

Nutrition and dietetics

Speech and language therapy

Soft and bite-sized food

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet is for people who need to eat soft and bite-sized food. It explains what soft and bite-sized foods are to help you choose the right food when you are in hospital and at home. If you have any questions, please speak to your dietitian or speech and language therapist.

What is soft and bite-sized food?

Soft and bite-sized food is soft, tender and moist. This type of food should be easily mashed or broken down into smaller pieces with a fork, spoon or chopsticks to make it easier to chew before swallowing. Because the pieces can be mashed or broken down easily, you should not need to bite off a piece of food before chewing.

Soft and bite-sized food has some variation in texture, but there should be no hard lumps and you should not need a knife to cut it. Food should be moist but there should not be any thin liquid leaking or dripping from the food.

Why do I need this type of food?

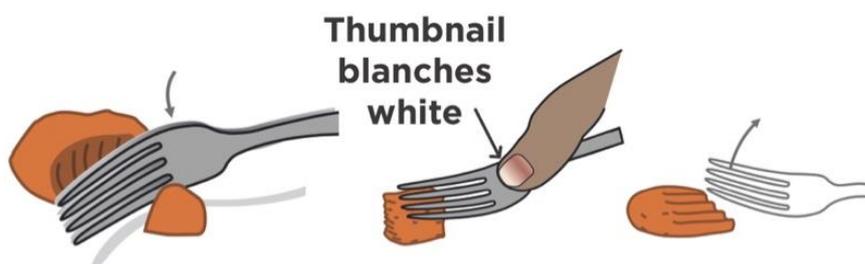
You may have problems eating, chewing or swallowing (dysphagia), have missing teeth or poorly fitting dentures, or pain in the mouth. These conditions can increase the risk of choking or food going down the wrong way and into the airway (aspiration) in some people. Soft and bite-sized food is recommended if you are not able to bite off pieces of food safely but are still able to chew food into smaller pieces that are safe to swallow.

How small should the pieces of food be?

The size of the pieces should be about 1.5cm x 1.5cm to reduce the risk of choking. This is about the width of a dinner fork or your thumb nail.

Most everyday foods can be made soft and bite-sized by cooking them differently, so you can still eat many of the foods you enjoy with a change to the consistency. For example, most meat, fish, fruit and vegetables can be made soft enough to cut or mash with a fork or spoon when cooked for longer.

The best way to test if your food is soft enough is by using the **fork pressure test**. Use the side of a fork to break the food into a smaller piece the same size as the width of a fork or your thumb nail. Then press down on the food with the fork until your thumb nail turns white. Lift the fork away and check the food is squashed completely and does not return to its original shape.



Source: The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative 2016
@<https://iddsi.org/framework/>

Examples of soft and bite-sized food

Meat and fish

- cooked soft and tender enough to break into pieces about the width of a fork

Vegetables

- boiled vegetables that are soft and tender and can be easily broken down to the correct size after cooking

Casseroles, stews, curry, soup

- meat, fish and vegetables should be as described above
- the liquid portion must be thick with no hard lumps

Fruit

- soft enough to break down or mash with a fork, spoon or chopsticks and with the excess liquid drained away
- the fibrous (stringy) parts of fruit are not suitable

Cereal

- pieces that are about the size of your thumb nail and fully softened in milk or yoghurt with the excess liquid drained away

Rice, pasta and dhal

- white rice and pasta (small shapes) only, which should be cooked until soft and served with a thick, smooth sauce to moisten it and hold it together
- rice should not be sticky or glutinous (gluey) or separate into individual grains

Are there any foods to avoid?

