Development of flavor perception and preference in human infants and children

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The Monell Chemical Senses Center is the world’s first basic and clinical research organization devoted exclusively to fundamental studies of the mechanisms and functions of the senses of taste, smell and chemical irritation. During its 45 year history one of the focuses of research has been on the early development of these flavor senses. In this presentation I will first describe the Monell Center and then provide an overview of our work on early human developmental factors influencing the chemical senses. The guiding vision for this work is that while some hedonic responses to flavors are innately determined, early experiences, including those occurring even before birth, serve to establish later flavor preferences and aversions. There are sensitive periods for development of flavor and food habits and a better understanding of these sensitive periods can inform public policy and benefit human nutrition and health.