

# SAFETY SENSE



**Our Learning Zone suite of Information Sheets were created by a collaborative panel of experts: medical, scientific and people who live with smell and taste disorders. We would like to thank them all for giving and sharing their time, experience and knowledge.**

Fifth Sense is the charity for people affected by smell and taste disorders. Based in the UK, we are the first charity providing direct support, information and a signpost to potential diagnosis and treatment to people affected by these conditions. We play a leading role in educating people about the importance of the senses of smell and taste to our lives. Through this we can promote awareness of the consequences of smell and taste disorders, demonstrate the need for greater availability of medical services and advocate for further research into treatment for these conditions.

Fifth Sense is a membership organisation. Membership is free and open to anyone affected by or with an interest in smell or taste-related disorders, including family members, carers and health or scientific professionals.

## **Who should read this?**

Anyone who is experiencing smell loss or changes to the ability to smell that affects their daily lives. Smell, and taste, still provides a very important early-warning system when it comes to objects or situations that may cause harm. There is a reason why the smells of decaying food, raw sewage, and ammonia are repulsive – it is an alert to instruct us to avoid these things as they will cause us damage. Natural gas doesn't have a smell and so suppliers add a chemical called mercaptan to ensure it can alert people who can smell that it is a danger.

## **Dangers and risks:**

1. If you have gas appliances such as a hob or cooker, you will be unable to detect the smell of any leaking gas. If you live alone, it might be worth investing in a natural gas detector – an online search can help you find one. It may even be worth considering if you have anyone else who can smell gas in the home, as they may not always be there with you.
2. When food becomes rotten or mouldy it will often have a characteristic smell that you will not be able to detect. It is therefore advisable to carefully label all food items with a date if they don't already have one on them to prevent you potentially becoming ill.
3. You are unlikely to detect changes in your own body odour and so you should be aware that others around you may pick up on smells that you cannot detect. Establishing a daily and regular personal hygiene routine of showering, deodorising, using hygienic wipes etc. can help you with this. If you experience parosmia, and perfumes do not seem to have a pleasant smell, choose fragrance free products instead.
4. Eating food can lose its enjoyment when you cannot smell and 80% of the flavour of food is achieved through smell. Eating spicy or minty foods may help your enjoyment of food as they stimulate the trigeminal nerve and enables chemosthesis to occur - chemosthesis is how food 'feels'. If the trigeminal nerve is damaged however, this too will be affected. It is important to be mindful about how much heat to use - excess spice can sometimes trigger gastro-intestinal pain or symptoms. You should also be aware of fluctuations in your weight. In some cases, it can decline through loss of appetite and in others it can increase by eating more high fat/salt and sugary foods to compensate for flavour loss.
5. If you rely on your sense of smell to perform your job, you should discuss the matter with your manager or supervisor, who with your permission can contact us for further advice if required.
6. Shopping for yourself and others might not be fun when buying toiletries, perfume or gifts. Approach someone you love and trust to help you with this – a "designated nose" can help with safety as well as making shopping more enjoyable.

# LIVING SAFELY WITH A SMELL DISORDER

Risk:	Safety Check:	Safety Check:	Safety Check:	Safety Check:
<b>Gas</b>	You could replace all natural gas appliances with electrical/alternative fuel. Any gas appliances you do have, ensure they are serviced regularly by a registered and qualified engineer.	Check all gas appliances are fully switched off before leaving home/returning home and before using anything that could ignite a spark (e.g. electrical switch).	Install a natural gas detector – if your gas detector sounds, call the National Gas Emergency number for free on 0800 111 999* immediately (*UK ONLY). A quick search online can help you find one.	Ensure your details are recorded on the Priority Services Register (PSR) of your gas supplier. This will ensure you are responded to as a priority in the event of a gas emergency, whilst you will also receive extra services tailored to meet your needs.
<b>Domestic Hygiene</b>	When using cleaning products ensure rooms are well ventilated.	Avoid mixing products that might intensify smells that can't be detected.	Read labels and follow safety guidance provided.	Wear protective clothing – when your nose can't be your safety detector of a strong chemical, ensure you take extra care in handling them.
<b>Food</b>	Follow use by dates and if you open food and reseal it, use a permanent marker or label to record the date it was opened.	Keep fresh food separated in your fridge (e.g. fresh fruit and vegetables away from raw meat) to help preserve its freshness.		If you live with others, ask them to be your designated nose to tell you if food smells ok.
<b>Personal Hygiene</b>	Wash/shower/bathe daily if possible and again after any exercise. Brush teeth twice a day and use a deodorant after washing. You can buy unscented toiletries if you experience parosmia (unpleasant smell distortions).	Try to wear natural fibres such as wool, cotton and linen. Keep clothes clean and wear tops for 1-2 days and bottoms/outer clothes for no more than 3 days.		Have a rescue kit at work that you can keep handy containing toothbrush/paste, a clean top, freshening wipes and deodorant.
<b>Work Safety</b>	Talk to your employer or Human Resources department in confidence if smell is a necessity for you to do your job so they are aware.		If you experience detriment at work because of your condition, speak to your trade union or ACAS (UK only) for advice <a href="http://www.acas.org.uk">www.acas.org.uk</a>	
<b>Fire/Smoke</b>	After use, ensure you switch off devices and appliances that can cause fires.		Install smoke alarms in your home and test them regularly. The Fire Service can do this for free in the UK.	