

Script – Print – What’s That (Lack of) Smell? COVID is Just One Reason for Loss of Smell

Most of us take the sense of smell for granted. But once we lose it, it becomes a real source of aggravation.

That’s certainly been the case during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While there are many COVID-related symptoms – headache, fatigue, body aches – one constant seems to be the loss of smell. According to some medical experts, loss of smell is even more of an indication of COVID than fever, for example.

“We know that loss of smell can be the first sign that you have a COVID infection,” said Dr. Terrence Loughlin, an otolaryngologist for OSF HealthCare. “We have a better understanding now that the COVID virus can temporarily put the neurons responsible for sense of smell out of commission by affecting the cells supporting neurons rather than invading the neurons.”

But it’s not just COVID that can cause loss of smell, which can also be directly tied to loss of taste. If you are experiencing any symptoms, Dr. Loughlin recommends seeing a doctor within one or two weeks.

“You can lose your sense of smell due to an infection of the sinuses, which should be treated, you can lose your sense of smell with polyps in your nose, you can lose your sense of smell with neurological diseases such as Parkinson's, and those are issues that really should be investigated and treated by a doctor,” said Dr. Loughlin.

Loss of smell can cause many emotions. It can cause people to feel disoriented, detached, anxious or worse.

“There are a lot of people who are depressed because of the loss of sense of smell,” said Dr. Loughlin. “Part of the reason is because of the loss of sense of smell diminishes your sense of taste or eliminates your sense of taste. And not being able to enjoy food as you are used to is very depressing.”

There are other reasons to be concerned about loss of smell, including not being able to smell a gas leak in your house; failing to realize the food you’re eating is spoiled; and losing your appetite can cause a Vitamin D deficiency or malnutrition.

The upside, however, is that most people will eventually regain their sense of smell, although the length of time varies.

“There have been a lot of numbers published on how long we lose our sense of smell,” said Dr. Loughlin. “I think the most common published numbers are that 50 % of people get their sense of smell back in three weeks and 95 % percent of people with loss of sense of smell get it back within a half of year.”

There are no proven treatments for restoring smell. According to Dr. Loughlin, some doctors will prescribe Flonase or Nasacort or even a steroid, but there is no data that proves any treatment is effective.

This is just another reminder about the importance of getting the COVID vaccine. Medical experts believe that the vaccine may protect people from losing their sense of smell even if they get infected.

And that news is nothing to sniff at.