

Linda Bartoshuk

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University of Florida

William James Fellow Award

Linda Bartoshuk is an international leader in taste research and a pioneer in developing new methods of psychophysical scaling. Her brilliant work has focused on the genetic variations in taste perception, and how that perception affects overall health.

Bartoshuk was the first scientist to discover that burning mouth syndrome, a condition experienced mainly by postmenopausal women, is the result of damage to the taste buds at the front of the tongue and not, as was once commonly believed, a psychosomatic condition.

But perhaps she is best known for the discovery of supertasters — individuals who have more taste buds than most people. Because they perceive tastes so intensely, supertasters tend to avoid a number of foods, such as bitter vegetables, which can affect health.

Bartoshuk has also been on the front lines of uncovering contributors to weight gain. She has found, for example, that people with a history of ear infections are more likely to be overweight. She hypothesizes that this could be due to nerve damage that can stop the nerve from inhibiting tactile sensations, making fats all the more rich and creamy. A lifetime of enjoying fats intensely could change dietary choices and, in turn, weight.

She was a major force in making inroads for women in science, and persevered through sexism in the scientific community during the early years of her career.

Bartoshuk's courage, gifts, and accomplishments have greatly illuminated our understanding of dietary choices and health risks.