



### A weekly question/answer column

## As I've Grown Older I've Lost My Appetite, Can I Get It Back?

*Jean Alder\* answers:*

If as a senior you find that the foods you used to love just don't taste the same, it's not your imagination, it's a fact. Over time our senses of taste and smell (chemosensory) diminish, either naturally or as a result of medical treatments such as chemotherapy or medications. These chemosensory losses can result in a decrease in appetite, lack of interest in food or even malnourishment and anorexia.

As complex as the reasons may be for chemosensory loss, compensating for taste or smell is well within your control. Here are some ideas for making food more appetizing.

- First, make sure that the food is attractively arranged and garnished. Present meals on plates with simple patterns so the food is clearly visible.
- Vary the shapes, textures and temperatures of the food. Take time to savor your food; smell it before you taste it, and chew thoroughly before swallowing.
- Augment your food's flavor with a variety of herbs, spices and other flavor enhancers. Maximizing food flavor does not call for great culinary skill, only imagination. You will find that, even if following a restricted diet, by creatively adding common ingredients in small amounts, the bitter notes of some foods can be masked, and your overall enjoyment of food can be increased.
- Look for strongly flavored foods, if tolerated, such as garlic, onions, citrus fruits and flavored vinegars.
- Use fruit sauces or jams, as well as concentrated flavors and extracts to stimulate taste buds.
- Double the amount of herbs and spices added to recipes, but within reason. Some spicy seasonings, such as black or red pepper, shouldn't be doubled automatically.
- Also, dry rubs and spice/herb combinations on meat and poultry add flavor without fat.
- Use flavor enhancers like monosodium glutamate (MSG) to enhance savory foods or reduce perceived bitterness or acidity. MSG's effectiveness is not dependent on the ability to smell; and because it is lower in sodium than table salt (75 mg vs. 2,500 mg/teaspoon), this easy-to-use flavor enhancer can boost the flavor of sodium-restricted diets.
- Add small amounts of fat (creamy dressing, cheese sauce, bacon bits) to soften sharp-tasting foods.
- The chemosensory losses associated with aging and medical treatments can be readily and easily managed. By using these simple tips, seniors themselves, or through their

caregivers, may regain the enjoyment eating once had, leading to improved nutritional status and better overall health.

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