

Mayo Clinic Minute: Hope for COVID-19 patients who've lost their sense of taste, smell

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The loss or change in a person's sense of taste and smell is something that can happen to people who have had COVID-19. It's a common symptom with other viruses, including influenza, but it's happening at a

much larger magnitude due to the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Current estimates indicate that 20% of people with COVID-19 will experience some alteration of their sense of taste and smell.

"On top of that, about another 20% of folks will come down with some prolonged version of this that can sometimes last for several weeks to several months," says Dr. Greg Vanichkachorn, a Mayo Clinic occupational medicine specialist.

The good news is that, over time, roughly 95% of those people can expect improvement in taste and smell in less than a year. And with help, the recovery of those senses can be sped up even more.

"There have been a lot of different therapies out there and touted for help with this, and we've combed through all the research. But the thing that we have seen to be the most effective, both in practice and in research, is something called 'olfactory retraining,'" says Dr. Vanichkachorn.

The nerves involved in taste and smell can heal and regrow. It's called "neuroplasticity."

"So the idea is that if we can challenge those nerves with different smells, that will help them regrow in the proper fashion," says Dr. Vanichkachorn.

Olfactory retraining involves smelling specific substances to do that.

"And those substances are clove, lemon, eucalyptus and rose. And what we recommend is that patients smell these substances for 15 seconds, twice a day for several weeks or several months. And this has been associated with significant improvements in the ability to [taste](#) and

smell," says Dr. Vanichkachorn.

One resource that experts say can be a big help is the website abscent.org. It's a [nonprofit group](#) that provides [smell](#) training tools and support for patients.

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