

TasteAerobics[©]

- This program was developed to engage the gustatory and olfactory sensors and thereby stimulate the participant's brain in the attention-directed enjoyment of a small portion of food, either prepared or fresh.
- Invented in 2001 by Roger Anunsen for older adults, this program has been a part of presentations at Oxford and the Smithsonian and is a part of mindRAMP's brain health educational programs.
- Based on how the brain tastes food, we challenge everyone to take an extra moment to move slowly through each of the TasteAerobics steps so that the brain has enough time to do its work.
- The result is that the brain has time to "think" about what is being eaten and engage multiple senses with each bite. Each individual is actively participating a brain healthy activity: Enjoying a single bite of something. When engaged in TasteAerobics, these brains are paying attention and giving their brains an opportunity (over time) to maintain or even improve their ability to taste (and smell). This is an example of neuroplasticity at work, the actual rewiring of a brain in a do-it-yourself effort.



The steps of TasteAerobics are set at about four (4) seconds for each step. More on some items, less on others but try to pay enough attention to each step to allow full focus on that step.

1. **EyeAerobics:** Look at the food. Really examine what is on the fork or in the spoon or held between your fingers.
2. **ScentAerobics:** Smell the food. The olfactory system of the brain is involved. This is sometimes powerful, such as a complex soup where the molecules of odor, called odorants, are rising or very weak, such as a blueberry or nut that has most of its odorants sealed inside.
3. **TouchAerobics:** Feel the food. Caution: This has been the most difficult step to correctly follow because you must break decades of brain wiring that has deep pathways telling your jaw to start chewing as soon as something hits your mouth, especially if your



mindRAMP & Associates, LLC

brain has been primed by the sight and smell of the food. Resist chewing for at least four seconds as the touch sensors covering your tongue send signals to your brain. The goal here is to feel the detail of the seeds on the outside of a strawberry or the shape of a pecan or the angles of the chopped vegetables in a vegetable soup.

4. **TasteAerobics:** (Optional) The taste part of the brain, the gustatory system, begins on the tip of the tongue and throughout the mouth where receptors within each taste bud detect one of the five sensations of taste. They are sweet, sour, salt bitter and umami. That last one was discovered in 1908 by a Japanese scientist but not



accepted as a fifth “taste” long after his death. The word means “good taste” and has been described as “savory” or “meaty” and is present in certain foods. When the olfactory system is engaged, the gustatory system seems to take a step back. This optional step can be done by closing off the olfactory receptors located at the roof of the nose by simply holding your nose closed. Without any odorants reaching your nose, the only sensations are from the tongue’s taste bud receptors. Then as soon as you release your nose, the first exhale delivers the odorant molecules directly to the roof of the nose where the impact to the brain is felt often with a heightened impact, like ringing a loud bell that brings the olfactory system to attention and results in smiles.

5. **Ear Aerobics:** While not available in items such as soups or mashed potatoes, there are opportunities to “listen” to your food. Consider nuts, celery, carrots, etc. that cause a sound, often a crunch when crushed by your teeth. Consider also the power of slowing the brain down when crouton or nut or other crunchy item is in a salad. Or a crunchy dessert that has smooth textures as well as a raspberry or nut or dried fruit or coconut or maybe the feel of shredded carrot in carrot cake.

