

# Moving oncology care forward so that you can look forward to life's moments

*Changes in taste and smell*

**Life** Oncology

*Making life better*

# Changes in taste and smell

It is common for patients undergoing and recovering from cancer treatment to experience a change in smell and taste. This can reduce their desire to eat and prevent them from consuming adequate amounts of food and fluids, resulting in malnutrition (undernutrition).

Malnutrition in patients receiving cancer treatment is associated with negative outcomes such as increased hospital admissions, longer hospital stays, increased healthcare costs, increased risk for infections, reduced tolerance and compliance to treatment and reduced effectiveness of treatment. Therefore, it's important that you manage your changes in taste and smell during treatment to ensure optimal health outcomes. These changes often get better after treatment.

## / Managing changes in taste and smell

Here's what you can do:

Choose foods that you find appealing. Some people find moist and naturally sweet foods appealing e.g., melon, grapes and oranges, whereas others find tart foods and beverages appealing

Eat room temperature or cold / frozen food, as they tend to have less aroma and taste

Add mild marinades, spices and herbs to flavour food and mask strange tastes

Try out different foods until you find something that is appealing to you

Ask friends, family or your caregiver to prepare your food for you to limit your exposure to food odours

Drink bottled beverages instead of canned beverages






Use plastic knives, forks and spoons and glass plates and cups

Use a straw for drinking, to get the fluid to the back of your mouth

Suck on candies and mints or chew mint gum to reduce the metallic taste in your mouth

Rinse your mouth and brush your teeth and tongue often, and before you eat

## What to eat

	If red meat tastes and smells strange to you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Try other protein sources e.g. poultry, fish, pork, lamb, eggs, dairy (milk, yoghurt, cheese), nut butter, nuts, beans, peas and lentils</li></ul>
	If food lacks flavour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Try adding sauces, herbs, spices, lemon juice, pepper and salt to improve the taste of your cooked food</li><li>■ While cooking, try to add: extracts, ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, vinegar, marinades, spices, herbs, vinegar or wine</li><li>■ Other options to add flavour while cooking: cheese, nuts, bacon bits, ham pieces, onion, garlic, bacon, green or red bell pepper</li></ul>
	If food tastes too sweet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Tone down overly sweet foods by adding a little salt or lemon juice</li><li>■ Add milk, buttermilk, plain yoghurt or coffee powder to milkshakes or oral nutrition supplements to dilute the flavours</li></ul>
	If food tastes too salty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Add a little sugar to tone down the saltiness of the food</li><li>■ Prepare food without adding salt or seasonings containing salt</li><li>■ Avoid processed foods as it contains a lot of salt (sodium)</li><li>■ Choose products labelles reduced sodium or low sodium</li><li>■ Choose bland, mild-flavoured food</li></ul>
	If food tastes bitter and salty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Add some sugar, syrup, jam, honey, cinnamon, dates or raisins</li></ul>

# Changes in taste and smell

## Foods to avoid

	Avoid canned food (meat, fruit and vegetables) and beverages
	Avoid hot foods
	Avoid food odours e.g., cooking for yourself and eating in a not well-ventilated room
	Avoid mint-flavoured toothpaste
	Avoid smoking

## 2 Mouth rinse suggestions



### Mild homemade salt and baking soda solution:

- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- Combined with 1 litre of water

You can also try:



Ginger ale



Alcohol-free mouth rinse

Life Oncology units have multidisciplinary teams that can support you during your journey to recovery – this includes registered dietitians (RDs).

The following are some of the areas a registered dietitian can help you in:



Assess your nutritional status and your current dietary intake



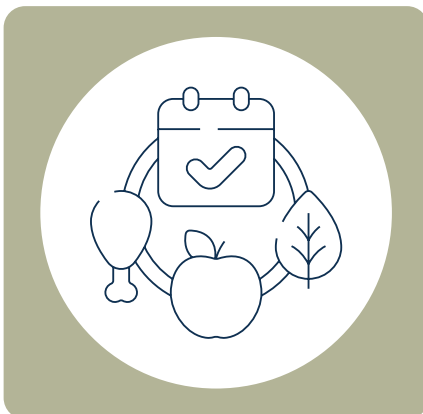
Provide you with an individualised meal plan for optimal nutrition



Recommend appropriate oral supplements to provide you with additional nutrients, including protein and energy when you are not meeting your nutritional needs through food alone



Provide you with guidelines on how to manage cancer treatment side effects that influence your dietary intake



If you need assistance with any of the above areas – ask your healthcare provider to refer you to a registered dietitian.

# References

## **CANSA**

<https://cansa.org.za/files/2021/04/Fact-Sheet-on-Nutritional-Guidelines-for-Individuals-Undergoing-Cancer-Treatment-April-2021.pdf>

## **Kidney Cancer Canada**

<https://www.kidneycancercanada.ca/managing-side-effects/#taste-changes>

## **Cleveland Clinic**

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/10257-chemotherapy-side-effects>

## **Mayo Clinic**

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/cancer/in-depth/cancer/art-20047536>

## **Nutrician & Diagnosis-Related Care**

Escott-Stump, S. (2015). China: Wolters Kluwer.

## **Krause's Food and the Nutrician Care Process.**

Mahan, L. K., Escott-Stump, S., & Raymond, J. L. (2012). St. Louis: Elsevier Saunders.

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