



# Nutrition and Aging Resource Center

## Culinary Enhancements

### Simple Techniques to Elevate Food Quality

Simple culinary enhancements can elevate the taste and flavor of food. Small changes can deliver big results and positively impact the quality of meals and participant satisfaction at senior nutrition programs.

Understanding the basics of taste and flavor is important. Taste is the body's ability to detect a flavor sensation through receptors on the tongue and palate. A person's favorite food is generally a combination of two or more of the basic tastes below:

- Sweet
- Sour
- Salty
- Bitter
- Umami (savory)

Flavor is the magic that happens when taste and aroma collide. Some research claims that the aroma of food accounts for up to 80% of how we perceive flavor. Flavor can be enhanced through ingredients and cooking techniques. Consider the tips below to improve the flavor and quality of your meals:

- Use aromatics in your kitchen and serving area to enhance the dining experience. Allow the delicious smells from cooking to permeate the room. Typical aromatics include leeks, onions, carrots, and celery; when cooked together, they help create layers of flavor.
- Add back flavor with spices and herbs. Crush dried herbs slightly to release flavor before adding them to a dish or recipe. Toast whole spices by adding them to a hot pan without oil. Bloom ground spices by adding them to hot oil in a pan.
- Add fresh ginger to help brighten up a recipe and create an invigorating aroma.

- Use acid ingredients to add bright, fresh notes and enhance other ingredients in a dish, providing balance to both bitterness and sweetness. Examples include citrus juice, vinegar, tomatoes, and fresh or dried fruit.
- Incorporate stocks to add concentrated flavor, richness, and smoothness.
- Create salt-free spice blends that can be used in a variety of dishes. Consider a Flavor Station to allow participants the opportunity to season their meals without the addition of salt.

Spices and herbs should align with the dish and the demographic being served. Be creative and engage with program participants by asking them what they like. Use the attached Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition herb and spice posters as resources for seasoning. You can even print and post the below posters in your kitchen as a reminder of the possibilities with herbs and spices:

- [Dried Spices Poster](#)
- [Dried Herbs Poster](#)
- [Fresh Herbs Poster](#)
- [Spice Blends Poster](#)