

# Flavorful Eating in the Later Years



LIVE WELL UTAH

FLAVORFUL  
EATING IN THE  
LATER YEARS

*Looking to amp up the flavor of your favorite foods? Try these simple tips.*

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According to the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau data, there are more than 80 million people age 65 and older. This group comprises close to one-quarter of the total population of the United States. Numbers have increased significantly since the 1990s when they were only at 12 percent. This increased longevity has a variety of nutritional implications.

Oftentimes caregiving for these seniors falls to the younger generations which may include children or grandchildren.

Providing meals may offer a challenge for what seems like picky eaters or those with no interest in food. A little understanding or education can go a long way in making the process a bit easier.

Many seniors find that the foods they used to love just don't taste the same anymore. It's not their imagination; it's a fact. Over time, our senses of taste and smell diminish, either naturally or as a result of medical treatments such as chemotherapy or medications. These losses can result in a decreased appetite, lack of interest in food, or even malnourishment. However, compensating for these losses is well within your control. Following are some ideas for making food more appetizing.

- Arrange food attractively on the plate. Use simple plate patterns so food is clearly visible.
- Vary shapes, textures, and temperature of the food. Take time to savor the food; smell it before you taste it and chew it thoroughly before swallowing.
- Augment food's flavor with a variety of herbs and spices.
- Look for strongly flavored foods, if tolerated, such as garlic, onions, citrus fruits, and flavored vinegars.

- Use fruit sauces or jams as well as concentrated flavors and extracts to stimulate taste buds.
- Double the amount of herbs and spices added to recipes, but within reason. Black or red pepper shouldn't be doubled automatically. Dry rubs and spice/herb combinations on meat and poultry add flavor without fat.
- Use flavor enhancers like monosodium glutamate to enhance savory foods or reduce perceived bitterness or acidity. MSG is lower in sodium than table salt and can boost the flavor of sodium-restricted diets.
- Add small amounts of fat (creamy dressing, cheese sauce, bacon bits) to soften sharp-tasting foods.

The chemosensory losses associated with aging and medical treatments can be readily and easily managed. By using these simple tips, seniors themselves, or through their caregivers, may regain the enjoyment eating once had, leading to improved nutritional status and better overall health.

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*This article was written by Ellen Serfustini, FCS Agent, Utah State University Extension*