

# Changes in smell and taste caused by chemotherapy

## What can you do?



Two out of three patients undergoing chemotherapy are affected by changes in the sense of smell or taste.

Changes in the sense of taste occur more frequently than changes in the sense of smell.

Changes in sense of smell and taste are often temporary, and can last a few weeks to months after treatment.

Chemotherapy may cause a range of unwanted side-effects, including changes in the sense of smell and taste.

The senses of smell and taste play an essential part in the choice and intake of food. Smell and taste disorders may lead to changed food preferences, reduced intake or food aversions.

Reduced nutritional status may influence treatment and recovery capacity. It is important to know the cause of smell and taste changes and how they can be treated. This factsheet provides information on smell and taste changes, as well as tips and advice on how to handle these in daily life.

This factsheet is published by the Science Shop of Wageningen University & Research as part of the project 'Changes in smell and taste in cancer patients', in cooperation with the HungerNdThirst Foundation. If you have any questions, contact the HungerNdThirst Foundation ([info@hungerndthirst.org](mailto:info@hungerndthirst.org)).



## Smell and taste disorders

- Changes in the ability to smell or taste may occur during chemotherapy. Chemotherapy attacks rapidly dividing cells, such as the receptors for smell and taste. This may result in changes in sense of smell and taste as a side effect of the chemotherapy.
- Changes in smell and taste depend on the type of cancer, the type of chemotherapy treatment and on the individual patient.
- Changes in the sense of smell and taste may occur at three different levels:
  - *Enhanced or reduced sensitivity to aroma/taste: you taste or smell less well, or you taste or smell aromas and tastes more intensely.*
  - *Disruption to the perception of smell/taste: things taste or smell differently than previously.*
  - *Smell and/or taste hallucinations: you taste or smell things that are not there.*



## Recommendations

- Changes in your sense of smell and/or taste might cause changes in the taste of things that you used to enjoy in the past. Try to replace these things with other products that appeal to you now. Choose food products that differ in taste, structure and intensity, to discover what tastes best for you.
- Search for websites with practical tips, such as recipes, to find inspiration for alternatives. Look, for example, at the Dutch websites [www.voedingenkankerinfo.nl](http://www.voedingenkankerinfo.nl) and [www.kanker.nl](http://www.kanker.nl).
- In coping with reduced appetite as a result of changes the sense of smell and taste, try to eat small meals more often during the day. Maintaining an adequate caloric intake is essential
- Discuss changes in your sense of smell and taste with those in your immediate environment. In this way, they will be able to help you by taking your disorder into account.

