Consumer Trends: 10 Factors That Cause Taste Buds to Flip Out

PR Newswire

GENEVA, Ill., (PRNewswire) — How you perceive taste today could be different tomorrow due to any number of factors that alter how sensitive our taste buds are. For example, two-thirds of pregnant women experiences changes in taste, and as we age our taste buds have a harder time picking up flavors. Here is a look at 10 factors that can alter how things taste.

1. Age
Ever wonder why grandma loads on the sugar or butter? Well, add taste perception to the list of things going downhill as we get older. Around age 45, taste buds begin to degenerate, and taste loss really becomes apparent in your late 50s. Sour is less affected than the other tastes, though, so if you like sour candy, you may still be in luck! And for grandma, taste thresholds for sweet, salt and bitter are 2.5 times higher than in her grandkids. For example, at age 20 or 30, you use one teaspoon of sugar in your coffee, but by age 75 you may need three teaspoons of sugar to get the same perceived sweetness.

2. What You Eat
Sensitivity to flavor is reduced for between one and four hours after a meal, depending on what the meal included. A spicy/hot meal such as enchiladas will have a greater effect than a bland meal such as oatmeal and milk.

3. Hunger
Hunger affects how food tastes by making hungry people more sensitive to sweetness and saltiness. This makes hunger the downfall of many dieters, as they reach for sweet or salty foods, which may not be the healthiest choices. Bitterness perception, however, is not affected by hunger.

4. Smoking
When smoking a cigarette or cigar, the smoker places the taste buds in contact with chemical compounds that greatly decrease the taste buds' ability to register salty, sweet, sour and bitter tastes.

5. Obesity
Children and adolescents who are obese have less sensitive taste buds. That means for obese children, sweet foods taste less intensely sweet, bitter foods are milder and salt is not as readily perceived.

6. Pregnancy
During pregnancy, nearly two-thirds of women experience changes in taste. Pregnant women have been found to have a reduced sensitivity to salty tastes, which may be the body's way of ensuring increased salt intake during pregnancy.

7. Colds/Flu/Allergies
We've all had a cold and complained about how we can't taste anything. What we've really lost is our sense of smell. The congestion from our cold is blocking our air passages, reducing our noses' ability to detect the smell of our food. Smell is 90% of how we taste, so without it, we don't perceive much flavor.

8. Disease
People with cancer and anorexia have reduced taste sensitivity as the result of their compromised physical condition. Cancer patients have reported that taste changes return to normal after treatment is completed.

9. Temperature
Hot and cold foods can throw your taste buds out of whack. Increasing temperature appears to increase the response to sweetness and decrease it to saltiness and bitterness. Decreasing temperature appears to increase the response to bitterness and decrease the response to sourness. Perfect example: You enjoy a hot cup of coffee, but once it cools down, the flavor is no longer pleasing. Your bitterness perception has been increased by the cooler temperature of the drink.

10. Solid vs. Liquid
Your taste buds can only detect flavors that are dissolved in a liquid. You can't taste a dry substance with a dry tongue. Also, increased viscosity reduces tastes sensitivity. Meaning, it's easiest to detect tastes in liquid state, harder in foams and more difficult in gels.

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Founded in 1987, FONA International develops and manufactures flavors for many of the largest food, beverage, nutraceutical and pharmaceutical companies in the world from its state-of-the-art, 33-acre campus in Geneva, IL. FONA International has established a reputation as the forward-thinking, independent solution provider in the very competitive flavor industry.

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