

# Taste & Swallowing DISORDERS



**For palliative patients at the end of life, swallowing is often a problem.**



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The senses of taste and smell are so closely linked that people who can't smell often complain that they can't taste either. Taste buds are located at various spots on the tongue and olfactory (smell) cells are specialized cells found in the nose. They both depend on zinc, and other nutrients, for their growth and maintenance

## TASTE DISORDERS

### CAUSES:

- Viral infections, head injuries, cancer therapy and side effects of prescription medications are common causes.

### SYMPTOMS:

- Sensory changes, such as a metallic, bitter or salty taste that can occur by themselves or be triggered by foods or certain medications.

### MANAGEMENT

- Eating foods with higher taste sensations.
- Using artificial saliva substitutes before eating.
- Using fluids like gravy and light cream sauces to increase the fluid of the food and give it more taste.
- Some people benefit from taking zinc substitutes, to help increase their taste sensation. *Taste buds are especially dependent on zinc.*

## SWALLOWING DISORDERS

### CAUSES:

- Lack of saliva in the mouth caused by some medications, mouth breathing, or dehydration
- Neurological disorders such as stroke, Parkinson's, or Alzheimer's disease

### SYMPTOMS:

- The tongue cannot push the food to the back of the throat while chewing
- Reduced use of the facial muscles - the mouth and lips cannot close properly making it more difficult for the food to be swallowed
- Loss of sensation in the mouth makes it difficult to know where food is in the mouth - this results in pocketing of food in the cheeks or under the tongue.

*Food must be removed by the care provider to prevent choking*

### MANAGEMENT:

- Swallowing is improved when the mouth is moist and treating for dry mouth may help with swallowing
- Ensuring that food is moist
- Pre-blending food to make food particle size smaller and more manageable
- Using a suction machine (if available) or wrapping a thin face-cloth or gauze around the finger and sweeping the tissues may help to remove food debris from the cheeks and under the tongue

## REFERENCES

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