

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNGER PEOPLE WITH PAROSMIA



Our Learning Zone suite of Information Sheets were created by a collaborative panel of experts: medical, scientific and people who live with smell and taste disorders. We would like to thank them all for giving and sharing their time, experience and knowledge.

Fifth Sense is the charity for people affected by smell and taste disorders. Based in the UK, we are the first charity providing direct support, information and a signpost to potential diagnosis and treatment to people affected by these conditions. We play a leading role in educating

people about the importance of the senses of smell and taste to our lives. Through this we can promote awareness of the consequences of smell and taste disorders, demonstrate the need for greater availability of medical services and advocate for further research into treatment for these conditions.

Fifth Sense is a membership organisation. Membership is free and open to anyone affected by or with an interest in smell or taste-related disorders, including family members, carers and health or scientific professionals.

Who should read this?

Parents, healthcare professionals and anyone who is caring for children and younger people experiencing distortions to the things they smell and taste. These are usually unpleasant smells – burning rubber, smoke, sewage, rotting meat which may also be affecting the flavour of food and drink, making it taste equally bad.

What is parosmia?

Parosmia is the medical term for experiencing distortions of the sense of smell. Someone with parosmia may be able to detect odours, but the smell of certain things – or sometimes everything – is different, and often unpleasant.

These unpleasant smells sometimes appear in response to specific odours, and for others, they can be triggered by virtually any smell.

Parosmia can range from mild to severe, and can be an incredibly debilitating and depressing experience. Children may appear to become “fussy” or “picky” eaters but this is not a behavioural issue, it is a real physical experience. Fifth Sense has been hearing from parents who have said that their children are experiencing parosmia following Covid-19, have described this as being worse than their initial loss of smell and feel their children are not being fully understood by their doctors.

What is parosmia?

Phantosmia, as the name suggests, is the term for olfactory hallucinations, or phantom smells, that appear in the absence of any odour. These can manifest as ‘normal’ smells – for example, being able to smell garlic when there is no garlic present – but they can also be unpleasant.

Parosmia and phantosmia are both classed as ‘dysosmia’, or qualitative disturbances of the sense of smell.

What causes parosmia?

The mechanism by which parosmia occurs is not fully understood, but it is thought to result from damage to the olfactory receptor neurones, the cells in our nasal cavity that detect odour molecules. It’s quite possible that damage to other areas of the olfactory system, such as the olfactory bulbs, can also cause these conditions.

Parosmia most commonly occurs when the sense of smell has been lost following a virus such as the common cold or Covid-19 (see **Information Sheet #1 Post Viral Olfactory Disorders**), although it can also occur as a result of head injury, exposure to toxins, diseases of the nervous system and sinus problems.

Can it be managed?

Options for treatments are limited but the good news is that symptoms of post-viral olfactory dysfunction often decrease with time. Whilst parosmia is being experienced however, there are a number of ways that symptoms can be managed. Some of these suggestions have come directly from parents who are finding ways to support their children:

1. **Believe them.** Listen to what they are saying and support their needs. Don’t dismiss it as bad behaviour or being fussy or picky.
2. **Help them** to keep a diary to make a note of foods that changes, what are triggers and what are safe foods. There are lots of common triggers for example cooking meat and onions/garlic and the smell of fresh coffee brewing, but these can vary from person to person. Establishing what these triggers are and what tastes ok to is important. A diary log and trigger tracker can be found on page 2.
3. **Encourage them** to try different foods with less strong flavours to see what they can cope with or enjoy (e.g. vanilla, white chocolate, cheese, banana, pasta), these can help to soften the bad tastes.
4. **Suggest to them** that they try using fruit-flavoured or unflavoured toothpaste and non-scented soap, shampoos and conditioners.
5. **Help them** to use a soft nose-clip when eating to help block the nose so that they are tasting what they eat without the flavours.
6. **Suggest (or prescribe)** vanilla or flavour free milkshake protein drinks to get the nutrients without any taste.
7. **Talk to them** about the experiences of young people from across the world who are experiencing or have recovered from smell and taste disorders on our website <https://fifthsense.org.uk/young-people>.
8. **Consider smell training** using smells that they are familiar with and are not parosmia triggers. In younger children this might not be helpful, but in teenagers this might be something they can tolerate. Information about and guidance on smell training can be found at <https://fifthsense.org.uk/smell-training>

There are products on the market that don’t use onions/garlic which can be a common trigger food. Some people have found that the **FODMAP** foods can be helpful in coping with parosmia. **FODMAP** stands for the different types of sugars that are found in foods – Fermentable **O**ligosaccharides, **D**issaccharides, **M**onnosaccharides and **P**olyols - it is primarily used help people manage Irritable Bowel Syndrome and you can read more about this here <https://www.monashfodmap.com/about-fodmap-and-ibs/>

DIARY LOG & TRIGGER TRACKER

Diary Record

Date	Source	What I actually smelled	What I actually tasted	Changes noted/comments
E.g 1/1/21	Spaghetti Bolognese	Burning rubber	Burnt, bitter taste	Made me feel sick
15/1/21	Oranges	Nothing	Sweetness not quite orange but pleasant	This tasted good

Triggers and Safe Food Diary Record

Date	Source	What I actually smelled	What I actually tasted	Safe Food or Trigger
E.g 1/1/21	Spaghetti Bolognese	Burning rubber	Burnt, bitter taste	Made me feel sick
15/1/21	Oranges	Nothing	Sweet/pleasant	This tasted good