

Loss of taste or smell

Q. Lately, I have been experiencing a loss of taste. Food just doesn't taste right and, sometimes, my sense of smell is involved too. I've been told by friends that this sometimes happens when people age and is "normal," however, I really would like to know if there is anything else that may be causing this and, if so, what can be done about it. The holidays are approaching and being able to enjoy the good food that my family will prepare would be such a treat! Is there any information available regarding this so-called "senior" problem?

A. While it is true that aging may bring on a loss of taste, there are other factors that may be the cause as well. You mention that your sense of smell is involved too and this is not unusual as the sense of smell is closely related to the sense of taste.

The National Institute on Aging has developed an "Age Page" brochure titled, "Smell and Taste: Spice of Life," that offers many reasons as to what may affect both senses. It states that smell is an important sense as it may help recall certain pleasures or alert to dangers such as smoke or gas leaks. It also explains that some problems with smell only last for a short time or that, sometimes, loss of the sense of smell may be a sign of a more serious disorder.

This brochure further advises the reader that there are many things that can cause the loss of the sense of taste and that, most of the time, there is something that can be done to regain taste. There are things that can change the way food taste, for instance, medications. Having a dry mouth can cause food to taste funny and make it hard to swallow.

If you have a problem with how food tastes, it is best to discuss it with your doctor. The brochure is only a resource for information on this condition and, in no way, should be a substitute for professional advice.

Call Answers for the Aging at 410-646-0100 if you are interested in obtaining a free copy of "Smell and Taste: Spice of Life."

Answers for the Aging also has resources relating to other topics of health. A recent brochure, just received, is titled, "Flu-Get the Shot," that shares information on the

seriousness of the flu, how it spreads and symptoms on how to tell the difference if you have the flu or a cold, along with other information. This brochure or others that you may have an interest in will be mailed free of charge by calling

Answers for the Aging is a free information and referral program of Catholic Charities. If you have questions regarding other senior or caregiving issues, we would be glad to talk with you - 410-646-0100 or 1-888-502-7587 (our toll-free number in Maryland).