Zinc Taste Test - How to Use Zinc Challenge

The zinc taste test, or Zinc Challenge, may not be appropriate for use on the first visit as it may literally leave a bad taste in the patient’s mouth. It is a valuable test, however, and should be done with everyone suspected of having low zinc levels.

To perform the test, put a few tablespoons of zinc status liquid into a cup. Ask the patient to drink from the cup and to hold it in his/her mouth until a definite taste develops, and then spit it out (upset stomach can occur from swallowing due to the sulfur in the product). This should take thirty seconds and responses are classified as follows:

1. No specific taste or other sensation is noticed.
2. No immediate taste is noticed, but after a few seconds a slight taste variously described as "dry," "mineral," "furry," or "sweet," develops.
3. A definite, though not strongly unpleasant, taste is noticed almost immediately and tends to intensify over time.
4. A strong and unpleasant taste is noted almost immediately.

What do these results tell us? 1 and 2 suggest severe zinc deficiency. 3 indicates a slightly low zinc level. A 4 is ideal and indicates adequate zinc status. Those who have eating disorders will invariably score low on this test. See below for suggested supplementation of zinc based on the patient’s Zinc Challenge results.

It is advisable to redo the test after two months of supplementation. Severe stress can alter zinc status very quickly so it is advisable to retest on a regular basis. This will show them that their zinc status has changed. Those who score low on this test should also be encouraged to do a Hair Mineral Analysis as a low zinc status often means low levels of other minerals. Do not assume that a zinc above normal range on a hair test means the person has too much zinc. Heavy metals such as cadmium can displace zinc. This Zinc Challenge test is a better indicator of zinc deficiency. Patients who take a very long time to improve may have copper toxicity or other heavy metals.

As should be obvious, do not tell the patient what the various responses are or what they mean until the test is over. This means not letting them read the bottle of Zinc Challenge, which discloses this information.

How to dose zinc supplementation as a result of this test:

Score of 1 - suggested dose 90 mg of zinc daily in divided doses  (3 Zinc Supreme)
Score of 2 - suggested dose 60 mg of zinc daily in divided doses  (2 Zinc Supreme)
Score of 3 - suggested dose 30 mg of zinc daily   (1 Zinc Supreme)
Score of 4 - no zinc supplementation necessary