

# Soft and Bite-Sized Foods and Thickened Liquids for People with Dysphagia

## Information for patients and families

Read this booklet to learn about:

- Dysphagia (swallowing difficulties)
- How to prepare soft and bite-sized foods
- How to prepare and buy thickened liquids
- What foods to choose and avoid
- A sample daily menu

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Clinician:</b>	
<b>Contact:</b>	



## **Dysphagia**

Dysphagia is the medical word for problems with chewing and swallowing.

Signs of dysphagia are:

- coughing or choking when eating or drinking
- feeling like food is stuck in your throat
- holding food in your mouth before swallowing and without swallowing
- a gurgly voice after eating
- excessive throat clearing while eating or drinking

Dysphagia can be serious. If you cannot swallow properly:

- Food and drink may go into your lungs. This can cause problems with breathing or infection.
- You may not be able to eat enough of the right foods to stay healthy and maintain your weight.

Your health conditions and swallowing needs may change. Your enjoyment of eating and drinking may also change.

We understand that food not only improves your nutrition and health but is also an important part of your sense of self, community and well-being.

This booklet helps you eat as safely as possible. You may have other concerns. Your health care team will work with you and help you with your unique dysphagia-related needs.

## How to manage dysphagia

Your health care team recommends that you follow a **soft and bite-sized, and thickened liquid diet** for dysphagia. This booklet tells you how to do this. You will learn how to buy and prepare soft and bite-sized and thickened liquids to make swallowing easier and safer.

These tips can also help you to manage dysphagia:

- Have your meal in a quiet place.
- Take your time when eating and drinking.
- Reduce distractions. For example, turn off the TV when eating and drinking.
- Sit upright during mealtimes. Remain upright for at least 30 minutes after.
- Do not talk while chewing or swallowing.
- Swallow one mouthful before taking the next.

Please talk to your health care team about options for swallowing pills.

## Soft and bite-sized foods

Soft and bite-sized foods are soft, tender and moist. No liquid leaks or drips from the food.

### How to check that food is soft and bite-sized

Food that is soft and bite-sized:

- Can be mashed or broken down with pressure from a fork
- Can be cut without a knife
- Should not have liquid leaking or dripping from it
- Can be eaten using a fork, spoon or chopsticks
- Is no bigger than 1.5 centimetres by 1.5 centimetres (cm) in size



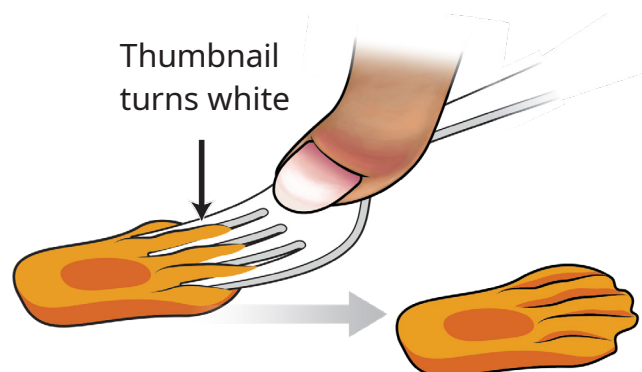
An example of 1.5 cm X 1.5 cm

### Helpful Tips!

Press food with fork prongs to check if food pieces are soft enough

Press into the food with a fork until your thumbnail turns white.

After lifting the fork, check that the food is completely squashed and does not go back to its original shape. If yes, it is soft enough.



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## **Preparing soft and bite-sized foods**

### **Eating out**

Try calling ahead if you plan to eat out. The restaurant may be able to accommodate your needs and choose the right texture of food for you. Try checking restaurant menus online before going out to eat. You can also prepare for social gatherings by eating beforehand or bringing homemade foods that you know are safe for you to eat.

### **Preparing soft and bite-sized foods at home**

It can be hard for restaurants to make foods that are safe for people with chewing and swallowing difficulties. You may need to rely mostly on homemade foods.

You can prepare soft and bite-sized foods by cooking foods tender and using a knife to cut the food into bite sizes.