The following types of food are not suitable for a soft and bite-sized diet because they need more chewing and increase the risk of choking:

- **mixed thin and thick food** such as soup with pieces of food, or cereal with milk which is not fully absorbed
- **hard, crunchy or dry food** such as nuts, raw or stir fried vegetables, pips and seeds, dry cakes, dry cereal
- **tough or fibrous food** such as steak, pineapple
- **food with skins, husks, or outer shells** such as peas, beans, grapes, sweetcorn, tomatoes, skin on meat, sausages
- **crispy food** such as crackling, crispy bacon, dry cornflakes
- **crumbly food** including dry cake and biscuits
- **chewy food** such as sweets, marshmallows, toffees, chewing gum, dried fruits, sticky food
- **sticky or gummy food** such as peanut butter, overcooked porridge, gelatin, sticky rice cakes
- **sharp or spiky food** such as crisps
- **stringy food** such as green beans or rhubarb
- **floppy food** such as lettuce, cucumber, uncooked spinach leaves
- **food that forms a crust during cooking or heating** such as a cheese topping
- **juicy food** where liquid separates from the food in the mouth, such as ice cream, jelly made with gelatin, watermelon and apple
- **bread**, unless your speech and language therapist has advised this is safe for you

What if I am also having thickened liquids?

If you are having thickened liquids, make sure that 'liquid food' such as soups, casseroles, curries, dhals, gravy or sauces are the same level of thickness as your drinks.

You should not have ice cream, sorbet, or jelly made with gelatin if you need thickened liquids unless your speech and language therapist has advised this is safe for you. This is because they melt quickly in the mouth and become a thin liquid, which may go down the wrong way when you swallow (aspiration). Some types of jelly are not made with gelatin, and these may be suitable for you. If you are unsure, ask your speech and language therapist for advice.

Will I always need soft and bite-sized food?

This depends on the cause of your swallowing problem. Some medical conditions cause problems with eating and drinking for a short time but get better quickly. Other conditions do not improve quickly and you may need to have soft and bite-sized food for longer. The speech and language therapist will work closely with you, your doctor and dietitian to decide the best way to manage your swallowing.

You should speak to your speech and language therapist or doctor if you notice any changes in your swallowing, or if you are having difficulty eating soft and bite-sized food. We may recommend a change to your food texture or drink thickness. Your speech and language therapist and dietitian will be able to help you choose the right food for you.

Helpful tips for eating enough

Eat little and often

If you find it difficult to eat your usual amount of food or you get full-up quickly, try eating smaller amounts of food more frequently during the day.

This may mean eating three small meals a day and having snacks between meals and at bedtime. You may also prefer to eat part of your meal and keep your pudding for later.

Eat a variety of food

Eating a variety of foods will provide you with all the nourishment you need and will keep your daily diet interesting and enjoyable. You may need to take a vitamin and mineral supplement if you are not able to include a wide variety of food in your diet. If you are concerned, ask your dietitian for advice.

Increase the energy and protein in your food

Changing the texture of your food to soft and bite-sized may mean it is more difficult to get all the energy and protein your body needs. You can increase the energy and protein in your meals by adding extra fats and full fat dairy products, for example:

- adding butter, margarine or vegetable oils to food
- adding milk or cream to cereals, drinks, soups and puddings

A simple way to add energy and protein is by using fortified milk. To make this, mix four tablespoons (two ounces) of milk powder with a little milk to form a paste. Then stir in a pint of full cream milk. Keep it in the fridge and use it in your breakfasts and to make custards and desserts. You can also use it to make hot and cold milk drinks such as Ovaltine[®], Horlicks[®], hot chocolate, milky coffee and milkshakes.

Make your meal look and taste attractive

When presenting your food in a bowl or on a plate, try to keep different parts separate so that it looks more appetising and you can see what you are eating. Choose foods that you enjoy eating.

You can add extra flavour to meals by adding herbs and spices, lemon juice, tomato puree, a small amount of grated, strong cheese, or meat, vegetable or yeast extracts such as Marmite[®] or Bovril[®]. You can also try adding sauces such as mint, soya, Worcester, balsamic vinegar, anchovy, or chocolate or coffee liqueurs.

