

Does presbygeusia really exist?

An updated narrative review

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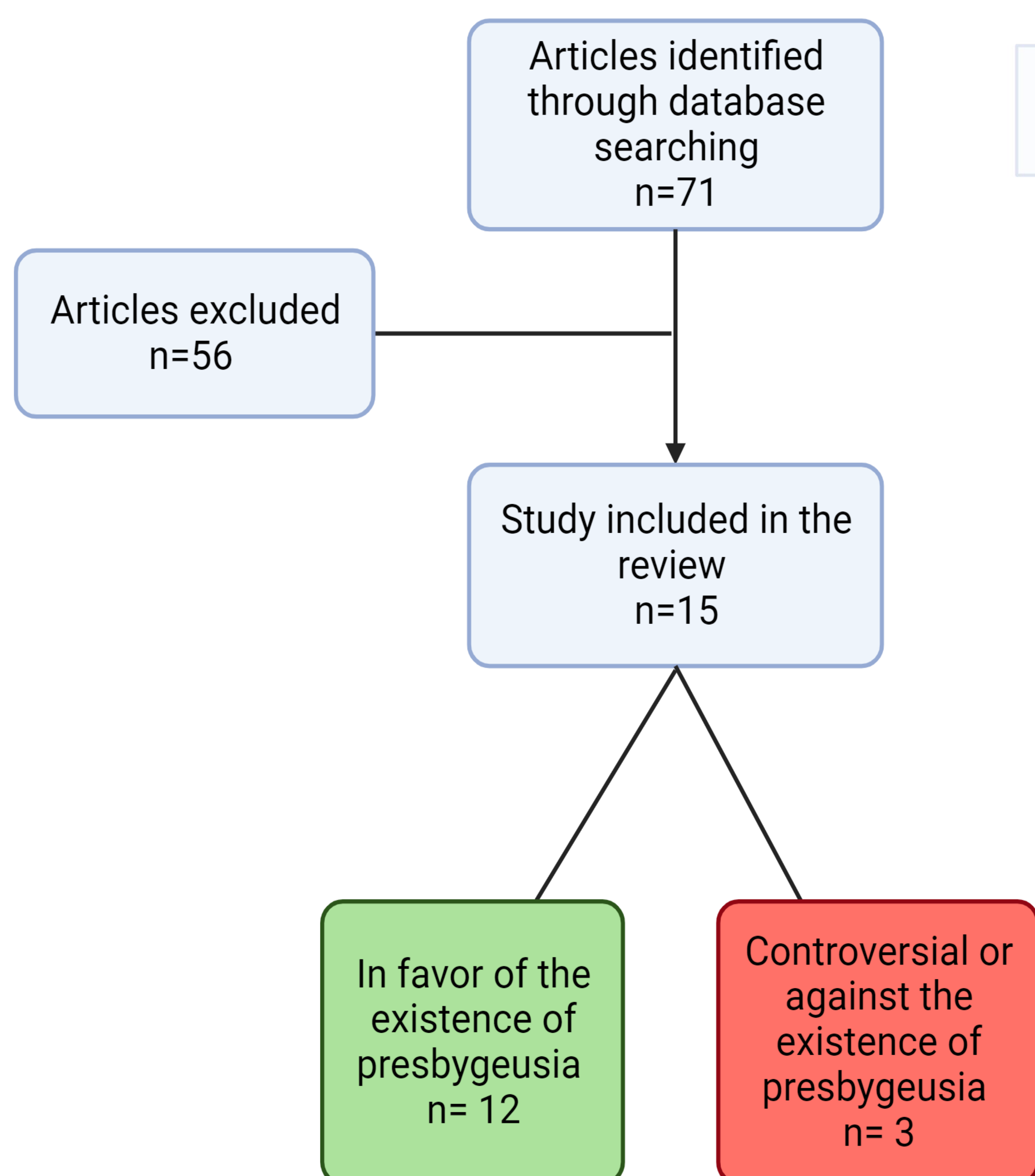
Background

Aging is a natural process resulting in a gradual decline in physical and cognitive functions, including taste perception. Many physiological age-related conditions might lead to this impairment, such as changes in taste buds, decreased saliva production, alterations in sensory nerves. However, not all authors recognize an impaired taste perception as a natural aging phenomenon, but rather define it as a pathological consequence of age-related chronic diseases, impaired oral health, and polytherapy. We performed a critical review of literature to disentangle the effects of age from those of age-related diseases.