#### **1. Cook foods until tender**

- Prepare soft and well-cooked foods from the list on page 12.
- Use pressure with a fork to check if meats are tender enough.
- Tender meats should be easily cut through with little difficulty when using a fork and knife.
- You can make foods more tender by adding sauces during or after cooking. When needed, add moisture with the foods in the table below.

## How to add moisture to foods

Add moisture to foods by adding:

- gravy
- sauce like tomato sauce or a cream sauce
- butter or margarine
- sour cream
- yogurt
- mayonnaise



Keep low sodium instant gravy mix in your pantry for an easy way to add moisture to foods.

## 2. Use a knife to cut the food into bite sizes

- Cut food into small pieces with a knife so that they are no bigger than 1.5 centimetres by 1.5 centimetres. This is roughly the size of your thumbnail.

## Minced foods

Minced foods are also safe for people who need soft and bite-sized foods. Minced foods only need a little bit of chewing. They are soft, moist and can be broken down with the tongue.

These foods include:

- minced or mashed cooked vegetables (such as squash, green beans or broccoli)
- cooked cereals (such as oatmeal, cream of wheat or oat bran)
- minced and moistened soft fish without bones
- cottage cheese
- minced or mashed canned fruits, drained (such as peaches)

You can mince most foods in several ways:

- Mash soft or well-cooked foods.
- Use a knife to cut food across into small pieces so that they are no wider than 4 millimetres in width.
- Place food in a food processor and blend until smooth.

### **Remove all liquid that might be released from food.**



Some foods may have liquid that separates from the solids. Other foods like fruits and vegetables can release liquid when they are being cut with the side of a fork or spoon. Strain these foods with a fine mesh strainer or blot away extra moisture with a paper towel.

## Thickened liquids

Your health care team will check 1 box below to show you how thick your liquids should be.

Mildly thick

Moderately thick

Extremely thick

## Thickening liquids at home

You can thicken liquids at home with thickening powders or gels. You can buy these products at your local pharmacies and some online stores.

Some examples are:

- Nestle Resource® ThickenUp® Clear
- Hormel Thick & Easy®
- Simply Thick® Instant Food Thickener

**Note:** This is not a complete list. Each product is different. Follow the instructions on the package.

**You will need to thicken all the liquids you drink.  
These include:**

- water
- milk
- tea
- coffee
- nutrition supplements
- juice
- soup



**Important:** Make sure that thickened liquids remain thick at room temperature. Ice cream, ice cubes, sherbet, Jell-o and Popsicles melt at room temperature.

**These foods are not safe to eat or drink.**





**Helpful  
Tips!**

- You may need to use a blender to remove lumps of thickener.
- Some liquids can take up to 20 minutes to become thick.



**Check the thickness of the liquid before drinking.**

You can use the “flow test” on the next page to do this.

A second best option is to compare the homemade thickened liquid to a pre-made product of the same thickness. Stir the liquid with a spoon. Tilt the spoon and watch the liquid flow off the spoon.

## **Buying thickened liquids**

You can buy liquids that are already thickened, such as:

- Thick and Easy® Clear Thickened Water
- Thick and Easy® Thickened Fruit Juices
- Thick and Easy® Thickened Water
- Thick-it® Thickened Fruit Juices
- Thick-it® Thickened Coffee and Tea
- Thick-it® Thickened Water

Thickened liquids are sold at stores, online and over the phone. Not all stores may have thickening powders or thickened liquid products on hand. You may need to place an order in advance.

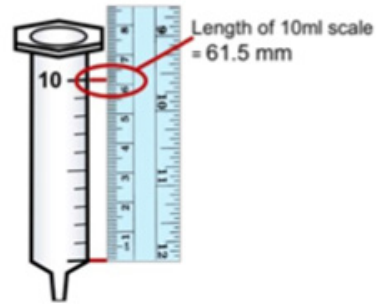
Ask your health care provider for a list of where to buy these products. Make sure you buy thickened liquids that are the same thickness as what your health care team recommends.

## Syringe flow test

Your health care team will let you know if it is right for you to do a flow test of your thickened liquid. A flow test measures how much of the thickened liquid is left in a syringe after 10 seconds.

