

Understanding Your Smell And Taste Dysfunction

You Are Not Alone.

Millions of people in the U.S. have smell and taste dysfunction. Awareness of smell and taste disorders has increased in the past few years, as they have been symptoms of COVID-19 variants. Yet, fact-based information on these conditions is hard to find.

There are many different types of disorders. This handout is designed to help you better understand your condition, prepare for doctor visits, and offer tips and resources for living with smell and taste dysfunction.

Smell-Related Disorders

Anosmia: Complete inability to smell

- **Acquired Anosmia:** Loss of smell due to illness, injury, or other cause
- **Congenital Anosmia:** Absence of smell from birth

Hyposmia: Diminished sense of smell

Hyperosmia: Heightened sense of smell

Parosmia: Distorted or altered smell perception

Phantosmia: Perceiving odors that are not present



Taste-Related Disorders



Ageusia: Complete loss of the taste function

Dysgeusia/Parageusia: Distorted or altered taste perception

Hypogeusia: Reduced ability to taste

Hypergeusia: Heightened taste sensitivity

Phantogeusia: Perception of tastes that are not present

Don't Ignore Your Senses

Smell or taste changes should be taken seriously. Symptoms should not be dismissed or ignored. Early intervention matters, as certain treatments, including smell training, may be more effective when started soon after symptoms begin. Importantly, research shows that changes in these senses can be early signs of medical conditions such as Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's, and other dementias.

Potential Causes

Research continues to better understand the mechanisms that underlie these senses. Smell and taste changes can occur for many reasons:

- Viral or respiratory infections (cold, flu, COVID-19)
- Aging
- Allergies
- Traumatic brain injury
- Rare congenital conditions
- Dental or mouth problems
- Sinus disease or nasal polyps
- Chemical exposure
- Side effects of certain medications
- Head or neck cancer, or cancer treatment
- Cigarette smoking



Seek Professional Advice. Talk to a Clinician!

Start with an appointment with your Primary Care Provider (PCP). Your PCP may recommend that you visit an Otolaryngologist (ears, nose and throat 'ENT' specialist) or Rhinologist, an ENT with special training in smell dysfunction.

Be Your Own Advocate. Arrive Prepared With Details About Your Health Journey

You know yourself and your own health better than anyone else. Before your appointment consider:

- When did you notice a change? Did it follow a cold or a virus?
- Are you taking a new medication or receiving a new treatment?
- What degree of smell and/or taste dysfunction are you experiencing? (partial, slight, intermittent, complete loss) You may find it helpful to perform a home test with familiar foods, or essential oils.
- In what ways has smell and/or taste dysfunction affected your everyday life? (eating, cooking, safety, mental well-being)



How Your Daily Life May Be Affected

Smell and taste dysfunction can have dramatic effects on day-to-day living and play an essential role in safety and nutrition.

Safety

Individuals with smell and taste dysfunction are at greater risk of exposure to serious situations because of their inability to detect natural gas, fire, smoke, and spoiled or expired food. Therefore, safety measures for people with smell dysfunction are vitally important.

Interventions to consider:

- Install and regularly test smoke and gas detectors in your home.
- Label and date foods to prevent spoilage-related risks.
- Use a resource like the USDA Foodkeeper app to help maintain food safety.



Eating & Nutrition

Your smell and taste dysfunction may affect your desire to eat, your interest in cooking, or your pleasure from food. You may need to pay closer attention to your daily diet to ensure you are eating properly and maintaining your nutrition. There are ways to make food interesting and appealing. Here are a few tips:



- Focus on texture! You may find you prefer the sensation of crunchy foods.
- Use spices or seasonings to make meals more enjoyable.
- Enhance flavor with non-olfactory aids, such as herbs, citrus, vinegar, or umami-rich ingredients like soy sauce or mushrooms.
- Experiment with hot and cold temperature contrasts to enhance eating satisfaction.
- Try colorful meal presentations to make meals visually appealing or boost appetite.
- Keep a food journal to track what works and what doesn't for you.

Find Support

Friends and family may not realize how deeply smell and taste disorders can affect daily life and may think it's a simple inconvenience. But it can affect all aspects of your life. Share what you are experiencing.

Connecting with others through peer support groups can reduce isolation, provide practical tips, and offer validation and empathy.

Pay attention to your emotional well-being. Depression, anxiety, and grief are common, especially with chronic or sudden loss. Identify ways to protect and support your mental health, and don't hesitate to seek help from a mental health professional.



A Patient-First Organization



The **Smell and Taste Association of North America™ (STANA™)** is the first patient-led organization in North America dedicated to people with smell and taste disorders. We provide education, advocacy, and collaboration with clinicians, researchers, and other partners. To learn more or sign up for our newsletter, visit our website www.thestana.org.

Explore STANA's Resources page for information on:

- Smell and taste clinics
- Research institutions
- Patient organizations
- Food safety and mental health-related tools
- Podcasts
- Awareness events

Links To Resources Referenced

Mental Health Professional Listings
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>

USDA Foodkeeper App
<https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/foodkeeper-app>

Follow STANA



www.thestana.org