



October 2022 Newsletter

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Combining Five Tastes for Better Meals

By Nicole Clark

Everyone is entitled to an opinion on what foods they like and dislike. But have you ever wondered, what exactly is the taste you perceive from food? Taste is specific to the sense located in our mouth. Combine taste with smell and feel, and now you have flavor.



Take a strawberry for example, how might you describe the taste? You may describe it as sweet. But, what else? Did the word 'tart' or 'sour' come to mind?

In all, there are five tastes: sweet, salty, sour, bitter and umami.

- **Sweet** is usually enjoyable.
- **Sour**, like the taste of a fresh lemon, may not be as appealing. Unless of course, you add a little sweetness, like you would if you made homemade lemonade.
- **Bitter** can be described as pungent, acrid, sharp or simply, disagreeable. Fortunately, or unfortunately, many vegetables have a bitter taste. This is fortunate because the bitterness is caused by antioxidants in vegetables. These are good for our health. It is unfortunate because if you don't like bitter, you are less likely to eat vegetables.
- **Umami** may be a less familiar taste. Imagine the savory taste of meat, mushrooms, parmesan cheese, soy sauce or tomato paste. These are umami and they tend to be earthy. Umami's taste is not distinct, but when it is missing from a recipe, food can be bland.

Like the lemonade example, any one of the five tastes are best when balanced, or enhanced, by another taste. If your goal is to expand the types of foods your household is willing to eat, the trick may be in how they are prepared.



Tips for combining taste

- Before adding salt, try adding something sour. Sour brightens the taste of food. Add 1 teaspoon of vinegar to a pot of soup, stewed meat, casserole or a non-dairy based sauce. Taste and add more if needed.
- To make food less bitter, add something sweet or sour. For example, put a citrus vinaigrette or zest on vegetables. Eat dark chocolate with fruit. Or, roast vegetables to bring out their natural sweetness.

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- Since umami enhances taste, adding an umami ingredient may mean using less salt and sugar. If you make a fruit tray (sweet), add thin slices parmesan (umami). In meat dishes, add a teaspoon of cocoa powder (bitter), or apple cider vinegar (sour). In vegetable dishes (bitter), include mushrooms and tomatoes, a ¼ teaspoon of soy or fish sauce (umami).
- When combining tastes, add small amounts, sampling along the way. The final product should taste like music sounds - no one instrument, or taste, should overwhelm the others.

Let's Talk

Kids love to have fun, so experiment with new tastes as if it were a game. Trying new foods can be scary. Through games and role-modeling, you can help reduce the fear of new foods.

Ask your kids to choose one food they love and one that is new. Identify the primary flavors of their chosen foods. Next, the parent will choose 1 - 2 foods with different flavors. The adult and the child will then taste each food individually. After each food, identify which taste you noticed.

If willing, advance the experiment by mixing foods with different tastes. Once combined, discuss how the tastes changed.

Recipe for Health Mediterranean Grain Salad (Serves 4 - 6)

Ingredients:

Set one:

- 4 cups cooked grain (barley, rice, quinoa) - *Sweet*
- 1 ½ cups cherry tomatoes, halved - *Umami*
- 1 large cucumber, cut into half-moons - *Bitter*
- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 ½ teaspoons salt - *Salty*

Set two:

- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice - *Sour*
- 1 cup greens, chopped (spinach, arugula, kale) - *Bitter*
- 1 teaspoon honey or sugar - *Sweet*

Set three: Optional

- ¼ cup sliced black olives - *Salty, Umami and Bitter*
- ½ cup feta or cotija cheese - *Salt, Sour and Umami*
- ¼ cup each chopped basil and parsley - *Sweet and Bitter*

Preparation:

For kids new to the first three ingredients, allow them to try each individually. Next, gently toss the first five ingredients together in a large bowl. Taste and discuss what tastes you noticed. In a small bowl, mix the lemon and honey together. Add lemon/honey mixture and greens to the large bowl, and gently mix to incorporate. Again, taste and discuss. Finally, add the remaining three ingredients to the salad. Sample and discuss how the tastes changed with each addition. If your child is unwilling to try any new set of tastes, that's ok. Offer praise for the foods they did try, role model tasting the salad, then try the experiment in a few weeks.



Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods...