Treating dysosmia, from saline to surgery

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Dysosmia is any change in smelling ability. Most often this is a loss, but there can also be a distortion of perceived smells. If this distortion is a perceived smell without an odorant nearby, it is a phantosmia. A distortion of an inhaled odorant is a parosmia. With all these conditions, olfactory testing can help predict the outcome. There is no known treatment for neural olfactory loss, although a course of oral steroids has recently been noted to have some positive effect. Phantosmias and parosmias are usually self limited, and many resolve spontaneously. If they persist, they can sometimes be stopped with saline nasal drops to obstruct the nasal passageways. Because some testing suggests that these distorted perceptions are neurally derived, several medications have had some success. If these treatments are not successful, and if the patient has major problems with the smell perception, then surgery to endoscopically remove the olfactory tissue can be considered. This operation is difficult, and is associated with CSF rhinorrhea in one third of cases.