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Smell Training' Might Speed the Sense's Return After COVID

Special training may help COVID-19 patients regain their sense of smell after suffering parosmia, a new British study suggests.

Parosmia is a condition where people have strange and often unpleasant smell distortions. Instead of smelling a lemon, for example, you may smell rotting cabbage, or chocolate may smell like gasoline. Parosmia has been linked to COVID-19 and other viruses and head injuries.

"Some degree of smell loss is thought to affect up to one-quarter of the general population," said researcher Carl Philpott, from the Norwich Medical School at the University of East Anglia.

"Smell loss is also a prominent symptom of COVID-19, and we know that the pandemic is leaving many people with long-term smell loss, or smell distortions such as parosmia," he said in a university news release.

Smell training involves sniffing at least four different odors twice a day every day for several months.

"It aims to help recovery based on neuroplasticity -- the brain's ability to reorganize itself to compensate for a change or injury," Philpott said.

The researchers worked with more than 140 people who had lost or had changes in their sense of smell.

The study patients were given a variety of smell training kits -- including different odors, like eucalyptus, lemon, rose, cinnamon, chocolate, coffee, lavender, honey, strawberry and thyme.

"We found that the presence of parosmia and worse smell performance on testing of odor identification and discrimination was associated with clinically significant recovery in smell function for people experiencing post-viral smell disorders," Philpott said. "This means that smell training can help the smell pathways to start to regenerate and recover."

The investigators also found that older people were more likely to start to recover their sense of smell. Also, the biggest improvements were seen among those who had lost the most amount of smell function.

The research was carried out before the pandemic, but the researchers believe their findings could help people who lost their sense of smell due to COVID-19.

The report was published online recently in the journal *The Laryngoscope*.

More information

For more on the loss of smell, head to the [U.S. National Institutes of Health](#).