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## HealthWatch Report: Cold Reality

### ***Patients Say They Lost Sense Of Smell***

POSTED: 7:43 am CDT May 19, 2004

UPDATED: 9:23 am CDT May 19, 2004

**CHICAGO** -- A stuffy nose can wash out the smell of flowers and deaden the taste of food, but for Joe Doubek and Gail Newman, the sense of smell never came back.



"It's horrible," Newman said. "I have a really bad metallic taste [in my mouth]."

 **Video:** [Cold Reality](#)

NBC5 HealthWatch reporter [Nesita Kwan](#) reported on Tuesday that Newman has lost much of her ability to taste food and can't stop to smell the roses in her front yard. Newman said the problem began five months ago, after taking a Zicam zinc nasal spray for her cold.

For Doubek, it's been even longer -- four years since taking Zicam.

"If my memory serves me correctly, my cold left but my sense of smell never came back," Doubek said.

Chicago smell and taste specialist Dr. Alan Hirsch said he's seen about 50 patients like Doubek.

"They'd spray the Zicam in, they'd develop a burning sensation or irritation, and immediately lose their sense of smell," he said.

Hirsch said medical reports warned about zinc and the loss of smell, called anosmia, 66 years ago, Kwan reported. That's when doctors were trying a zinc sulfate spray to prevent polio.

But Zicam officials told Kwan that Zicam's active ingredient is zinc gluconate, which they said is "significantly different from (the) zinc sulfate" used in the polio studies. They also said a "loss of smell due to intranasal zinc gluconate had never been reported in any clinical research."

As a homeopathic product, Zicam did not have to go through the kinds of safety studies that regular medicines go through to get FDA approval, Kwan reported. But Zicam's manufacturer told Kwan that it is performing such studies now. Neither Doubek nor Newman have filed lawsuits against the company, but Zicam officials said 10 other individuals have.

Dr. Arthur Rosner -- who is not associated with Zicam -- said other things, like sinus infections, might be to blame for the loss of smell.

"If you have a chronic infection in this area, it's one of the reasons who you can lose smell," Rosner said.

But for patients like Newman, there's only one concern -- regaining the ability to smell and taste normally.

"I still eat the same things -- I have to eat," she said. "But then afterwards, the metallic taste comes back into my mouth. It's terrible."

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