

# Managing taste and smell changes

## Nutrition Education Session

Unity Health Post-COVID Self-Management Program



## Our Agenda:

01

About Taste and Smell Changes

02

Practical strategies to improve the taste of food

03

Smell training



# About Taste and Smell Changes

- Loss of taste and smell can occur after any infection
- Nerve receptors for smelling can be damaged
- Smell and taste are connected leading to taste changes as well

## **This can lead to:**

- low appetite
- reduced enjoyment of eating and meal times
- affect your quality of life



# Recovery & Treatment

More than half of those who have COVID-19 will lose their taste and smell

- Most recover in 2 to 3 weeks

About 10% have had a loss of smell for at least 8 weeks or many months.

- As you recover, you may experience unusual smells

## Treatment

- There is **currently no medical management** for taste and smell changes in Canada
- There are strategies to help manage the changes and may speed up the recovery process



# Strategies for Taste Changes



## General tips

- Choose foods you like and continue to retry them
- Make a list of foods that do taste good
- Keep your mouth clean
  - Brush your teeth twice a day
  - Floss daily
  - Rinse with water when it feels dry, and before and after meals
- Try different flavours, textures (crunchy, soft, seedy), and temperatures
  - \* Do not try this if a Speech Language Pathologist has told you eat soft foods or drink thick liquids
- Don't smoke cigarettes or vape
- Eat in a pleasant setting



## If a food tastes too salty

- Choose low salt varieties



- Cook without added salt or salt-based seasonings. Try herbs and spices instead.
- Rinse canned food in water
- Add sweet flavours to food or drink, such as honey, sweetener, or sugar



## If a food tastes too sweet

- Add a pinch of salt to foods or drinks  
 \*Talk to your doctor or dietitian if you have been told to limit salt
- Add something sour, like citrus fruits to sweet foods.
- Add instant coffee, nutmeg, cinnamon or cocoa to sweet foods such as pudding, nutrition supplement drinks, ice cream, milk shakes or canned fruits
- Dilute too sweet drinks with water





## If food tastes bland

- Add strong flavours such as herbs, spices and sauces
  - Some examples: cinnamon, mustard, chili, citrus fruits, garlic, honey, jam, ketchup, soy sauce, mayonnaise
- Try adding flavoured liquids
  - Examples: broth, gravies, marinades, salad dressing
- Try a different food with every bite
- Mix textures at each meal
- Try to smell your food before eating



## If you have a metallic or bitter taste

- Try using plastic cutlery
- Use glass cookware
- Protein foods can taste bitter or metallic
  - Marinate proteins with sweet/sour to change the flavour
  - Try a variety of proteins such as eggs, beans, lentils, fish, cheese, lean meats



# Smell Training



## What is smell training?

Smell training is actively sniffing the same four scents every day, spending around 20 seconds on each scent and really concentrating on what you're doing.

Some studies have shown that smell training can help people recover faster.

It's easy and safe to do.



# The smell training technique

## Materials:

- 4 different essential oils, such as lemon, eucalyptus, rose and clove (Choose scents you are familiar with)

OR

4 different items such as, orange peel, coffee, cinnamon sticks, mint leaves

- 4 small jars with lids or bowls
- White paper (if using oils)



## Directions:

1. If using oils, place a few drops onto a piece of paper and place into a jar. Repeat for each scent and label each jar. Change the paper every few days.
  - If using household items, place each in a bowl. Replace these items every few days.
2. Open a jar and hold it close to your nose.
3. Take quick, gentle 'bunny' sniffs for 20 seconds. Really concentrate on what you are doing - focus your thoughts on what it is you are trying to smell. Be as attentive as you can and really try to 'find' that smell.
4. Pause for 15 seconds before moving onto the next scent.
5. Repeat once or twice daily for at least 4 months.



## Additional resources

For more information on smell training:

Abscent.org

<https://abscent.org/>

Fifth Sense

<https://www.fifthsense.org.uk/>



## Summary

- Dealing with taste and smell changes for a long period of time can be difficult for many and their quality of life
- Many recover on their own
- There is currently no treatment

You can try:

- strategies to help manage the taste of food
  - Using different flavours and enjoying different textures
- smell training





Thank you!

