

# Age-Related Mouth Changes

We all know that as we age our bodies change, but did you know our mouths change too? The changes usually happen slowly over many years so we don't notice any big differences. We often do not pay much attention to our mouths unless they hurt.

## **Have any of these changes happened to you?**

- Loss of taste or a change in the way foods used to taste – you may find it takes more sugar for something to taste sweet or more salt for something to taste salty
- Mouth “feels” food or the texture of food differently
- Chewing may be more difficult
- Swallowing may become more difficult and you may find that you tend to “swallow wrong” or get food “stuck in your windpipe” more often than you used to
- [Dry mouth](#)

These changes can affect what you choose to eat. The wrong food choices can affect whether you get the proper amount of vitamins and minerals and other nutrients needed for a healthy body. People with high blood pressure should not have much salt in their food. Adding more salt on foods to taste food is not a good option. People with diabetes may find it hard to avoid the extra sugar it takes to make food taste sweet, even though the extra sugar will make the diabetes harder to control. People tend to avoid foods that don't taste good anymore and replace them with foods they can taste. Many of these foods have fewer vitamins , minerals and other nutrients than the foods they are replacing.

If you have problems chewing and swallowing, you may avoid some foods and change the way you eat foods. As we age, the tongue loses some of its ability to work correctly. We may find it harder to move food around in the mouth while we are chewing it. You may also notice you are more likely to start to “choke” on food or drink if you are not paying attention to eating and drinking. You may find you are swallowing food before it is chewed enough. Water and other liquids are necessary to “get the food down”. These problems are part of aging. We need to take steps to deal with them.

## **Tips:**

- Changes in taste that are not caused by such things as medications or other medical conditions can be helped by adding more spices (not salt) to foods or by using an artificial sweetener instead of sugar.
- Add fresh fruit and vegetables, which have more flavor and less salt or sugar than canned or processed foods, to your diet to help with nutrition and with taste
- Eat more slowly to taste your food and keep you from choking on it.
- Cut meat and other hard food into small pieces and chew each one completely before swallowing.
- Have a glass of water available whenever you eat.