

## Taste may indicate severity of COVID infection

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HOSPITAL treatment is more likely for those with COVID-19 who have weak taste buds, This is the finding of Network Open.

Those with weak taste buds may also experience symptoms for a longer period than those with a stronger sense of taste, the study found.

After being infected, COVID-19 patients classified as “non-tasters” had a nearly four-fold higher risk for hospitalization than others with the virus, according to the United Press International (UPI) reporting on the study. These persons may suffer COVID symptoms for more than three weeks, on average. Those with stronger taste senses experience the symptoms for less than two weeks, the researchers said.

“The results carry important implications,” Dr. Henry P. Barham told UPI in an email. Knowing that weakened taste buds may predict more severe illness “allows [those infected] to make more informed choices” about treatment, he said.

Dr. Barham, a physician with Sinus and Nasal Specialists of Louisiana in Baton Rouge, is a coauthor of the study. It’s been known that losing the sense of taste or smell is common – or found in up to eight in 10 COVID patients. a study published by the JAMA

The new study suggests that those with weakened senses of taste before infection may be at increased risk for infection and severe illness from the virus, UPI reported, citing the researchers.

More than 1,900 adults were tested by Dr. Barham and his coresearchers for the presence of “bitter taste receptors” in taste buds.

According to the UPI report, bitter taste receptors are cells on the surface of the tongue that affect the ability to perceive bitter or strong tastes.

The researchers classified the study participants, based on the presence of the receptor cells, as “super-tasters” (who respond more to bitter taste); “tasters” (with normal responses) or “non-tasters” (those with weakened response).

Dr. Barham said the study shows that the level of expression of bitter taste receptors prior to infection may indicate the severity of COVID-19 infection, Dr. Barham said.

UPI reported that among the 1,900-plus participants, 266 tested positive for COVID-19 and 55 required hospital care.

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Among those hospitalized, 47 were non-tasters.

As a result, non-tasters were 10 times more likely to become infected with COVID-19. They are also four times more at higher risk for hospitalization.

\*\*\* Dr. Joseph D. Lim is the former Associate Dean of the UE College of Dentistry, former Dean of the College of Dentistry, National University, past president and honorary fellow of the Asian Oral Implant Academy, and honorary fellow of the Japan College of Oral Implantologists. Honorary Life Member of Thai Association of Dental Implantology. For questions on dental health, e-mail [jdlim2008@gmail.com](mailto:jdlim2008@gmail.com) or text 0917- 8591515./ PN