

Taste and Smell Changes in Post COVID-19 Recovery

Post-COVID-19

Interdisciplinary Clinical Care Network

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► Just over half of patients who have COVID-19 will lose their sense of smell. Most will recover after two or three weeks but the longer loss of smell, known as parosmia, is common. For about 10% of people, the loss of smell can last at least 8 weeks or, commonly, continue for many months. Some people also experience unusual smells as they recover.



Loss of smell can affect taste because the flavor of the food is a result of the combination of smell and taste. There is evidence that COVID can affect taste as well as smell. This loss of smell and taste may cause your favorite foods to taste and smell differently following your COVID illness. Food may taste bland, sweet, or metallic. Although these changes are usually temporary, they can affect your appetite and how much you eat.

How can you help your sense of smell to get better?



Although we don't know the long-term effects of COVID-19 on smell and taste, we know from studies of loss of smell caused by other viruses that about 30-60% of patients report improvement within 6-18 months. It is important to know that recovery can be slow and difficult to detect. It might be helpful to test your sense of smell by yourself at home and then test again in 6 months.

Although there is no treatment to help get your smell back there are 'smell training kits' that some studies have shown can help some people recover faster. This involves repeated stimulation of the smell nerves. For more information check out this link: www.abscent.org

Some doctors have prescribed corticosteroid nose inhalers for patients whose loss of smell may be made worse by allergies, runny nose, or blocked sinuses, however there is currently no strong evidence that this will help. Please consult your physician to discuss potential risks and benefits.

How can you help improve the taste of food?

- Choose foods that you like and continue to retry foods as your taste preferences may change.
- Keep your mouth and teeth clean and healthy. Brush your teeth twice a day and rinse with water if it feels dry and uncomfortable. Avoid mouthwashes that have alcohol in them.
- If smells from cooking bother you, try microwave-ready or cold meals.
- Try different flavors, textures (crunchy, seedy etc.), and temperatures of food to see which you like best. Do not try this if a Speech and Language Pathologist checked your swallowing and told you to eat only soft foods or thick liquids. Simple foods, such as plain chicken, fish, tofu, and rice may be easier to eat especially if you feel nauseated or have an unsettled stomach. Cold or room temperature foods may be best.
- Although eating enough protein is important for recovery, high protein foods can taste bitter or metallic. Marinating proteins with sweet/sour to change the flavor can help. Also try a variety of proteins such as eggs, vegetarian meat alternatives, beans, fish, cheese, red meat, or lentils.



- Adding strong flavours such as herbs, spices and sauces can help with taste, for example, mustard, cinnamon, chili or vinegar.
- Sharp/tart flavors and drinks such as orange, lemon, or lime flavors can be useful in balancing sweet tastes.
- If foods have a metallic taste, try plastic cutlery instead of metal and use glass cookware.
- Salty or bitter taste may be improved by choosing low salt varieties and adding sweet flavors to food or drink, such as honey, sweetener, or sugar.
- If you are struggling to maintain your weight, please discuss this with a health care professional.



Loss of smell or taste can make you feel down. Allow yourself to feel whatever emotions may come, and remember to be gentle with yourself. You may be more at risk of depression with a reduced sense of smell. If you are finding it is difficult to cope, or you are worried, please speak to a health care professional.

For more information on how to support your understanding and management of symptoms as you recover from COVID-19, please visit www.phsa.ca/health-info/post-covid-19-care-recovery