

TALKING TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT SMELL AND TASTE IMPAIRMENT



The charity for all those living with impaired smell and taste

What is smell and taste impairment and what causes it?

Smell and taste impairment includes the inability to smell or taste, distortions in the senses of smell and taste, and smelling or tasting things that aren't there. The most common causes of smell and taste impairment are:

- Traumatic Brain Injury
- An infection or virus, such as a cold, Covid-19, flu or sinusitis
- Allergies, such as hay fever
- Chronic Rhinosinusitis (CRS)
- Smoking
- Pollution and poor air quality
- Exposure to dangerous chemicals
- Abuse of drugs inhaled through the nose
- Age-related degeneration - just as our hearing and sight can decline as we age, so can our sense of smell and taste
- Some neurodegenerative conditions such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, or brain tumours
- Congenital anosmia - where someone is born without ever being able to smell
- Some medications and some cancer treatments
- Sometimes the cause is unknown

Why is it important to talk to your doctor?

If you have lost your sense of smell or taste, or if it has changed and hasn't gone back to normal, you should talk to your doctor - just as you would for any other physical change to your health. And if you have never had a sense of smell and this is impacting on your life, your doctor may be able to help.

Changes to your sense of smell or taste can sometimes be an early sign of another health issue, so it's important to get checked. It is also important to seek medical advice if your smell or taste impairment is affecting your physical health or causing you to feel anxious, in low mood or frustrated.

Talking things through with your doctor and deciding together on next steps can help. It can sometimes be difficult to explain how you are feeling and what you want help with. This information sheet can help you to prepare for your appointment. You can use it alongside our [other information sheets](#) and [webinar recordings](#) about the different types and causes of smell and taste impairment.

Preparing for your appointment

We suggest you make your own notes before, during and after your appointment. The prompts on page 2 may help you to think about what to say, explain how you are feeling, what's worrying you and what kind of help you want. See also, [NHS What to ask your doctor](#).

If your doctor can't help, you can ask them to refer you to an ENT specialist - there are a number of consultants who specialise in smell and taste disorders. There is a list of [clinics](#) on our website that will be helpful for you and your doctor.

If you need further support, you can use our [enquiry form](#) to contact us.

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Describing your condition:

When did you first notice that your sense of smell / taste was impaired and do you know what caused it?

Do you have symptoms that may be relevant? (e.g. any irritation, swelling, discomfort, pain)

Anything else?

Describing your concerns:

How is this affecting your physical health (e.g. changes to eating habits, losing / gaining weight)

How is this affecting your mental health? (e.g. feeling anxious / depressed, frustrated, isolated)

How is this affecting your quality of life? (e.g. how you spend your time, your work / studies / free time / relationships)

Questions you may want to ask:

What do you think is causing my smell / taste impairment?

Can you offer any treatment? If so, what is it, and what effects might this treatment have?

Can you refer me to an ENT specialist in a rhinology / smell and taste [clinic](#)?

Can you refer me for other support? (e.g. a mental health practitioner / dietitian)

Use this space to write down any other questions that you have:

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