Using Your Senses

There are five senses used when tasting food and drink: sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch. The senses help to develop food preferences (likes and dislikes) and evaluate foods through preference or discrimination tests.

SIGHT

The size, shape, colour, temperature and surface texture all play an important part in helping to determine the first reaction to a food.

Moist	Sticky	Clear
Firm	Smooth	Thick
Juicy	Flaky	Coarse
Dry	Caramelised	Bubbling
Solid	Heavy	Icy
Crumbly	Opaque	Steaming

SMELL

Smell (odour) and taste work together to produce flavour. This is the reason why people with a blocked nose find it difficult to determine the flavours of foods. Smell can trigger memories and either encourage or discourage someone from eating a food.

Aromatic	Savoury	Fragrant
Tart	Weak	Zesty
Pungent	Citrus	Sweet
Bland	Strong	Earthy
Spicy	Mild	Fresh
Acidic	Smoky	Meaty

TASTE

We can detect five basic tastes:

- Bitter
- Salt
- Sour
- Sweet
- Umami

Sweet	Bland	Bitter
Savoury	Umami	Salty
Zesty	Strong	Tart
Tangy	Rich	Smoky
Sour	Spicy	Piquant
Mild	Hot	Floury

HEARING

The sound of food being prepared, cooked, served and eaten all help to influence food preferences. The sounds also influence our understanding of whether they are fresh or ripe, eg a crisp, crunchy apple.

Crackle	Pop
Crunch	Brittle
Sizzle	Crisp

TOUCH

Food texture is the way food is felt by the fingertips, tongue, teeth and palate.

When food is placed in the mouth, the surface of the tongue and other sensitive skin reacts to its surface texture. This sensation is known as mouthfeel.

Brittle	Bubbly	Tender
Coarse	Close	Open
Solid	Granular	Greasy
Dry	Moist	Gooey
Short	Tacky	Waxy
Chewy	Soft	Cloying

Taste receptors

Our tongues are covered with *taste buds*, which are designed to sense chemicals in the mouth. Most taste buds are located in the top outer edges of the tongue, but there are also receptors at the back of the tongue as well as on the walls of the mouth and at the back of the throat. As we chew food, molecules mix with saliva, enter *taste pores* and interact with *gustatory hairs*, also known as *taste receptors*. This triggers nerve impulses that are transmitted to the brain.

Olfactory system

This is the sensory system used for olfaction, or the sense of smell. As we breathe in, the *olfactory receptor cells* are stimulated by odours and the *olfactory membrane* sends neural messages up the *olfactory nerve* to the brain.

Intensity

Foods may be described by association, eg meaty, minty or fruity. The intensity (low, medium or high) can also be recorded, eg garlicky or salty.