Eating Guide for Puréed and Mechanical Soft Diets

This information explains what you can eat while you are on a puréed or mechanical soft diet. It includes steps you can take to make sure you eat well, even if you have problems chewing or swallowing. Sample menus and recipes are included. Eating well as part of a healthy lifestyle can help strengthen your body and increase your overall well-being.

Foods in puréed and mechanical soft diets have a smoother texture than regular foods. They require very little or no chewing at all to swallow. You may need to be on a puréed or mechanical soft diet if you:

- Have trouble chewing or swallowing
- Had mouth surgery
- Have trouble moving or have lost feeling in parts of your mouth, such as your lips or tongue

A **puréed diet** is made up of foods that require no chewing, such as mashed potatoes and pudding. Other foods may be blended or strained to make them the right texture. Liquids, such as broth, milk, juice, or water may be added to foods to make them the right texture.

A **mechanical soft diet** is made up of foods that require less chewing than in a regular diet. Patients on this diet can tolerate a variety of textures. Chopped, ground, and puréed foods are included, as well as foods that break apart easily without a knife.

If you experience any of the following signs or symptoms during or after swallowing, you should contact your doctor and speech/swallowing therapist:

- Coughing
- Food particles lodging in your mouth throat
- Breathing problems
- Wet voice or excessive phlegm
- Lung infection (pneumonia)

If you don't know which diet is right for you, or have any questions, speak with your doctor or speech/swallowing specialist. You can also speak with a dietitian in the Department of Food and Nutrition by calling (212) 639-7071.

Maintaining or Regaining Weight

Your caloric need is the number of calories you need every day to maintain your weight. Finding out this information can help prevent you from losing weight. Also, you can increase the number of calories if you need to gain weight.

Each person has a different caloric need. This need is based on:

- Age
- Sex
- Height and weight
- Level of physical activity

Generally, people who are older or less active have a lower caloric need. Your doctor and dietitian can help you find out your caloric need. However, the easiest way to check if you are eating enough is to watch your weight. Try to weigh yourself twice a week. If you are losing weight, write a list of all the foods that you eat. Do this for a few days. Have your dietitian look it over to see where you can add more calories. If you are eating less than usual or losing weight, please call your dietitian.

Guide for Good Nutrition

Eat foods that have all the nutrients your body needs to keep you healthy. This includes:

- Proteins
- Carbohydrates
- Fats
- Fiber
- Vitamins and minerals

Also, make sure that you drink plenty of liquids. Your goal should be to drink 8 glasses of water a day. However, speak to your doctor or dietitian to find out if more or less liquid would be best for you.

Protein

Protein helps your body build tissue and heal after surgery. Foods rich in protein include:

- Meats
- Fish
- Poultry (chicken, turkey)
- Milk, soy milk, non-fat dried milk powder
- Cheese
- Yogurt (especially Greek yogurt)
- Eggs or egg whites
- Beans or bean purée
- Nuts and nut butters
- Soy products such as tofu and edamame (soy beans)
- Liquid nutritional supplements such as Ensure®, Ensure Plus®, Boost®, or Boost Plus®

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are starches and sugars. They should make up at least half of your caloric intake. Most of the carbohydrates in your diet should be complex carbohydrates, such as:

- Starchy vegetables (potatoes, green peas, squash)
- Whole grains
- Cereals

- Breads
- Pasta

These foods are considered "protein-sparing." This means they can prevent your body from breaking down protein for energy. Your body can then use this protein to build tissue.

Fat

Fat is the most concentrated source of calories. For example, 1 teaspoon of sugar has 20 calories, but 1 teaspoon of oil has 45 calories. Fats are in:

- Meats
- Dairy
- Coconut and canned coconut milk/cream
- Nuts and nut butters
- Seeds
- Vegetable oils
- Avocados
- Olives
- Fried and sautéed foods
- Baked goods

Some fats are healthier for you than others. Unsaturated fats are healthier for you than saturated fats.

Unsaturated fats are found in:

- Olive oil
- Canola oil
- Peanut oil
- Fish oil
- Avocado

Saturated fats are found in:

- Meat
- Full-fat dairy products (whole milk, cheeses, heavy cream, cream cheese)
- Butter
- Coconut
- Palm oil

Eating too much fat can make you gain weight. If your goal is to gain weight, try to eat healthier (unsaturated) fats. If you are trying to lose weight, or are already at a healthy weight, choose low-fat foods when planning your meals.

Fiber

There are 2 kinds of fiber: soluble and insoluble. Soluble fiber is found in barley, oats, and the flesh of skinless fresh fruits. Soluble fiber can help soften your stools and slow your digestion.