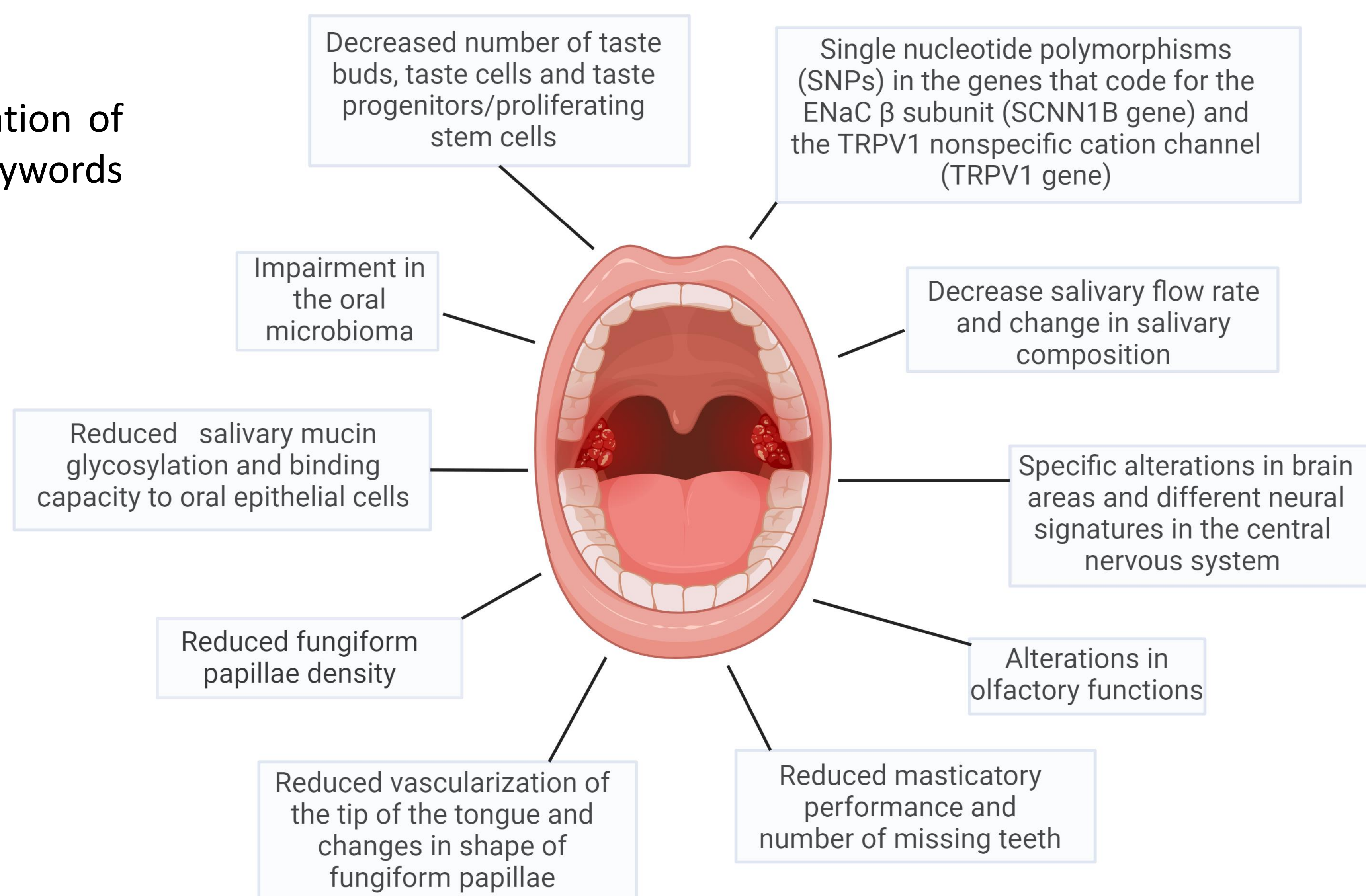
Methods

Literature database were queried by a combination of database-specific subject headings and keywords related to “ageing” and “taste alterations”.

Evidence pros or cons the existence of presbygeusia



Mechanisms potentially implicated in presbygeusia



Results

Taste alterations were more common in older adults with a prevalence between 10% and 30%, being sour and bitter the most compromised tastes. A few studies explicitly assessed healthy old individuals without comorbidities, drug, or conditions impacting on taste perception.

Overall, literature agreed in finding a reduction in taste perception in healthy elderly people. However, most studies were small, had methodological limitations and employed different methods of taste assessment. Furthermore, the frequently used solutions of tastants were rather limited for the ‘real-life’ perception of taste in complex food products. Finally, taste perception is only one of the factors impacting on the food choices of the elderly and, probably, not the most important.

Conclusion

Presbygeusia exists and is the physiological decline in taste perception occurring in the elderly. However, its true prevalence and clinical relevance is currently uncertain.

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