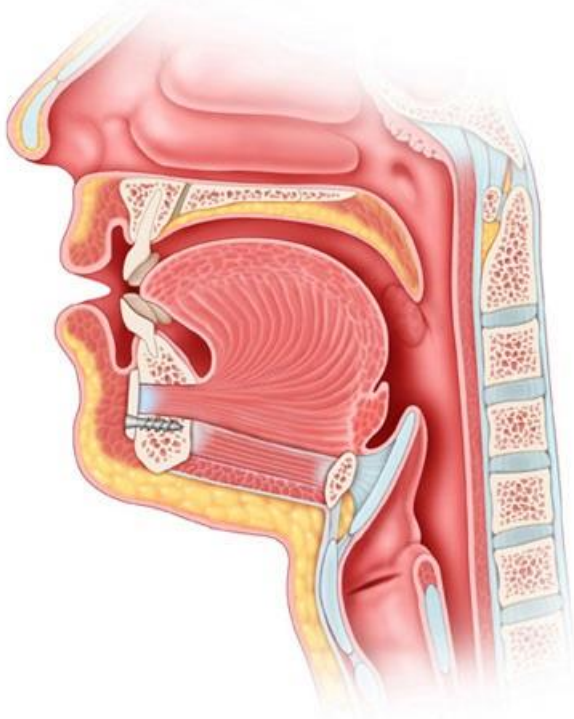


Your tongue and your taste buds

The tongue is a muscular organ in the mouth. The tongue is covered with moist, pink tissue called mucosa. The tongue is anchored to the mouth by webs of tough tissue and mucosa. The tether holding down the front of the tongue is called the frenum. In the back of the mouth, the tongue is anchored into the hyoid bone. The tongue is vital for chewing and swallowing food, as well as for speech.



Did you ever wonder why your favourite foods taste so good?

Well, you can thank your taste buds for letting you appreciate the saltiness of pretzels and the sweetness of ice cream.

Taste buds are sensory organs that are found on your tongue and allow you to experience tastes that are sweet, salty, sour, and bitter. How exactly do your taste buds work? Well, stick out your tongue and look in the mirror.

See all those bumps? Those are called papillae, and most of them contain taste buds. Taste buds have very sensitive microscopic hairs called microvilli. Thousands of taste buds cover the surfaces of the papillae. Taste buds are collections of nerve-like cells that connect to nerves running into the brain. Those tiny hairs send messages to the brain about how something tastes, so you know if it's sweet, sour, bitter, or salty.

The average person has about 10,000 taste buds and they're replaced every 2 weeks or so. But as a person ages, some of those taste cells don't get replaced. An older person may only have 5,000 working taste buds. That's why certain foods may taste stronger to you than they do to adults. Smoking also can reduce the number of taste buds a person has.

But before you give taste buds all the credit for your favourite flavours, it's important to thank your nose. Olfactory receptors inside the uppermost part of the nose contain special cells that help you smell. They send messages to the brain.

Here's how it works: While you're chewing, the food releases chemicals that immediately travel up into your nose. These chemicals trigger the olfactory receptors inside the nose. They work together with your taste buds to create the true flavour of that yummy slice of pizza by telling the brain all about it!

When you have a cold or allergies, and your nose is stuffy, you might notice that your food doesn't seem to have much flavour. That's because the upper part of your nose isn't clear to receive the chemicals that trigger the olfactory receptors (that inform the brain and create the sensation of flavour).

Try holding your nose the next time you eat something. You'll notice that your taste buds are able to tell your brain something about what you're eating — that it's sweet, for instance — but you won't be able to pick the exact flavour until you let go of your nose.

So the next time you chomp on an apple or slurp up some soup, thank your tongue — and your nose! Without them, life wouldn't have any flavour.

Source: http://kidshealth.org/kid/talk/qa/taste_buds.html

<http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/picture-of-the-tongue>