What is Thermal Taste?

When the tongue is warmed or cooled a certain way some people experience a sensation of taste, such as sweet or salty. As this is due to stimulation from temperature and not food or drink it has been termed ‘phantom taste’. This interesting phenomenon was only discovered in 2000 and is still not well understood, although it is thought to be experienced by up to 50% of the population. Those who experience a phantom taste are termed ‘thermal tasters’ and those who do not are called ‘thermal non tasters’.

How is thermal taster status measured?

Taster status is determined using a specialist piece of equipment called a Peltier thermode. A probe is attached to the Peltier. This contains a small plate which is placed on the tongue to warm or cool it.

Software on the laptop controls the temperature of the thermode in a controlled way and on either a warming or cooling trial.

Some people detect a phantom taste when the tongue is either warmed OR cooled, but a true thermal taster is when they experience a phantom taste on both warming & cooling trials.

Research shows that thermal tasters are also more sensitive to other tastes too. Little is known about their behaviours, but it could impact on food choices and health.