

Can a Car Accident Cause Loss of Smell or Taste?

How Head Injuries Affect the Senses, and Why These Losses Matter in a Georgia Injury Claim

Loss of smell or taste after a Georgia car accident is easy to overlook at first. Broken bones and visible cuts get attention first. Weeks later, coffee may have no aroma and food may taste flat. A burning pan on the stove may go unnoticed.

Those changes can point to a head injury, even when the person never lost consciousness. They can also affect daily safety, work, and the simple pleasure of a meal. A [Georgia car accident claim](#) should account for them, but only if they're identified, tested, and documented.

Our Georgia car accident lawyers at [Gary Martin Hays, LLC](#) connect symptoms like these to the crash that caused them. We work with treating doctors to document a sensory loss. That way, it isn't dismissed as minor or unrelated. We also make sure its effect on work and home life is part of the claim.

Key Takeaways

- **Head Trauma Can Damage the Sense of Smell** – Frontal head injuries and skull fractures can injure the nerves and brain areas that process smell.
- **Many People Don't Notice Right Away** – Research shows a large share of people with smell loss after a brain injury are unaware of it.
- **Taste Loss Is Often Smell Loss** – Most people who think they've lost taste actually have a problem with smell, which drives flavor.
- **Testing Creates Objective Proof** – Standardized smell and taste tests can measure the loss, not just describe it.
- **The Loss Affects More Than Meals** – Smell warns of smoke, gas leaks, and spoiled food, so a loss can create real safety risks.

How a Car Accident Can Damage the Sense of Smell

Smell depends on delicate nerve fibers. They pass through a thin plate of bone at the base of the skull. In a crash, the brain can shift inside the skull and stretch or tear those fibers. The [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders \(NIDCD\)](#) warns of the risk. "Frontal head injury can permanently damage the sense of smell," the agency says.

Other crash injuries can play a role too. A blow to the forehead or the back of the head can bruise the front of the brain. That happens in [coup-contrecoup brain injuries](#). [Basilar skull fractures](#) near the smell pathways are another known cause. So are [facial injuries from a car accident](#), especially those involving the nose.

Why Loss of Taste Usually Starts With Smell

People often describe the problem as losing their sense of taste. The tongue detects only basic tastes, such as sweet, salty, sour, and bitter. Most of what people think of as flavor comes from

smell. The NIDCD notes that “most people who think they have a taste disorder actually have a problem with smell.”

That distinction matters in an injury claim. A record that says “loss of taste” without testing gives the insurer room to question it. Testing both senses helps doctors pinpoint the real problem. It also gives the claim a clearer medical foundation tied to the head injury.

These Symptoms Are Easy to Miss

A 2014 [systematic review](#) in *Frontiers in Neurology* looked at smell problems after traumatic brain injury. In two studies it covered, about 40% to 44% of people with measurable smell loss didn’t know it. People often blame a cold, allergies, or stress instead of the crash.

That delay can hurt a claim if the symptom first appears in the records months later. Telling the doctor about any change in smell or taste helps connect it to the accident. Smell loss can also signal a broader brain injury. It belongs with other [delayed brain injury symptoms after a car accident](#).

Tests and Records That Can Document a Sensory Loss

Insurers sometimes treat smell and taste loss as subjective complaints. Objective testing and imaging can answer that argument. The table below shows common tests and records doctors use. It also shows what each can add to a Georgia car accident claim, especially when an insurer questions whether the loss is real.

Test or Record	What It Can Show	Why It Matters in a Claim
Scratch-and-Sniff Smell Test	Whether a person can identify common odors	Turns a reported symptom into a measured score
Smell Threshold Testing	How strong an odor must be before it’s detected	Shows partial loss, not just total loss
Taste Testing	Response to sweet, salty, sour, and bitter solutions	Separates true taste loss from smell-related flavor loss
Brain MRI	Damage to the frontal lobes or smell centers of the brain	Links the loss to a physical injury
CT Scan	Skull or facial fractures near the smell pathways	Connects the symptom to crash-related trauma
Ear, Nose, and Throat Exam	Rules out sinus disease or other causes	Answers an insurer’s argument that something else is to blame

Does the Sense of Smell Come Back?

Some people recover part or all of their sense of smell over time. Others don’t. One study in the *Frontiers in Neurology* review tracked patients over time. Smell problems dropped from 22% at three months to 13.5% at one year. Another reported that people with post-traumatic smell loss “rarely regain normal olfactory ability.”

That uncertainty matters when a claim is settled. Settling before doctors know whether the loss is permanent can leave future harm uncompensated. A specialist's opinion on the likely recovery can show what the injured person may face in the years ahead. That opinion can carry real weight in negotiations.

How Smell and Taste Loss Affect Daily Life

The NIDCD describes smell as a warning system for "a gas leak, spoiled food, or a fire." Without it, a person may need smoke detectors in every room or help checking food before eating it. The agency also notes that in severe cases, loss of smell can lead to depression.

Some careers depend on these senses. Chefs, firefighters, nurses, and people who work around chemicals may struggle to do their jobs safely. Losing the enjoyment of food, a partner's perfume, or a favorite place is also real harm. Georgia law allows recovery for [loss of enjoyment of life in a car accident claim](#).

Why Insurers Push Back on These Claims

Adjusters may argue the loss came from a cold, aging, or a prior condition. They may point to a normal CT scan or a gap in treatment. Some suggest the person simply didn't notice the change until a lawyer got involved. Some use [missed concussion symptoms to deny TBI claims](#), and smell loss can draw the same treatment.

A prior condition doesn't end a claim either. Under Georgia's [eggshell skull rule](#), an at-fault driver takes the injured person as they are. If the crash worsened an existing problem, that worsening can still be part of the claim. Medical testing that shows the change can carry significant weight.

An Example of a Hidden Sensory Injury

For instance, a Duluth line cook is rear-ended on Pleasant Hill Road and hits her head on the window. The emergency room treats a headache and a cut. Two months later, she can't smell food burning on the grill. Her manager moves her to a lower-paying job.

A smell identification test might confirm significant loss, and an MRI might show a frontal lobe injury. Her doctor's notes could tie the symptom to the crash. Those records could support claims for lost wages and reduced earning capacity. They could also support the daily losses of living without a sense of smell.

A Lost Sense Is a Real Injury

Loss of smell or taste can change how a person works, eats, and stays safe at home. It also tends to be underreported, undertested, and undervalued by insurers. Reporting the change early and getting proper testing gives the injured person the strongest footing for a claim.

Noticed changes in smell or taste after a Georgia crash? [Request a free consultation](#) with our car accident team. With our No Fee Guarantee, you won't pay anything unless we win. We can help gather the medical proof your claim needs and pursue every loss the injury has caused.