### **Before you test, make sure you are using the right syringe.**

There are different types of syringes. Use a 10 millilitre (mL) syringe that is 61.5 millimetres (mm) long from the 0 mL to the 10 mL measurement line.



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Before you start the test:

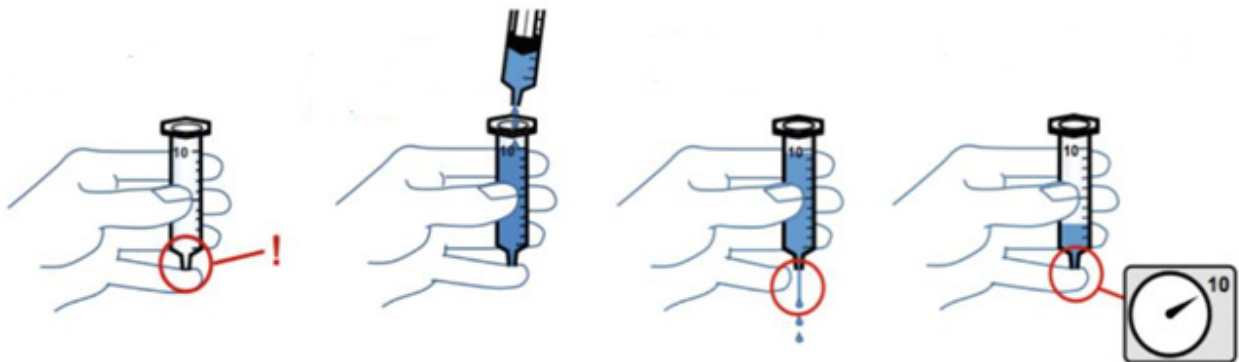
- ✓ Prepare the thickened liquid by following the instructions on the package
- ✓ Make sure the inside of the syringe is clean and dry
- ✓ Have a 10 second timer ready

Here are some testing tips:

- Use a clean and dry syringe every time you test.
- Test twice or more to make sure the thickness of the liquid is right.
- If the flow suddenly stops, there may be lumps in the liquid. This means the liquid would not be safe for you to drink.
- Make sure to test the liquid at the temperature you want to drink it.

When you are ready, follow these steps in order:

1. Remove the syringe plunger, the top part that pushes into the syringe.
2. Hold the syringe with the tip pointed down.
3. Cover the tip using your finger to seal it closed.
4. Fill the syringe from the top to the 10 mL line.
5. Release your finger covering the tip and start the timer.
6. At 10 seconds, put your finger back to cover the syringe tip.
7. Look at how much liquid is left in the syringe.
  - If there is **less than 4 mm** left, the liquid is too thin.
  - If there is **4 to 8 mm** left, the liquid is **Mildly Thick**.
  - If there is **8 to 10 mm** left, the liquid is **Moderately Thick**.
  - There should be **all 10 mm** left, or no flow at all, for **Extremely Thick liquids**.







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You can watch a video of the “IDDSI Flow Test Instructions” video on the The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative webpage: <https://iddsi.org/Resources/Videos/Testing-Methods>.

## Foods to choose and avoid

People with swallowing difficulties find different foods appetizing and comfortable to eat. Your meals may look different than they did before. We encourage you to find foods and ways to eat them that satisfy your nutritional needs, are enjoyable, and are safe for you to swallow.

	 <b>Foods to choose</b>	 <b>Foods to avoid</b>
<b>Vegetables and Fruit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft and bite-sized, mashed, steamed, or boiled vegetables (such as squash, carrot, broccoli, or cauliflower)</li> <li>• Soft and bite-sized canned vegetables, drained (such as tomatoes, spinach, or green beans)</li> <li>• Soft and bite-sized canned fruits, rinsed and drained (such as peaches, or cherries)</li> <li>• Soft and bite-sized fresh fruits (such as banana, cantaloupe, mango, or avocado)</li> <li>• Boiled potatoes, cut into bite sized pieces</li> <li>• Mashed potatoes</li> <li>• Applesauce or other fruit sauces</li> <li>• Thickened fruit or vegetable juice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raw vegetables (such as carrots, cucumber, celery)</li> <li>• Tough, stringy, or pulpy fruits (such as pineapple or orange)</li> <li>• Juicy fruits with a lot of liquid (such as watermelon or grapes)</li> <li>• Hard fruits (such as apples or pear)</li> <li>• Coconut</li> <li>• Dried fruit</li> <li>• Floppy vegetables (such as lettuce, cucumber, uncooked spinach leaves)</li> <li>• Fruits with outer layers (such as grapes)</li> </ul>

