

No sense of smell after COVID? Therapies can help bring it back

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So, you had COVID-19 a few months back and you still can't smell that

first steaming cup of coffee in the morning. Is there anything you can do to hasten the return of that vital sense?

Experts say there is, including "physical therapy" for your nose.

"In most cases, [smell loss](#) is temporary, but it can take months or even years to recover," said researcher Dr. Tran Locke. She's an assistant professor of otolaryngology–head and [neck surgery](#) at Baylor College of Medicine, in Houston.

People with prolonged smell loss after recovering from COVID-19 should see an ear, nose and throat specialist to rule out other causes, according to Locke and her colleague, Dr. Sunthosh Sivam.

"Seasonal allergies or inflammatory sinus disease would also impede your smell baseline and your ability to recover from the effects of an infection like COVID-19," Sivam said. He is also an assistant professor of otolaryngology–head and neck surgery at Baylor.

"We want to minimize any inflammatory issues first," Sivam said in a university news release.

Patients with smell loss due to COVID-19 may be prescribed nasal steroids or rinses to reduce inflammation. If smell loss persists, the next step is olfactory retraining, which both experts describe as physical therapy for your nose.

Patients gently smell different essential oils or herbs with familiar scents for 20 seconds while focusing on their memories and experiences associated with those scents. Rose, lemon, clove and eucalyptus are commonly used, but patients can choose their own scents. Patients should do two sessions a day for four to six months.

"It takes patience. The more you train, the better the outcome will be," Locke said. "I recommend patients find a quiet place where they won't be disturbed so they can give their full attention to the practice."

Sivam said patients should manage their expectations before starting the regimen, because they may not regain the same level of smell as they had before they were infected with COVID-19.

"When you smell a rose scent, your characterization may be different than before you had the smell loss," Sivam said. "You're relearning what a rose smells like with your new smelling status. I talk with my patients about building a new smell vocabulary."

Because smell and taste are closely linked, many [patients](#) who lose their sense of smell after recovering from COVID-19 also lose their sense of taste, Locke noted.

It's crucial to talk with your doctor before trying any method of restoring your sense of smell, the doctors emphasized.

"If you have no [smell](#) for two weeks, it's important to come in and get checked out," Locke said. "It could be due to COVID-19. It could be unrelated. Either way, I think having a doctor evaluate the condition is important to avoid self-treatment resulting in a delay in diagnosis."

More information: Harvard Medical School has more on [COVID-19 and loss of smell](#).

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