Dairy products suddenly taste bad [1]

Dear Alice,

I have a weird problem that happened to me once when I was maybe 8 years old (I'm 20 now). I woke up one morning and all dairy products tasted horrible. They tasted as though they had gone bad. I'm not sure how long it lasted back then because I just stopped eating all dairy products for a couple of years? I was afraid they would taste bad, but it definitely lasted several months. When I started to have them again they tasted fine. It seems to have started again. What could possibly be the cause of this?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Though an udder-ly perplexing experience, one possible explanation for this is dysgeusia. This scientific term for changes in taste describes what happens when the nerve cells responsible for taste sends messages to the brain than those with which it's familiar. Taste, as you may know, is influenced by flavors on your tongue and the odors that you smell. In fact, your sense of smell plays a big part in how things taste to you. Even a small change in your ability to smell may make your favorite food taste bland or gross. So, what is causing your change in taste? Well, changes are usually a symptom of another underlying cause, and dysgeusia may often be traced to a number of potential sources, such as:

- A wide range of medications such as antibiotics, lithium, and chemotherapy drugs
- An illness [2] or injury that affects the head, nose, or throat
- Dry mouth
- Smoking
- Periodontal disease, tartar build-up, and gingivitis
- Damage to the taste nerves, such as burning your mouth with hot food or liquid
- Vitamin or mineral deficiencies

Changes in taste are usually temporary and typically disappear once the cause of the problem is eliminated. You may want to try investigating the source of the problem on your own by thinking about what could be the culprit of your dysgeusia. It might be as simple as waiting for a stuffy nose to clear up or brushing your teeth [3] and tongue [4] more frequently. You may also want to try rinsing your mouth out with water before eating dairy products or try eating them at different times of the day to see if when you eat them affects the taste.

If pinpointing the cause on your own remains a mystery, a health care provider may be able to
help you figure out exactly what's going on. Other than dysgeusia, other conditions that may affect smell and taste include hypogeusia (a reduced ability to taste), ageusia (an inability to detect any taste), and phantom taste (the mouth retains an unpleasant taste even if there's nothing in the mouth). Though usually temporary, losing one's sense of smell and taste may be a sign of a more serious condition, such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, malnutrition, Parkinson's disease, or Alzheimer's disease. A health care provider may ask you questions such as if your taste changes only happen with dairy foods, if you have experienced any illnesses recently, and if you've changed any of your personal habits like your diet or your oral hygiene routine. Once you find the cause, hopefully you'll be back on the way to consuming delectable dairy products without any worries.

Hope this helps!

Alice!

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