



PRESS RELEASE

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## **AbScent and the University of Reading launch first ever research project to discover the causes of smell distortion**

The UK smell loss charity, AbScent, has launched a unique research project to discover the causes of smell distortion, also known as parosmia, with the University of Reading. It's the first study of its kind into the condition.

It's estimated that up to 5% of the UK population (over 3 million people)<sup>1</sup> could be suffering from some form of smell loss, and this can have a profound effect on their quality of life. Parosmia often arises during the recovery phase of smell loss after a virus or head injury. As recovery begins, smell signals are not correctly interpreted by the brain. When this happens, smells are not the way they are expected. For example, coffee can smell like burning sewage. This adds further to the loss in quality of life suffered by anyone with an impaired sense of smell.

This unique research project is being carried out at Reading University's Flavour Centre, which is internationally renowned for its work into flavour analysis. Dr Jane Parker is founder of the Flavour Centre and leader of the project.

*She says: "There is a strong connection between our sense of smell and our ability to taste flavour in food and drink. Without our sense of smell flavours are limited to salty, sweet, sour, bitter and savoury. By using the analytical equipment we have at the Flavour Centre we can reduce smells to individual molecules and test how people respond to each one. We hope that this will tell us more about which molecules distort smells for sufferers."*

The researchers are currently recruiting volunteers who suffer from parosmia, and those who have a normal functioning sense of smell. The volunteers are asked to give a day of their time to spend at The Flavour Centre. There they will be tested for threshold, discrimination and identification using the Burghart "Sniffin' Sticks" test. A full history will also be taken. They will be asked to smell a stream of warm, moistened air for between two and four 15 minute periods and signal when they perceive smells that are distorted.

Chrissi Kelly, Founder of AbScent, who lost her sense of smell in 2012 says: *"Our sense of smell is a complex partnership between our nose and our brain. The analysis carried out with Reading University*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6317880/>

*will tell us more about what lies behind these distortions and signpost new ways of helping sufferers adapt.”*

*“Losing your sense of smell can be devastating and have profound consequences for quality of life. It is closely linked to how we connect to the world around us; the emotions we feel and the relationships we have, and is also tied to our most cherished memories. Smell is such an important part of how we experience life and it is vital that we do more to help sufferers of smell loss.”*

An important aspect of AbScent’s work is to provide instruction in smell training. It has been shown to amplify recovery for people with smell loss or distortion, where there is damage to the olfactory nerve. It helps to stimulate this nerve and encourage it to regenerate. The original protocol uses the essential oils of rose, lemon, clove and eucalyptus which are smelled twice a day for a minimum of four months. Volunteers for the research project will spend an hour with AbScent to discuss how smell training works and give them advice and support to try it themselves.

The research project started in October and will run until May 2020. Volunteers are still welcome to apply and should contact [j.k.parker@reading.ac.uk](mailto:j.k.parker@reading.ac.uk).

**ENDS**

**For interviews and enquiries please contact:**

Caroline Sharp  
Sharp Content Communications  
[caroline@sharp-content.co.uk](mailto:caroline@sharp-content.co.uk) / 07979 756440

**Notes to editors:**

- [AbScent](#) is a UK registered charity (No. 1183468) started in 2018 to help people who are experiencing the distressing effects of smell loss.
- The Sense of Smell Project will be overseen by an international expert on smell disorders, [Prof. Thomas Hummel](#) of the University of Dresden in Germany and data analyst in olfactory studies [Robert Pellegrino](#), of the University of Tennessee.
- For more information on the latest available research into smell loss visit: <https://abscent.org/learn-us/latest-research-research>
- AbScent’s vision is a world where smell loss is recognised by the general population as a challenging condition, where patients are fully supported by the medical community and their care circles, and where healing strategies are explored, funded and made available to the world-wide population.
- The effects of smell loss can be complex and therefore support is necessary from several areas to suit the biopsychosocial needs of the community.
- [Smell Training](#) is a supportive technique for people who have suffered smell loss and has been demonstrated in over a dozen scientific studies to be useful in improving the sense of smell. It can be of benefit for people who have lost their sense of smell after a virus or injury.

- [Smell training](#) is not a cure, but a way of amplifying natural recovery. Every time it is done it stimulates the olfactory nerves and this encourages regeneration. It can be likened to physiotherapy for the nose. Smell training builds new neural pathways and encourages brain plasticity.
- AbScent consists of Founder Chrissi Kelly, Trustees Miriam Block and ENT Simon Gane of the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital in London, and an [advisory board](#) detailed on the website. [www.abscent.org](http://www.abscent.org)