Insoluble fiber is found in the skins of fruits and vegetables, legumes (beans, lentils), seeds, and whole grains. It is not broken down in your intestines and adds bulk to your stool. This can help you have more regular bowel movements. Even if fruits and vegetables are blended or juiced, the fiber is still there if the pulp has not been removed. Getting enough of both kinds of fiber is important.

Vitamins and minerals

Vitamins and minerals are found in all foods in different amounts. A person who eats a well-balanced diet will most likely not need a supplement. Your diet should include some of the following:

- Breads, grains, and cereals
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Dairy products (milk, yogurt)
- Poultry, fish, and eggs
- Beans
- Seeds
- Nuts

Please speak with your doctor if you are thinking about taking a supplement.

Lactose

Lactose is a sugar found in milk and milk products, such as yogurt, cheese, and ice cream. Many people can't tolerate lactose. It may cause them to have gas, cramping, or diarrhea. If this is a problem for you, it may keep you from having dairy items. Look in your supermarket dairy case for low-lactose or lactose-free milk and cheese products. Lactaid® is a brand that has several of these products. Many patients are able to get nutrients from dairy products by eating cheese or yogurt. These foods have less amounts of lactose than milk or ice cream. You may also try the following lactose-free foods and beverages:

- Rice milk or cheese
- Soy products such as soy milk, cheese, and yogurt
- Almond products such as almond milk, cheese, or yogurt
- Tofu

Adding More Calories and Protein to Your Diet

Boosting your calorie count

If you need to eat more calories, here are some easy tips to boost the calorie count of your foods:

- Eat small, frequent meals or snacks. For example, if you are eating half as much as usual at each meal, you should be eating twice as often.
- Add 2 to 4 tablespoons of canned coconut milk or cream to smoothies, shakes, cereals, or yogurts for extra calories. You can also add it to rice or diced chicken for extra calories and flavor.
- Choose creamy soups rather than soups with clear broths.
- Have puddings and custards rather than gelatin desserts.
- Add sauces, gravies, or extra vegetable oil to your meals.
- Drink apricot or peach fruit nectars. They are less acidic than others.
- Drink fruit shakes or fruit smoothies made with yogurt or ice cream.
- Make ice cubes from milk or fruit nectar. Use these high-calorie ice cubes in smoothies or to keep your shakes cold. As they melt, they will add calories to your beverages.
- Drink high-calorie drinks, such as milkshakes, soy milkshakes, or eggnog (pasteurized).
- Drink a liquid nutritional supplement such as Ensure® instead of milk to make a nutritious, high-calorie milkshake.
- Add honey to smoothies, tea, yogurt, hot cereals, shakes, or ice cream.
- If you are **not** on a low-fat diet, add sour cream, half and half, heavy cream, or whole milk to your foods. You can add it to mashed potatoes, sauces, gravies, cereals, soups, and casseroles. Consider adding mayonnaise to your eggs, chicken, tuna, pasta, or potatoes to make a smooth, moist salad.
- Add avocado to dishes or smoothies.
- Add nut butters such as peanut butter to shakes and smoothies.

Boosting your protein intake

If you need to increase the amount of protein in your diet, here are some easy tips:

- Add tofu to cooked vegetables, soups, smoothies, or in place of chicken or meat if you are having difficulty eating animal proteins.
- Add cooked eggs to your soups, broths, and cooked vegetables. Purée the cooked eggs if needed.
- Use plain Greek yogurt in smoothies, cream sauces, or wherever you would use sour cream for added protein.
- Add cheese (shredded or grated) to your soups, cooked eggs, vegetables, and starches. For example, adding full-fat ricotta cheese can moisten a dish, as well as add calories and protein. Add cottage cheese to smoothies, purées, or canned fruits.

- Use fortified milk (see recipe in the "Recipes" section) rather than regular milk to double the amount of protein in it. Use this milk in shakes, hot cereals, mashed potatoes, hot chocolate, or with instant puddings to create a high-protein, high-calorie dessert. Also, you can add non-fat dried milk powder alone to purées and smoothies to add more calories and protein.
- Grind some nuts with a coffee grinder and add to them to your smoothies, hot cereals, puddings, or yogurts.

Liquid nutritional supplements

If your doctor or dietitian suggests that you drink high-calorie/high-protein liquid nutritional supplements, drink them between your meals. Try some of the products listed below. You can buy most of them at any supermarket or pharmacy. If you don't see them in the store, ask a pharmacist or store manager to order these products for you. You can also order them online.

