

Enhancing the Taste of Our Food

A What are your favourite foods? Do you like pizza, hamburgers, roast pork, or sweet cakes and cookies? Chances are that, whatever you like best, it has a strong taste and a salty, sweet or savoury flavour. People generally like to eat tasty foods, and this can create potential health problems, especially with the consumption of fast or processed food. Fast food traditionally contains a lot of salt or sugar, because this is a cheap way to make food taste good and it encourages people to buy more cookies, chips, and soft drinks, for example. However, people are becoming increasingly aware of the dangers of an unhealthy diet, and the manufacturers of processed food know that sales will increase if they can advertise that their product has less salt or sugar. They also know that if their product tastes bland or boring, no amount of health benefits will make it a popular choice with consumers, and they will lose money if their product is not popular. However, a new technology is currently being developed that may allow fast food manufacturers to reduce salt and sugar without sacrificing taste.

B If you stick out your tongue and look in the mirror, you will see that it is covered with tiny bumps. These bumps are called taste buds and they are the receptors in our skin that allow us to taste different kinds of foods. There are five different taste receptors, for sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and savoury flavours. When we are born, we have a lot of these on the roof of our mouth as well as on our tongue, but as we get older, we lose taste buds, which is why older people find it harder to taste things. Adults typically have about 10,000 taste buds, but older people may have as few as 5,000. We have more receptors for bitter tastes than for any others; researchers think that this may be because these taste buds warn us if food is poisonous.

C The food that we eat contains natural chemicals that fit into the different shaped receptors on our tongues; for example, sweet

foods trigger the sweet receptors. The technology to mimic, or copy, these natural flavours with chemicals such as aspartame has been in existence for a long time, and aspartame is a common ingredient in many diet soft drinks and other diet products. While aspartame allows us to experience a sweet taste without eating sugar, it also has disadvantages. Firstly, many people do not like its bitter aftertaste, and secondly, some people say that it is bad for health if taken in large quantities.

D However, a new technology is being developed that may be an improvement on artificial sweeteners and other chemicals. Taste enhancers target the taste receptors on our tongues, and they make us more sensitive to sweet, sour, or salty tastes. Just a few molecules of a taste enhancer could double the sweetness effect of a teaspoon of sugar, or the salty effect of a teaspoon of salt. This means that instead of using artificial chemicals to make food tasty, food manufacturers could use half the quantity of the real substance and a tiny quantity of taste enhancer to make the food taste good. This has the potential to save food manufacturers money by replacing large quantities of sugar and salt with tiny amounts of chemicals. It could also benefit our health if we can eat food that tastes good and is low in sugar and salt.

E Taste enhancers have other advantages, too. People generally do not like bitter tasting food, but reversing this technology so that the bitter taste receptors are blocked instead of stimulated may reduce the bitter taste of some healthy foods. This means, for example, that people may be persuaded to eat more soy protein.

F Taste enhancer technology is very new to the marketplace, and as yet it is not widely used, but it has the potential to make a significant change to the processed food industry and to improve the healthiness of many fast foods.

Identifying the Main Idea

2 Read the topic sentence *ONLY* of each paragraph and circle the heading that most closely describes what the whole reading passage is about. Take **NO MORE THAN FIVE MINUTES** to do this.

- a. The Taste Buds on the Human Tongue
- b. The Disadvantages of Fast Food
- c. A New Technology to Make Our Food Healthier
- d. The Health Disadvantages of Sweet and Salty Food

Distinguishing Fact and Opinion

3 Look at the sentences below. Decide if they are facts or opinions. People often write opinions as if they were facts. Ask yourself: *Can this statement be proved?*

- a. _____ The human mouth has approximately 10,000 taste buds.
- b. _____ Research has shown that in taste tests, most people prefer sweet food.
- c. _____ Sweet food is nicer than salty food.
- d. _____ Most food manufacturers care more about profits than the health benefits of their product.
- e. _____ New food technology can help food to taste better using 50% less salt and fat.
- f. _____ New food technology has more drawbacks than advantages.

TIP

When you have to complete IELTS questions that ask if the given information is true, false, or not given, you need to be able to distinguish fact and opinion.

IELTS-Type Questions: Reading for Details and for Main Ideas

Now that you have an overall idea of the topic of the passage and its layout, you should have a good idea of which paragraphs needed to read more carefully to find answers to the detailed questions.

Multiple Choice

Circle the correct letter, a-c, for each question.

- 1. Manufacturers know that their sales will improve
 - a. if their food tastes bland or boring.
 - b. if they tell people they have reduced the sugar and salt.
 - c. if they tell people they have increased the sugar and salt.
- 2. The artificial sweetener that manufacturers add to food is
 - a. a chemical.
 - b. a diet product.
 - c. a natural flavour.

