



Chewing and swallowing problems

This information is a guide to help you deal with your chewing and swallowing problems until you can talk to your doctor. It is not intended to replace medical advice.

Some chemotherapy drugs and radiotherapy can make your mouth and throat sore. This may cause chewing and swallowing to become more difficult. If this happens and solid food become difficult to swallow you may need to change its consistency or texture, by having a soft or blended diet.

See table overleaf.

Your nutritional needs

You still need to ensure that your diet is varied and appealing and contains enough energy, protein and vitamins for you. This information will give you some ideas to help you cope during this part of your treatment.

Some general tips

If your appetite is reduced and you are taking soft or blended foods, it is important to:

- eat little and often, i.e. small snacks/nourishing drinks between meals
- choose high energy foods e.g. full fat milk/yogurts, custards
- 'fortify' your food and drink by increasing the energy and protein content (see overleaf)
- include some meat, fish, cheese, eggs or pulses each day
- add sauces and gravies, custard and cream to foods when it is possible
- ensure all foods are chewed well before they are swallowed
- if chewing is difficult, chop foods finely and/or blend them
- try cold foods and drinks as they do not have such a strong smell and may be soothing
- try a fizzy drink to help freshen your mouth
- rinse your mouth out with water or mouthwash regularly
- crushed ice in a drink is refreshing if your mouth feels dry
- if you are using any painkillers, take them around 20 minutes before eating so you are as comfortable as possible

Dietary supplements

If chewing/swallowing becomes so difficult that you are unable to eat good amounts of a soft moist diet you may lose weight. If this happens you should ask to see a dietitian. You may require supplements.

What foods should I avoid?

If you have a sore mouth, you should avoid:

- acidic/citrus fruits such as oranges, lemons, grapefruits and their juices
- bitter and sharp tasting foods such as tomatoes or tomato sauce and vinegar
- spicy foods
- very dry, crumbly foods such as crisps, dry toast and nuts as these are more difficult to eat

Can I have ready-made soft meals?

The chart overleaf shows how you can fortify your meals.

It is common to have little time or energy to cook and prepare your own meals. Ready to eat meals are easy and can be nutritious. You can use tinned foods, oven or microwave meals.

Choosing soft, easily chewable foods and those which require less effort to eat will be best.

Some ideas include: fish pie, stew, pasta with lots of sauce, cottage/shepherds pie, root vegetables or mashed potatoes with gravy.

If you would like further information, please ask at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre.

The dietitian will be happy to help you with your personal eating plan and give you some ideas for healthy menus, so please ask.

How can I fortify my meals?

To 'fortify' food means adding more calories by increasing the energy and protein content. This may seem like a strange thing to do when we are always being told to reduce the fat and sugar content of our food. But remember, you are trying to add calories to your diet at this time, because you are not eating enough to give your body the energy it needs.

Ingredients which can be used to 'fortify' your meals include milk, milk powder, cream, butter, margarine, cheese, sugar and glucose.

	Soft food suggestion	Ways to fortify
Milk	milkshakes milky hot chocolate custard Complan or Build up	Add 4 heaped tablespoons of milk powder to 1 pint of milk in order to make fortified milk. Or add 1 small tin of evaporated milk to 1 pint of milk.
Cheese	cheese soufflé/macaroni cheese finely grated cheese can be added to soup or vegetables	Add extra cheese or cream.
Eggs	scrambled egg/poached egg fluffy omelette crème caramel/egg custards	Add cheese or mayonnaise to savoury dishes. Add cream and milk to sweet dishes.
Fruit and puddings	fruit juices, stewed or tinned fruit fruit fools, whips, jelly fruit yoghurt and soft fruits baked apple, chopped banana milk puddings e.g. rice, tapioca, semolina mousses, jelly, ice cream, blancmange sponge puddings with cream or custard bread and butter pudding	Add cream, custard or evaporated milk. Add honey, seedless jams or syrup. Glucose is less sweet than sugar and therefore more can be added to food and drinks.
Soup	homemade or condensed and ready made soups	Add cream or dilute with milk rather than water. Add finely grated cheese.
Meat	stews, casseroles shepherd's pie, cottage pie lasagne/pasta with bolognese sauce	Add extra gravy or sauces.
Fish	poached/flaked fish fisherman's pie (fish and potato pie) flaked fish such as tuna or salmon fish pate/salmon mousse	Add cheese or mayonnaise.
Vegetables	mashed potato, soft baked potato, sweet potato mashed carrot/swede/cauliflower creamed spinach baked marrow/aubergine	Add cream, grated cheese, mayonnaise or butter.

Please ask your speech and language therapist or dietitian for more information about other soft/moist diet suggestions. We hope this fact sheet will help you during this part of your treatment. However, if anything is unclear, the dietitian will be pleased to advise you.

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