SYMPTOM

Metallic taste

A metallic taste is a change that makes food, drink, or saliva seem like metal.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Coins or metal lingering in your mouth

WHERE IT IS FELT
Tongue and mouth

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Medicines, mouth problems, respiratory infections

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Sudden facial droop, weakness, or trouble speaking

USUALLY LASTS
Depends on the cause and how quickly it resolves

SEE A DOCTOR IF
It persists, returns, or interferes with eating

Overview

A metallic taste is a change in how you experience taste. It may make food, drinks, or your saliva seem as though they contain metal. The medical term for a distorted sense of taste is dysgeusia .

Taste and smell work closely together. What seems like a taste problem may begin with reduced or altered smell, especially during a cold or another respiratory infection.

A metallic taste is usually temporary and is often linked to medicines, dental or gum problems, or an infection. Less often, it can result from an underlying health condition. The taste alone usually does not indicate an emergency.

What it may feel or look like

You may notice a taste resembling coins, iron, or blood. It can be present all the time or appear only when you eat and drink. Some foods may taste bitter, stale, or different from usual.

Other symptoms can offer clues to the cause. These may include:

A metallic taste does not usually cause visible changes. White patches, ulcers, swelling,

bleeding, or dental damage suggest that your mouth also needs to be examined.

- A blocked or runny nose
- Dry mouth or bad breath
- Bleeding, swollen, or painful gums
- Heartburn or an acidic taste
- Reduced appetite because food tastes unpleasant
- Reduced or altered sense of smell

Common causes

Common causes include medicines and supplements. Some antibiotics like amoxicillin or doxycycline , blood pressure medicines, diabetes medicines, and iron-containing supplements can affect taste. Cancer treatments may also do so. The change may begin soon after starting treatment or after a dose change.

Plaque, gum inflammation, tooth decay, dental infections, and poor-fitting dental appliances can produce an unpleasant or metallic taste. Blood from irritated gums may also taste metallic.

Colds, sinus infections, and other respiratory infections can change smell and taste. COVID-19 can cause taste changes, although loss or distortion of smell may be a larger part of the problem.

Dry mouth can make tastes seem stronger or unusual. Possible triggers include dehydration, mouth breathing, medicines, and conditions that reduce saliva production. Indigestion or acid reflux may bring stomach contents into the throat or mouth, causing a sour, bitter, or metallic taste.

Hormonal changes during pregnancy can affect taste, particularly early in pregnancy.

Less common causes include vitamin or mineral deficiencies, burning mouth syndrome, and damage to nerves involved in taste. Some kidney, liver, thyroid, or neurological conditions can also affect taste, but they usually cause other symptoms as well.

Urgent causes are uncommon. A sudden taste change with facial droop, arm or leg weakness, confusion, loss of balance, or trouble speaking could be part of a stroke. A chemical exposure or poisoning may also cause an unusual taste.

When to seek medical care

Call emergency services immediately if a sudden metallic taste occurs with:

Seek same-day medical or dental care if you have spreading facial or mouth swelling, fever with severe tooth pain, or difficulty drinking. Get prompt advice after a suspected poisoning or significant chemical exposure. In the United States, Poison Control can be reached at 1-800-222-1222.

Book a routine appointment if the taste persists, keeps returning, or makes it difficult to eat. You should also arrange an assessment if you have unexplained weight loss, ongoing dry mouth, mouth sores, bleeding gums, or a new taste change after starting a medicine.

- Facial droop, one-sided weakness, or difficulty speaking
- Severe confusion, loss of balance, or a sudden severe headache
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, mouth, or throat
- Trouble breathing or swallowing

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when the taste began, whether it is constant, and whether anything makes it better or worse. Tell them about recent infections, dental work, pregnancy, reflux symptoms, and all medicines and supplements you use.

They may examine your teeth, gums, tongue, mouth, nose, and throat. They may also check whether the main problem involves taste, smell, or both. A dentist may be best placed to assess tooth or gum symptoms.

Tests are not always needed. Depending on your symptoms, testing may include blood tests for a suspected nutritional deficiency or another health condition. Persistent or unexplained changes may lead to referral to an ear, nose, and throat specialist for smell and taste testing.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. A dental problem may need professional cleaning or other dental care. Treatment for an infection, dry mouth, or reflux may help when one of these is responsible.

If a medicine may be affecting your taste, speak with the prescriber or a pharmacist. Do not stop a prescribed medicine on your own. A different medicine or another adjustment may sometimes be possible.

While the taste settles, you can try:

Tart foods may help some people, but they can irritate mouth sores or worsen reflux. Do not start zinc or other high-dose supplements unless a clinician has identified a need. Too much of a supplement can cause harm and may interfere with other nutrients or medicines.

- Brushing your teeth and tongue gently and cleaning between your teeth
- Drinking water regularly
- Using sugar-free gum if your mouth feels dry
- Trying non-metal cutlery or cold foods
- Avoiding tobacco and foods that clearly worsen the taste

What to expect

A metallic taste related to a short infection, pregnancy, or temporary mouth irritation often improves as the trigger settles. Taste changes caused by ongoing medicines or health conditions may last longer.

Recovery can be gradual. Food may taste different before it returns to normal. If eating has become difficult, choose nutritious foods you can tolerate and seek advice rather than allowing your intake to remain low.

Common questions

Can COVID-19 cause a metallic taste?

Yes. COVID-19 can alter taste or smell, sometimes during the infection and sometimes afterward. Other respiratory infections can cause similar changes, so this symptom alone cannot confirm the cause.

Does a metallic taste mean I am pregnant?

Not by itself. Pregnancy can change taste, but many other causes are possible. If pregnancy is possible, a pregnancy test is a more reliable way to check.

Could the taste be coming from my teeth or gums?

Yes. Gum inflammation, bleeding, decay, and dental infections can all cause an unpleasant taste. Arrange dental care if you also have tooth pain, swollen or bleeding gums, bad breath, or facial swelling.

Should I stop a medicine that may be causing it?

No. Ask the prescriber or a pharmacist to review the medicine. Stopping some treatments suddenly can be unsafe, and another cause may be responsible.

Is a metallic taste a sign of something serious?

Usually not when it occurs alone. Seek urgent help when it appears with neurological symptoms, breathing or swallowing difficulty, major swelling, or suspected poisoning.

Sources

- National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders: Taste Disorders
- NHS: Metallic taste
- MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia: Taste - impaired
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Signs and Symptoms of Stroke
- Journal of Clinical Medicine: How to Manage Taste Disorders, 2022;11(9):2252