Liquid Nutritional Supplement	Calories	Protein (g)	Water (mL)	Lactose Free
Ensure® (8 ounces)	250	9	196	Yes
Ensure® Clear™ (10 ounces)	180	9	274	Yes
Ensure Plus® or Ensure Complete® (8 ounces)	350	13	180	Yes
Glucerna® (8 ounces)	200	10	200	Yes
Boost® (8 ounces)	240	10	200	Yes
Boost Plus® (8 ounces)	360	14	185	Yes
Boost® Glucose Control® (8 ounces)	190	16	200	Yes
Boost® Nutritional Pudding (5 ounces)	240	7	140	Yes
Carnation® Instant Breakfast Powder (1 packet)	130	5	NA	No
Carnation® Instant Breakfast Ready-to-Drink (11 ounces)	250	14	285	No
Boost® VHC (8.45 ounces)	530	22.5	168	Yes
Scandishake® (1 packet)	440	5	NA	No
Scandishake® Lactose Free (1 packet)	430	8	NA	Yes
Resource® Boost Breeze (8 ounces)	250	9	196	Yes
Enlive® (6.7 ounces)	200	7	166	Yes
Resource® Benecalorie® (1.5 ounces)	330	7	NA	Yes
Resource® Beneprotein® Instant Protein Powder (7 grams)	25	6	NA	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Recommended foods

Below, you will find a list of recommended foods, as well as foods to avoid, while you are on a puréed or mechanical soft diet.

Puréed Diet

Type of Food	Recommended	Excluded
Milk and Dairy Products	• Milk, plain or well-blended yogurt without fruit pieces, buttermilk, evaporated or condensed milk, milkshakes, malts • Puréed cottage cheese, thin ricotta cheese, mild or processed cheeses melted into a sauce • Ice cream, frozen yogurt • Liquid nutritional supplements such as Ensure® or Carnation Instant Breakfast®	• Solid cheeses, regular cottage cheese, farmer cheese, pot cheese
Vegetables	• Vegetable juices, puréed cooked vegetables, baby food vegetables	• All others, even well-cooked vegetables that don't require a lot of chewing
Fruits	• Fruit juices and nectars • Smooth applesauce, puréed fruits, baby food fruit	• All others, including mashed banana and canned fruits
Starches	• Cooked cereals, cream of wheat, Farina®, cream of rice, oatmeal, hominy grits • Whipped or smooth mashed potatoes • Puréed pasta, puréed rice	• All others
Meat or Meat Substitutes	• Strained or puréed meat, fish, and poultry • Smooth egg salad, soufflés, hummus, or puréed beans	• All others, including scrambled, fried, poached, hard-boiled, or soft-boiled eggs
Fats	• Butter, margarine, sour cream, cooking fats and oils, gravies • Whipped toppings, heavy cream	• All others
Soups	• Broth, bouillon • Soups with puréed or strained vegetables • Strained or puréed cream soups • Puréed chicken noodle or chicken and rice soup	• All others

Type of Food	Recommended	Excluded
Sweets and Desserts	• Plain custards or puddings • Sherbet, ice cream, frozen yogurt • Jell-O® • Flavored fruit ices, popsicles, fruit whips, flavored gelatins • Clear jelly, honey, sugar, sugar substitutes • Chocolate syrup, maple syrup	• All others, including anything made with coconuts, nuts, or whole fruits (e.g., yogurt with fruit in it)
Beverages	• All beverages	• Any containing raw eggs
Miscellaneous	• Salt, pepper, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, • Herbs, spices • Syrups *Avoid spicy/acidic items if you have mouth soreness.	• Nuts, coconuts, olives, pickles, seeds

Mechanical Soft Diet

Type of Food	Recommended	Excluded
Milk and Dairy Products	• Milk, buttermilk, eggnog, yogurt (plain and with fruit), milkshakes, evaporated and condensed milk, malts • Cottage cheese, soft cheeses like ricotta or farmer (pot) and cheese sauces, grated cheeses • Ice cream and frozen yogurt • Liquid nutritional supplements such as Ensure® or Carnation® Instant Breakfast®	• Hard cheeses
Vegetables	• Any well-cooked, diced vegetables, such as carrots, peas, green beans, beets, butternut or acorn squash, wax beans • Chopped or creamed spinach • Puréed vegetables, baby food vegetables • Vegetable juices	• Raw vegetables, stir-fried vegetables, fried vegetables, lettuce

