <li>You choke or cough frequently when eating</li> <li>You are eating less than usual or have lost weight</li> <li>You are disgusted by food</li> <li>You have pain when swallowing or your tongue is sore, cracked or has a white coating that does not go away after brushing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact your treatment team</li> </ul>