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**Matric no: 18/
mhs02/097**

Course code: phs 212

Question

Elucidate the pathway involved in taste

Digestive enzymes in saliva begin to dissolve food into base chemicals that are washed over the papillae and detected as tastes by the taste buds. The tongue is covered with thousands of small bumps called papillae, which are visible to the naked eye. Within each papilla are hundreds of taste buds.

The tongue contains small bumps called papillae, within or near which taste buds are

situated. In the tongue's taste buds, the taste receptors receive sensory input via two important mechanisms – depolarization and neurotransmitter release. Intake of salty foods leads more sodium ions to enter the receptor, causing the said mechanisms. The same is true with intake of sour foods (hydrogen ions) and sweet foods (sugar molecules), both of which result to the closing of K^+ channels upon their entry.

From the axons of the taste receptors, the sensory information is transferred to the three taste pathways via the branches of cranial nerves VII, IX and X. The chorda tympani of CN VII (facial nerve) carries the taste sensory input from the tongue's anterior two-thirds. Then, the rest of the

taste sensations from the throat, palate and posterior tongue are transmitted by the branches of CN IX (glossopharyngeal nerve) and CN X (vagus nerve). From these cranial nerves, taste sensory input travels through the nerve fiber synapses to the solitary tract, the ventral posteromedial thalamic nuclei , and the thalamus. In these three locations, there are clustered neurons which respond to the same taste (sweet, sour, salty or bitter).The thalamus relays the information to the primary gustatory cortex located in the somatosensory cortex. The primary gustatory cortex is where the perception of a particular taste is processed.

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