

For some COVID victims, it's a tortured path regaining a sense of smell

Smell is instrumental in our perception of flavors, allowing us to differentiate strawberry from raspberry ice cream and warning us when food is spoiled. It keeps us safe — when we catch a whiff of smoke that signals fire or gas that signals a leak. It's tied to our memories, transporting us back to a person or place we love.

People dealing with smell dysfunction have scheduled medical appointments, joined support groups and spent months using smell kits to retrain their noses. Universities have launched studies on recovering smell after COVID-19, starting treatment trials using nasal rinses and essential oils.

The business of olfaction restoration is booming.

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It's not entirely clear what causes COVID-related anosmia (and, later, parosmia), although [scientists believe](#) the virus affects supporting cells that are crucial for the healthy function of olfactory neurons — which detect and transmit odorant information to the brain.

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"I just felt like nobody understood what I was going through. It's not like you break a leg and people understand that you can't walk," [COVID survivor Mariana] Castro-Salzman said. "I had to explain to them all the weird smells and, like, how depressing [it is] and how much anxiety you get from it."

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