	 <b>Foods to choose</b>	 <b>Foods to avoid</b>
<b>Grain Products</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooked cereals (such as oatmeal, cream of wheat, oat bran, infant cereal, cream of rice)</li> <li>• Dry cereals, softened with liquid, then drained</li> <li>• Bite-sized, tender pasta or noodles (such as macaroni, orzo, baby shells, star pasta)</li> <li>• Thick congee</li> <li>• Rice served with non-sticky sauces, that moisten and hold grains together</li> <li>• Moistened bread, pancakes, muffins cut into bite sized pieces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bread</li> <li>• Dry cereal</li> <li>• Grain products with seeds, nuts or fruit</li> <li>• Crackers, Melba toast, rice cakes</li> <li>• Tortilla chips</li> <li>• Shredded wheat</li> <li>• Crisps</li> </ul>
<b>Milk and Alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smooth yogurt without fruits, seeds or nuts</li> <li>• Soft cheeses (such as feta or brie), cut into bite sized pieces</li> <li>• Cottage cheese</li> <li>• Cream cheese</li> <li>• Smooth pudding and custard</li> <li>• Thickened milk or soy beverage</li> <li>• Rice pudding, tapioca pudding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yogurt with fruit, seeds or nuts</li> <li>• Hard cheeses</li> </ul>

	 <b>Foods to choose</b>	 <b>Foods to avoid</b>
<b>Meat and Alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft and bite sized meat and poultry without bones, cooked tender</li> <li>• Soft and bite sized fish without bones, cooked tender</li> <li>• Soft and bite sized canned fish</li> <li>• Beans, lentils, chickpeas and other legumes, cooked tender</li> <li>• Bite-sized soft tofu</li> <li>• Eggs cooked until there is no more runny yolk, scrambled or cut into bite-sized pieces</li> <li>• Smooth hummus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeds</li> <li>• Nuts and nut butter</li> <li>• Tough or stringy cuts of meat</li> <li>• Cuts of meats with bones or gristle</li> <li>• Sausages, hot dogs, wieners</li> <li>• Steak</li> <li>• Crisp bacon</li> <li>• Chicken, salmon, and sausage skins</li> </ul>
<b>Mixed Dishes and Entrees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft casseroles and entrees made with ingredients in this 'Foods to choose' column (such as lasagna, scalloped potatoes, shepherd's pie), cut into bite sized pieces</li> <li>• Smooth, pureed soups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soups with solid pieces of food</li> <li>• Dry cereals served with milk</li> </ul>

	✓ <b>Foods to choose</b>	✗ <b>Foods to avoid</b>
<b>Sweets and Desserts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smooth, pureed desserts without nuts or seeds</li> <li>• Honey, syrups, sugars, seedless jams and jellies</li> <li>• Moist cake cut into bite sized pieces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ice cream, sherbet, frozen yogurt, Popsicles</li> <li>• Hard or soft candies</li> <li>• Carbonated beverages</li> <li>• Hard, dry, or crumbly cakes or cookies</li> <li>• Chewing gum</li> <li>• Marshmallows</li> </ul>
<b>Condiments, Fats and Oils</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Butter, margarine, oil</li> <li>• Smooth gravies and other sauces</li> <li>• Ketchup, smooth mustard, mayonnaise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grainy salad dressings with spices such as coarse ground pepper</li> <li>• Grainy mustard</li> </ul>

