

Treatment and Taste Changes

Taste is the number one reason we choose the foods we eat. Enjoying food improves our quality of life and well-being. Unfortunately, many cancer patients have some type of temporary or permanent taste and/or smell changes. It is often hard to enjoy eating when food does not taste or smell normal. These changes can be caused by the cancer process itself, the treatment(s) associated with the cancer and/or other medical conditions. There are also many medications that are associated with taste and smell changes.

Foods may taste like cardboard or metal, taste too sweet, salty, sour or bitter, or they may have no taste at all. You may even dislike favorite foods. There are certain foods that may be preferred during cancer treatment, such as food with “umami” taste.

What is umami?

There are four tastes that you may be familiar with: sweet, sour, salty and bitter. Umami is the fifth taste. “Umami” is a Japanese word that refers to the savory, brothy, meaty, taste and mouth feel of many foods, including some meats, seafood, fruits, vegetables and dairy products. Glutamate, an amino acid, is what gives food umami flavor. Glutamate is naturally found in many foods. The amount of umami in food is influenced by the food that you choose and the way it’s prepared.

Eating foods with umami has been shown to:

- Help with digestion of food
- Increase salt flavor in foods without adding more salt
- Increase acceptance of a new food
- Improve flavor of foods
- Increase amount of food eaten

Increasing umami in your food

General recommendations

- Try tart/sour/tangy: lemon, vinegar, and vinegar-based condiments like ketchup, pickles, relish, Greek yogurt, sauerkraut, kimchi*
- Marinate foods in a vinegar marinade; meat, chicken, fish, vegetables
- Roast vegetables in the oven and sprinkle with parmesan cheese
- Add sautéed onions to foods
- Use mushrooms as a side dish, or mixed into soups, casseroles, and omelets
- Make homemade applesauce
- Use condiments such as soy sauce
- Use Umami flavoring (sold as a powder or paste)



Use umami-rich foods

Listed in this table are foods you may prefer if you are experiencing taste and smell changes.

Fruit		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apples• Avocados	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coconuts• Grapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kiwi• Tomatoes
Vegetables		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beets• Carrots• Chinese cabbage• Corn	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enokitake mushroom• Green peppers• Onions• Peas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potatoes• Shiitake mushrooms• Spinach• Sweet potatoes
Grains, beans, nuts, and seeds		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Barley• Corn	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flaxseed• Peanuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soybeans• Wheat
Meat, dairy, and eggs		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beef• Chicken• Duck	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pork• Cow's milk• Cheddar cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eggs• Parmesan cheese
Seafood		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cod• Crab• Kombu• Mackerel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oysters• Prawns• Salmon• Scallops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seaweed• Tuna
Other		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Balsamic vinegar• Catsup	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green tea• Oyster sauce	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soy sauce• Teriyaki sauce

Cook foods at a low temperature for a long time (slow cook)

- Prepare your favorite crock pot or slow cooker meals
- Make a pot roast
- Slow cook meats at 350 degrees F or below
- Sauté vegetables over medium heat for at least 15 to 20 minutes
- Simmer soups, stews, tomato sauces and other sauces
- Try a baked potato instead of a boiled potato

Food options if you don't want to cook

- Hearty canned or boxed soups
- Soups from a deli*
- Canned stews
- Canned chili
- Frozen chicken pot pie
- Frozen lasagna
- Wheat bread
- Applesauce with no added sugar
- Vegetarian sushi rolls*
- Baked/flavored tofu
- Canned seafood (tuna, crab, oysters, sardines)
- Roasted meat from the grocery store (chicken, beef)*

**Not all the foods on this list are allowed on the Immunosuppressed Patient Diet. If you have questions about foods on this list, please discuss with your dietitian.*

Recipe: Scrambled Eggs with Spinach and Parmesan Cheese

Ingredients:

2 large eggs
Salt and pepper to taste
1 tsp olive oil
3 c spinach
1-2 Tbs grated parmesan cheese
Crushed red pepper



Directions:

Wisk eggs in a small bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside. Heat oil in a nonstick skillet on medium heat. Add spinach and cook, tossing until wilted (about 1 minute). Add eggs, stir until set (about 1 minute). Note: cook well done if on an Immunosuppressed diet. Stir in parmesan cheese, and sprinkle with red pepper flakes.

Adapted from: Bon Appetit

Resources

Umami Information Center: www.umamiinfo.com

This education resource was intended to be given as a part of a nutrition consult by an SCCA dietitian. Questions? Ask an SCCA dietitian at nutrition@seattlecca.org.