

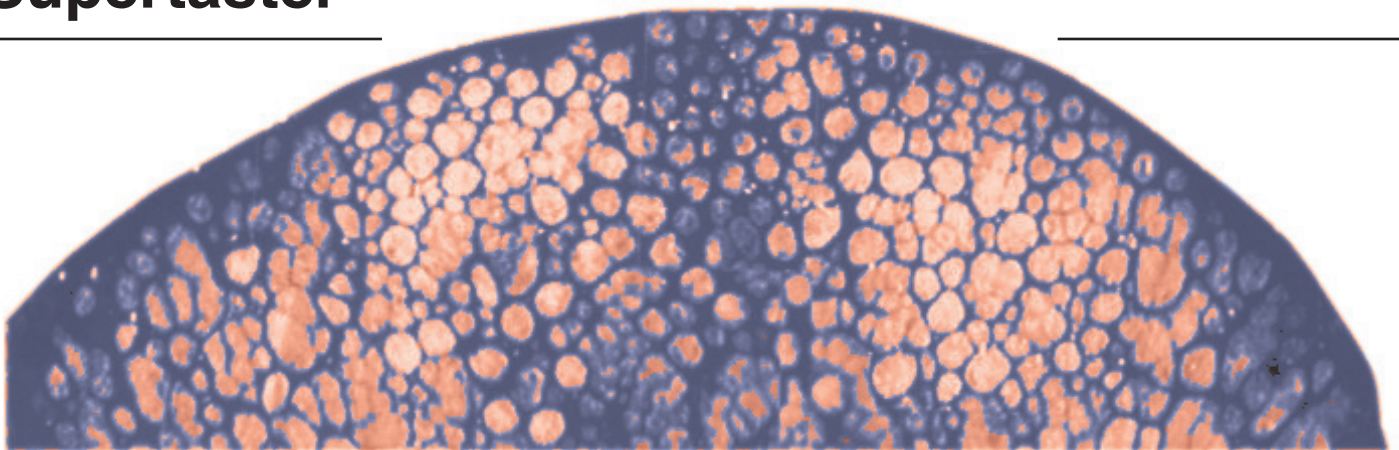
THE ANATOMY OF TASTE

When the tongue is stained with blue dye, the fungiform papillae, the structures, which contain the taste buds, do not stain; they appear as pink circles. With a magnifying glass and flashlight, they can be counted.

Based on the number of fungiform papillae (and therefore taste buds) we are born with, individuals can be divided into "nontasters", "medium tasters" and "supertasters." A quarter of all people tested are nontasters, half are medium tasters and a quarter are supertasters. Supertasters have the most taste buds and therefore live in more intense taste worlds. (e.g., the bitterness of saccharin is greatest to supertasters).

Not only do supertasters perceive the basic tastes (sweet, sour, salty, bitter) more intensely, but because a basket-like cluster of pain fibers surrounds each taste bud, supertasters are more sensitive to alcohol, heat, capsaicin (chili pepper) and piperine (black pepper). In addition, fungiform papillae are innervated by touch fibers. Thus supertasters perceive more intense sensations from fats and thickeners in foods.

Supertaster



Nontaster