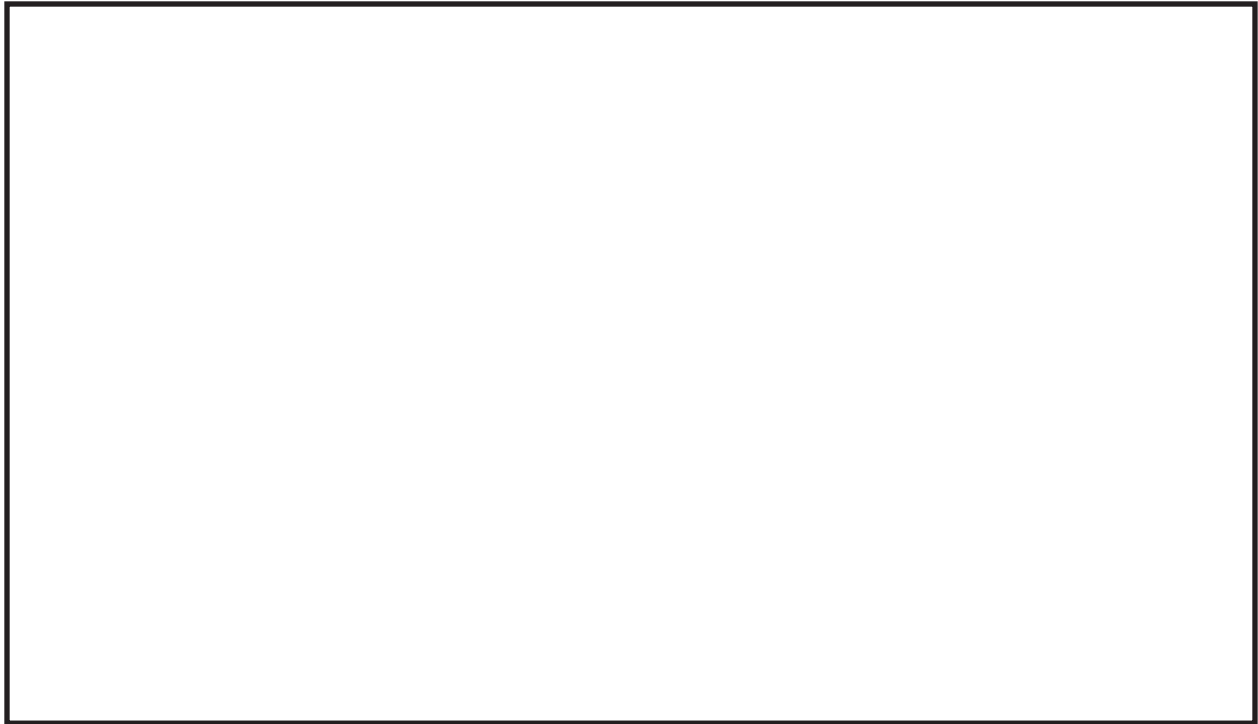
## Sample daily menu

Here is an example of eating well on a soft and bite-sized and thickened liquid diet.

<b>Breakfast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cream of Wheat</li><li>• Soft and bite-sized scrambled egg</li><li>• Ripe avocado cut into bite sizes</li><li>• Applesauce</li><li>• Thickened milk</li><li>• Thickened tea</li></ul>
<b>Lunch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cream of mushroom soup</li><li>• Macaroni with sauce</li><li>• Cottage cheese, drained</li><li>• Banana cut into bite sizes</li><li>• Thickened milk</li></ul>
<b>Afternoon Snack</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Yogurt</li><li>• Canned peaches, drained and cut into bite sizes</li><li>• Thickened apple juice</li></ul>
<b>Dinner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Baked, deboned salmon cut into bite sizes</li><li>• Mashed potatoes</li><li>• Steamed cauliflower cut into bite sizes</li><li>• Moist cake cut into bite-sized pieces</li><li>• Thickened water</li></ul>
<b>Evening Snack</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dry cereal softened with milk, then drained</li><li>• Mango cut into bite sizes</li><li>• Thickened orange juice</li></ul>



Your health care team can use the box below to write down guidelines and suggestions specific to your chewing and swallowing needs.

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for writing down guidelines and suggestions specific to chewing and swallowing needs.

Use the box below to write down any questions or concerns you may have. You can discuss them with your health care team at the next follow up visit.

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for writing down any questions or concerns that may arise.

**Disclaimers:**

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