

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR SENSES OF TASTE AND SMELL ARE CHANGED BY COVID-19



LONG COVID ESSENTIALS: A SERIES BY The Sick Times × LONG COVID JUSTICE

Loss of or distorted taste and smell are common symptoms of COVID-19. In some people, these symptoms continue after COVID-19 and become symptoms of Long COVID. [One study](#) estimated that 60 percent of people infected with SARS-CoV-2 in 2021 lost some ability to taste and smell, and more than a quarter of those didn't fully regain that ability.

* RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TASTE AND SMELL

The senses of taste and smell are closely related. Even when the sense of taste is not itself damaged, you may experience a diminished or distorted sense of taste if your sense of smell is damaged.

[Some research suggests coronavirus could linger](#) in the nose, tongue, and taste buds after infection, contributing to smell and taste issues.

Total loss of smell is sometimes called anosmia, while a distorted sense of smell is called parosmia. Ageusia refers to the loss of taste, and dysgeusia is a distorted sense of taste.

Loss of taste and smell carries several risks. People who can't taste properly may not eat or drink enough, leading to risks of malnutrition, dehydration, or unhealthy weight loss. They may be at risk of food poisoning because it's hard to tell when food has gone bad, or unable to perceive threats like fires and gas leaks.

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* GETTING HELP

Taste and smell are usually treated by an ear, nose, and throat doctor, or otorhinolaryngologist. A doctor may give you a smell test, where you sniff and identify different scents. They may also do a taste test, where you taste substances applied directly to your tongue or different liquids you sample and then spit out.

One promising treatment option is called a [stellate ganglion block](#). It is an injection of local anesthetic into nerves in the side of the neck. Traditionally used to treat pain, the treatment has [had some success in restoring taste and smell](#). Not everyone responds, but for those who do, the results can be dramatic.

Some experts also recommend self-management options like adding additional spices and seasonings to meals and eating foods with varying textures.

* RESOURCES

- [Loss of Taste and Smell](#) – Cleveland Clinic
- [Smell and Taste Association of North America](#)
- [New Treatment Restores Sense of Smell in Patients with Long COVID](#) – Radiological Society of North America
- [Swirl of Hope](#)

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* **QUESTIONS?** connect@s4hi.org

This series was designed by people living with Long COVID and associated diseases. Each resource sheet has been reviewed by patient and medical experts. This is an informational resource, not medical advice. Publication date: 9/16/2024.