

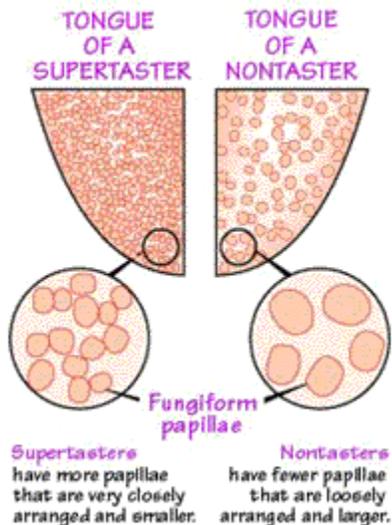
ARE YOU A SUPERTASTER?

By Ann Gerhardt, MD

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Do you shun kale, dry wines, grapefruit and radicchio? If you are told that eating broccoli will prevent cancer, would you rather take your chances and live broccoli-free? Your choice may have nothing to do with simple preference. You may be genetically different from people who like or are indifferent to these foods. You may be a supertaster.

Scientists who research taste have divided people into categories of supertaster, medium taster and non-taster, based on their tongue's sensitivity to a very bitter compound, 6-n-propylthiouracil (PROP). The difference relates to the size and number of your taste buds, as shown in the picture.



(Picture from Slash/Food.com)

A variety of tests can prove or disprove your supertaster status, but why bother? You either want to eat bitter foods or you don't. You may miss out on some nutrients from salad greens, but can make most of them up with other vegetables, fruits and whole grains.

Not all supertasters omit bitter foods from their diets. Some eat bitter foods, but mask the flavor with salt, fat and cream, which may not be so healthy. A study, published in the June 16 issue of the journal *Physiology*

& Behavior, found that, even though supertasters were more sensitive to salt, they tended to prefer products with higher amounts of sodium, unconsciously masking what they perceive as unpleasant tastes.

Food manufacturers do this to some extent for all of us. Add salt and fat to any processed food, and fewer people will find it unpleasant. One of the reasons dairy producers add salt to cheese is to counter the bitter flavor of fermented milk.

Your choices as a supertaster? You can avoid bitter foods altogether or risk elevated blood pressure and cholesterol by adding cream and salt to cover up bitter flavors. If you live long enough, your taste buds will atrophy with age, so that you don't taste as sensitively. Maybe at age 85 you can enjoy broccoli.¶

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