

## A matter of taste

You love dill pickles, but your spouse can't stand them. Your daughter adores chocolate but can't handle even the smell of your black licorice. The range of likes and dislikes among human taste buds is enormous.

We really do have different reactions to certain flavors, and they can be as varied as our personalities. Some people have many more taste buds than their peers, and they're known as "supertasters" (these tend to be women). Others have fewer buds. Some tastes, however, are learned. Most of us prefer sweet flavors. Coffee and other bitter tastes are generally acquired.

Some foods are actually easier to taste than others. Because hot foods give off steam, the nose picks up the aroma and



enhances the sense of taste. On the other hand, heat will increase the bitterness of some foods as well—broccoli, for instance.

In spite of what you may have been told, your taste is not all in your tongue either. In fact, there are taste buds inside the cheeks, on the roof of the mouth, and in the throat. These buds contain nerves which analyze flavors. The olfactory sense (smell) contributes to this complex process to allow us to enjoy certain foods and reject others. Of course, all this is simply

interesting trivia until something goes wrong. Taste disorders are very annoying and serious to those they affect. They can be caused by certain diseases and mineral deficiencies, among other problems. Many people believe that the sense of taste diminishes with age, but this isn't necessarily true. Most healthy seniors retain their sense of taste, but they may have a reduced sense of smell, which can affect their appreciation of certain flavors.

➤ About 20 percent of us are affected by TMJ disorders and 50 percent of us show symptoms of this disorder. ➤



Xerostomia, or dry mouth, is related to gum disease and possible tooth loss in 30 percent of adults.

## What does your saliva say about you?

Lick a postage stamp and you could be telling scientists not only who you are, but whether you're predisposed to certain diseases. Recent research has uncovered much more DNA information in saliva than was previously anticipated. The best news is that saliva is a promising replacement for blood when doing future DNA testing.

At this time, a few diseases, including respiratory diseases that affect children, lupus, and a particular periodontal disease that occurs in juveniles, are linked to genes that can be found in saliva. Researchers hope that, eventually, genes for Alzheimer's, breast cancer, adult periodontal disease, and cystic fibrosis may be discovered in saliva.

Another reason for wanting to use saliva in testing rather than blood is that so many patients are reluctant to give blood. Drawing blood is invasive compared to giving saliva. Children are generally uncomfortable giving blood, and some adult patients have religious or other reasons for not wanting to do so. Practical reasons for using saliva include ease of collection and storage. Saliva can be obtained from large populations in sufficient quantities for extensive studies.

By age five, most children have all 20 of their primary, or "baby," teeth.



## The last word on pacifier use

Some parents are absolutely against pacifier use. Others aren't sure what's best for their child, and they ask us what they should do. The truth is that there's nothing wrong with pacifiers during the first three years of life. In fact, they may be preferable over finger-sucking habits.

### ■ WHY A PACIFIER?

First, babies are comforted by sucking, and it may actually strengthen certain mouth muscles. When this happens, the tongue and lips are better able to guide in the baby teeth which will then guide the permanent teeth.

Maybe even more importantly, most children will give up their pacifiers by the age of three—the most tenacious by the age of five. On the

## Bad breath remedies—Allspice

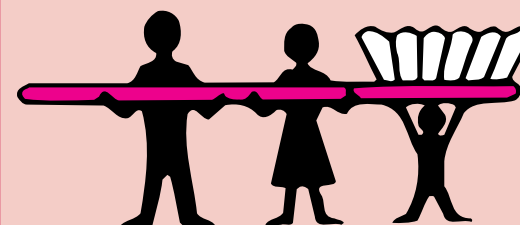
Want to freshen up your breath after that garlic bread you had with your lunch? A little allspice from the kitchen cupboard can do the trick. Just add a little to warm water and gargle. The same ingredient that adds spice to your pumpkin pie could be effective in sweetening your breath.

Allspice originates in the Caribbean, where it grows on large evergreen trees. The fruit of the tree is harvested before it ripens and is ground into allspice powder. One of its main ingredients is "eugenol," or oil of cloves, which is often used as a topical pain reliever and can also aid in digestion. The spice is naturally anti-bacterial, and that may be the secret to its breath-enhancing properties.

Allspice may be a perfect breath sweetener for some, but if you have any known allergies to spices, you should probably be wary of this remedy. In addition, if your bad breath persists, it may be the result of a systemic problem or periodontal disease. Obtain a professional diagnosis from us to be sure.



Over 30 million Americans no longer have their own teeth.



To prevent sore throats from lurking in your brush bristles, change your toothbrush monthly. If you or your child is ill, use a new toothbrush during the illness and replace it again when you return to health. Retainers and other orthodontic appliances can be sterilized by soaking them in hydrogen peroxide or bleach, and rinsing thoroughly to remove any residue of the sterilizing agent. Some patients ask if they can boil their toothbrushes to sterilize them, but most toothbrush material will not hold up to such heat. To avoid toothbrushes contaminating each other in the holder, you might consider using toothbrush covers. Replacing the toothbrush is the smartest move if you want to avoid recurring sore throats and other infections.

### THE TRUTH ABOUT SUGAR

Some parents will attest that sugar makes their kids bounce off the walls, but there's no scientific evidence to back this up. Still, it's smart to watch your child's sugar intake. Teaching children to avoid sugar can help them avoid tooth decay and promote better overall health.