If food seems too dry or sticky, try adding extra liquid such as:

- milk or other dairy products such as cream or yoghurts
- gravy or other sauces
- fat such as melted butter or oil
- ice cream, custard or fromage frais

Ideas for mealtimes

Breakfast ideas

- porridge or Ready Brek[®] made with the milk fully absorbed
- cereals softened in milk such as Weetabix[®], All-Bran[®], Corn Flakes[™] or Bran Flakes with the milk fully absorbed or excess liquid drained away
- full fat yoghurt and fromage frais
- a small glass of orange, apple or pineapple juice
- boiled, poached or scrambled eggs
- soft mashed banana, pear or ripe peaches or mango
- stewed or soft tinned fruit such as apple or strawberries
- add cream, sugar, honey, yoghurt, crème fraiche or a nutritional supplement for extra calories

Soups, casseroles, stew and curries

- creamy meat, fish or vegetable soup, or supplement soups such as Build Up[®] or Complan[®]
- dhal
- thick stews or curries with small pieces of soft meat
- add butter, margarine, oil, cream, grated cheese or a savoury nutritional supplement for extra calories

Fish, meat and poultry

- tender chicken or meat no bigger than the size of your thumbnail served with a gravy, tomato, cream, cheese or white sauce, or a savoury nutritional supplement
- cottage pie, shepherd's pie, bolognese sauce, chilli con carne
- fish mixed with melted butter, white or parsley sauce, boil in the bag fish, fisherman's pie, homemade fish cakes made with tinned fish with potato mashed together
- tuna mayonnaise

Vegetarian options

- pease pudding, mushy peas, thick dhal, lentil puree, pureed bean dips
- thick vegetable and lentil casserole
- soft cooked risotto and other rice dishes served with a thick sauce
- omelette, eggs in cheese sauce, egg mayonnaise
- soft cooked cauliflower cheese
- quiche or flan with the crust removed
- cream cheese, curd and cottage cheese
- mashed potato, sweet potato or Jerusalem artichoke with butter, cream, cheese or oil

Vegetables

- combinations of soft, mashed vegetables such as carrots and swede, pumpkin with turnips, Jerusalem artichokes, celeriac and cauliflower

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- soft cooked or mashed marrow, courgette, squash, sweet potato
 - add butter, margarine, oil, cream, grated cheese, full fat yoghurt or a mashed boiled egg for extra calories

Desserts

- milk pudding, egg custard, rice pudding, panna cotta, semolina, lemon curd
- fruit compote, baked apple, stewed fruit, trifle, some soft tinned fruits in syrup
- yoghurt, fruit fool, mousse, instant whip, jelly made with evaporated milk
- crème caramel with excess liquid drained away
- jam roly poly, soft sponge cake, sponge pudding
- cheesecake (remove the crumb base)
- add custard, ice cream, cream, evaporated milk, thick and creamy yoghurts or fromage frais to puddings for extra calories

Snacks

- custard, rice pudding, yoghurt, mousse, trifle
- soft sponge fingers soaked in liquid, moist sponge cake
- houmous, tahini, avocado, smooth peanut butter, vegetable, meat or fish paté

Your weight

Your weight on discharge is: _____

If you are finding it difficult to eat well following the advice in this leaflet, and/or you are still losing weight, you can get help and advice from your GP or dietitian. **Please weigh yourself once a week and contact your dietitian if your weight falls below:**

Where can I buy ready-made meals that are soft and bite-sized?

You can buy food which is soft and bite-sized from the supermarket. Alternatively, some companies make ready-made meals which are soft and bite-sized and can be delivered to your home. When ordering, make sure to ask for **Level 6 – Soft and bite-sized**.

Wiltshire Farm Foods

Telephone: 0800 066 3549

www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com/ready-meals/extra-tender

Oakhouse foods

Telephone: 0333 370 6700

www.oakhousefoods.co.uk/specialist-nutrition/fork-mashable.html

Hermolis

A range of kosher meals can be ordered via telephone or email.

Telephone: 0191 456 0456

E-mail: sales@hermolis.com

Punjab Kitchens

A range of halal meals can be ordered online or via telephone.

Telephone: 0191 456 0456

<https://punjabkitchen.co.uk/texture-modified-meals/>

How do I contact my dietitian and speech and language therapist?

Hammersmith Hospital

Dietitian 020 3313 3048

Speech and language therapist 020 3313 3076

Charing Cross Hospital

Dietitian 020 3311 1445

Speech and language therapist 020 3311 1764

St Mary's Hospital

Dietitian 020 3312 6398

Speech and language therapist 020 3312 6101

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk