

# Loss of sense of smell (anosmia/hyposmia) following viral infections or head injury

Information for Patients

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## What is anosmia and hyposmia?

Anosmia is the loss of your sense of smell and hyposmia is the reduction in your ability to smell.

It is common for your sense of smell and taste to change or disappear following a viral infection. Some cold and flu viruses can do this, as can the COVID-19 coronavirus. The symptoms usually settle over time but not always.

Head injuries that cause sudden movement of the brain forwards or backwards, stretch the nerves that detect smell, which damages them. This could cause your sense of smell and taste to change or disappear. This happens if you hit the front or the back of your head. The symptoms usually settle over time but not always.

## Treatment

There is no medical treatment that improves the chances of recovery. It can take up to two years for recovery to take place. Unfortunately, at the current time, there are no clinical trials of therapy in Britain for any cause of anosmia.

If you are a smoker, stopping smoking can help symptoms considerably. The NHS Inform website has some information which may help if you decide to stop smoking:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/stopping-smoking>

Some people consider that taking Vitamin A as a supplement might help post viral anosmia. This can be bought from pharmacies or some health food shops. However, there is no medical evidence that it will improve your symptoms. Vitamin A supplements must not be taken by pregnant women.

Zinc supplements have been suggested as a possible treatment for anosmia if started within a year of having a head injury. These can be bought from pharmacies or some health food shops. However, there is no medical evidence that they will improve your symptoms.

In general, no further investigations are useful and a referral to the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) clinic is not required. You may find the below websites useful for further advice and information:

The Fifth Sense website has some advice on smell training and information on safety issues caused by a loss of sense of smell: <https://www.fifthsense.org.uk/>.

AbScent is another website about loss of sense of smell: <https://abscent.org/>.

The ENTUK website has very detailed patient information for post COVID-19 anosmia: <https://www.entuk.org/>