TASTE CHANGES WITH CANCER TREATMENT

- Chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery for cancer can cause changes in taste, known as dysgeusia.

- Taste changes are common in the week following cancer treatment and generally resolve within 2 months, but this can vary depending on the location of cancer and type of treatment.

- Taste changes include reduced or increased sensitivity to or distortion of taste, smells and sensations, as well as phantom tastes (the sensation of tasting something even though you aren't eating).

- Taste changes can make it difficult to enjoy food, which can lead to reduced food intake and subsequent weight loss. It is important to avoid weight loss during cancer treatment as it often means loss of muscle mass and strength, and can lead to prolonged treatment and malnutrition.

What causes taste changes?

- *Dry or ulcerated mouth*
- *Surgery to the mouth and/or tongue*
- *Changes to saliva*
- *Medications*
- *Nerve damage*

Strategies to **improve** taste and intake

ISSUE	TRY THIS...
Food tastes too bland	• Add flavour with vinegars, lemon, honey, ginger, soy sauce, salt, pickles, pepper, herbs and spices
Food tastes too sweet	• Use no added sugar options • Avoid foods with added sweeteners, like dried fruit and honey • Choose more savoury dishes
Food tastes too overpowering	• Replace flavourful foods with milder foods *(e.g. pepper instead of chilli)*
Food tastes too salty	• Use low or no salt varieties • Don't add salt to meals • Avoid highly processed foods including chips, deli meats and sauces • Minimise the use of store-bought sauces and condiments
Food tastes bitter or metallic	• Rinse mouth using mouth cleaning or saltwater rinses • Moist and sweet fruits or ginger foods may help
Food tastes too dry	• Ensure adequate daily fluid intake • Oral hydration products to replace saliva • Choose soft, moist foods • Use condiments to moisten meals including gravy, sauces or cream • Sip fluids during meals
Food smells overwhelming	• Choose cold or room temperature items • Avoid being around cooking • Manage nausea with medications as appropriate

Remember that good oral hygiene is important and can help manage some taste changes. *September 2021, v1*