

*The sensory world of children”
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How important is sensory perception for children’s food choice? What is the role of motivation and desire in children’s food choice? Can we change children’s long term food choices by altering sensory perception and motivation? Answers to these and related important questions are the soul of what we do.

In one of our recent studies we investigated the role of liking and motivation in children’s vegetable consumption. The main outcome of this study is that motivation plays a key role in children’s vegetable consumption. Next year we aim to increase children’s motivation, in order to guide children to healthier food choices. In a recent publication we proposed that cutting foods in small pieces will help children develop a stable liking for foods. Whether this strategy will help children consume more vegetables is the aim of our future studies.

Currently we advise and collaborate with food industry, on how to develop sensory methods and products that meet children’s sensory and nutritional needs. We work together with key researchers in the field of food choice of children and continuously aim to better understand the sensory world and food choices of children.

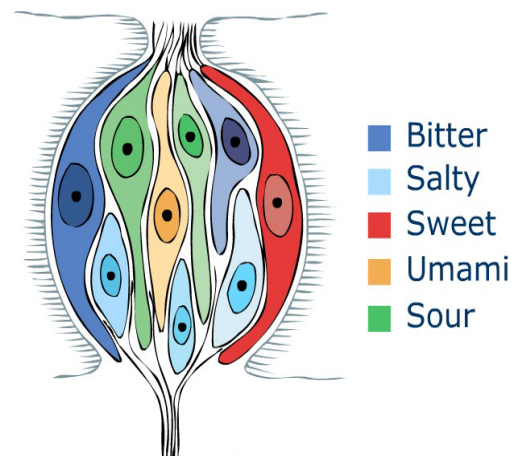
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Latest research news – Fat taste

It should be common knowledge that there are five basic tastes: sweet, sour, salt, bitter, and umami. For those of you who thought there were only four, umami is a descriptor for savoury or chicken stock taste and it is now widely regarded as the fifth basic taste. For a taste to be widely accepted in the scientific community it must pass some strict criteria: there must be receptor mechanisms for the tastant located on taste receptor cells, there must be signals sent from those taste receptor cells to the taste processing regions of the brain, the brain must be activated by the tastant, and the perception must be distinct from other basic tastes. All of these things must happen and be unequivocal for basic taste status. Even though the vast majority of researchers in the taste field believe umami is the fifth basic taste, there are still some who are not convinced.

This leads me to research from our group investigating the potential sixth taste – fat taste. At this stage there is insufficient evidence and far too much controversy to be definitive about the existence of fat taste it will probably take another 10-20 years before there is general consensus. However, research from our lab appears conclusive we have been able to develop a fat taste threshold method using oleic acid (C18:1). As with all taste we expected to observe, and did observe, large individual variation in sensitivity to oleic acid. Given that we can determine oral taste thresholds for oleic acid, and there are fat taste receptor mechanisms located on taste receptor cells in humans, it appears likely that humans may possess a sixth basic taste – for fat!

Jessica Stewart is completing her PhD on this topic, so watch this space for more news on fat taste, and the functional role fat taste may play.



Taste Buds