TIP

Multi-choice questions usually follow the order of the passage, so **DON'T** read the whole passage through for each question.

3. Instead of using artificial chemicals to make food taste better, manufacturers could
 - a. add double the quantity of taste enhancer.
 - b. add half the quantity of taste enhancer.
 - c. add a very small quantity of taste enhancer.
4. Another benefit of taste enhancers is
 - a. people will enjoy bitter tasting healthy food.
 - b. people will eat more unhealthy food.
 - c. people will reverse their eating habits.
5. Taste enhancers have the potential to
 - a. make people stop eating so much processed food.
 - b. make healthy changes to industrially produced food.
 - c. make all the food we eat healthier and better for us.

Sentence Completion – Type A

Complete the sentences below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

6. When we are born, we have taste buds on the roof of our _____ and on our _____.
7. Researchers believe that one of the functions of the bitter taste buds is to tell us if food is _____.
8. A teaspoon of sugar could taste twice as sweet if a _____ of taste enhancer is added.
9. Replacing some of the salt and sugar with small amounts of chemicals could save money for _____.

Identification of Information

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the reading passage?

Write:

TRUE if the statement agrees with the information

FALSE if the statement contradicts the information

NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this

10. _____ Consumers are happy to buy healthy food even if it tastes bland or boring.
11. _____ Taste buds enable the body to taste foods of many flavours.
12. _____ Younger people can taste more flavours than older people.
13. _____ Bitter taste buds are more uncommon than other taste buds.
14. _____ Aspartame is a chemical produced in large quantities in the USA.
15. _____ Artificial sweeteners and other chemicals cause tooth decay.

TIP

You will lose the marks for a question if you write more than two words or if you misspell a word. Also, check that your answer is grammatically correct.

TIP

If the information in the reading passage and the question does not match, then the answer is 'false'. If the reading passage does not give enough information to answer the question, then the answer is 'not given'. Even if you have personal knowledge about the topic, you must **ONLY** answer according to what is written in the passage.

16. _____ Taste enhancers may be better for our health than aspartame.
 17. _____ Soy protein is an example of a bitter tasting food.

Global Multi-Choice

Circle the letter for the correct answer.

18. The writer's main idea is:
- We should not eat so much salt and sugar, especially in fast food.
 - Taste enhancers will reduce the amount of salt and sugar in our diet.
 - The fast food industry prefers to manufacture healthy food.
 - It is possible that taste enhancers may improve our diet.

After You Read

Vocabulary - Synonyms

In the IELTS Reading test, you may not find the exact word in the reading passage as you do in the question. You will need to be able to find words with similar meanings, that is, synonyms. Practise with these words from the reading passage.

- 4 Match the words in the boxes with their synonyms. Use your dictionary if you need to. The first one has been done for you.

Synonym		Word or Phrase in the Passage
1.	industrially produced	problems
2.	has very little flavour	consumers
3.	foods with lots of flavour	processed
4.	cause	potential
5.	giving up	tastes bland
6.	possible	create
7.	the people who buy	sacrificing
8.	advantages	consumption
9.	difficulties	tasty foods
10.	eating	benefits

Guessing the Meaning of Unknown Words

- 5 For each sentence, choose the correct meaning of the underlined word from I–IV. Use the clues in the sentences to guess the meaning. **DO NOT** use dictionaries.
- There are five different taste receptors, or taste buds, on the human tongue.
 - flowers
 - cells
 - buds
 - radios
 - The technology to mimic, or copy, these flavours has been in existence for a long time.
 - photocopy
 - make the same
 - make different
 - be impolite
 - People generally don't like bitter food, but the bitter taste buds can be blocked so that food tastes less bitter.
 - opened up
 - closed down
 - made like salt
 - made like lemon
 - Sweet and savoury taste buds can be stimulated so that food tastes even better.
 - closed down
 - dangerous
 - developed less
 - developed more
 - With this new technology, we no longer need to use artificial or industrially produced chemicals to make food tasty.
 - healthy
 - unnatural
 - natural
 - interesting
 - Bitter taste buds warn us that food is dangerous for us to eat and could be poisonous.
 - very sweet
 - making us sick or even die
 - medical
 - healthy
 - Taste enhancers make the sweet, salty, or sour tastes even better.
 - flowers
 - flavours
 - improvers
 - people who taste food for a job
 - When we eat sweet food, we stimulate the sweet taste buds, in other words, sweet food triggers the sweet receptors.
 - makes our teeth bad
 - uses a gun
 - makes them work more
 - makes them work less

Connecting Words

Connecting words show the relationship in meaning between one sentence and another, one clause and another, or one phrase and another.

- 6 What meaning or function do the following connecting words have? Write them in the correct boxes in the column on the right. The first one has been done for you.

for example	while	firstly / secondly
because	also	however