Type of Food	Recommended	Excluded
Fruits	• Ripe bananas • Any canned fruits • Any cooked fruits without the skin (All must be mashed or diced into small pieces.) • Smooth applesauce, puréed fruits, baby food fruits • Nectars, fruit juices	• Fresh fruits, fruit skins, fruits with pits, dried fruits
Starches	• Any diced soft breads, such as soft rolls, muffins, soft French toast, pancakes • Cakes, pies without crusts, pastries without nuts or dried fruits, soft cookies • Dry cereals soaked in a small amount of milk • White or brown rice • Casseroles • Cooked cereals, cream of wheat, Farina®, cream of rice, oatmeal, hominy grits, couscous • Diced soft pastas or noodles, pasta salad, pastina, orecchiette • Soft whole grains (i.e., barley, farro)	• Rye-crisps, dry crackers, popcorn, taco shells, Melba toasts • Breads and muffins with seeds or nuts, pita bread, rye and pumpernickel breads, bagels, French or sourdough breads, toast • Chow mein noodles • Any cakes or breads made with nuts, seeds, raisins, or dates • Kasha (buckwheat), wild rice, shredded wheat, granola
Potato or Potato Substitutes	• Mashed, baked, or creamed potatoes, sweet potatoes	• Hash browns, fried potatoes, potato skins, French fries
Meat or Meat Substitutes	• Ground, finely chopped tender meat or poultry with gravy • Soft chicken salad, creamed tuna salad without celery, egg salad without celery • Diced meat loaf, meatballs, salmon loaf, or croquettes • Casseroles • Diced baked or broiled fish (fillet of sole, roughy, flounder, salmon) • Well-cooked beans, tofu • Scrambled eggs or diced hard-cooked eggs • Plain cheese quiche	• Whole cuts or diced meat or poultry • Hot dogs, sausage, knockwurst, bratwurst, pork chops, steak, bacon • Fried fish, haddock, halibut, tuna • Crunchy peanut butter • Chili with beans

Type of Food	Recommended	Excluded
Fats	• Butter, margarine, cooking fats and oils • Gravy, whipped toppings, salad dressings, mayonnaise • Finely chopped olives	• Nuts, almonds, cashews, peanuts, pecans, seeds, coconuts, whole olives
Soups	• Broth, bouillon • Soups with puréed or strained vegetables, strained or puréed cream soups • Diced chicken noodle soup	• Any soups with chunks of meat or crunchy vegetables
Sweets and Desserts	• Seedless jellies only, honey, sugar, sugar substitutes, syrup • Ice cream, frozen yogurt, puddings, custards • Pies without crust, pastries and cakes without seeds or nuts, soft cookies (all diced)	• Any sweets and desserts with coconut, nuts, or dried fruits • Granola bars • Pies • Chewy, crunchy, or hard candy • Jelly or jam with seeds, preserves • Crunchy cookies • Licorice, taffy, caramel
Beverages	• Water, coffee, tea, carbonated beverages, hot cocoa, fruit punch, coconut water • Gatorade®, Pedialyte®, Isopure® lemonade without pulp	• Any beverage containing raw eggs
Miscellaneous	• Salt, pepper, ketchup, mustard, herbs, spices, jelly	• Avoid spicy/acidic items if you have mouth soreness

Difficulties With Eating

During and after chemotherapy and radiation therapy, some patients develop side effects that make it difficult to eat. Below, you will find recommendations to help with these side effects.

Taste changes

You may find that the foods you once liked taste different during and after chemotherapy or radiation therapy. In the weeks after finishing chemotherapy, your taste should slowly return to normal. Your taste may take a little longer to return after radiation therapy. Try some of these tips to deal with taste changes:

- Experiment with different foods. You might find a new food that you like.
- Retry foods every week or two to see if the taste has returned.
- Substitute fish, eggs, cheese, or milk for meat. You may tolerate these foods better.
- Try different seasonings, including herbs and spices. Use salt if you are not on a low-salt diet.
- Adjust the sugar levels in the food to your taste.

- If the food you are eating tastes metallic, use plastic utensils or glassware for cooking.
- Try cold foods or foods at room temperature. Marinate your foods in fruit nectars, duck sauce, or citrus juice (if your mouth is sore).
- Maintain good oral hygiene.

Sore mouth

Patients who have had chemotherapy or radiation may have a sore mouth. If this is a problem for you, try these recommendations:

- Eat mild foods, such as milks, custards, or puddings.
- Your doctor can give you a mouth spray to control pain while you eat. Avoid foods that are acidic, such as orange juice and tomato sauce. Avoid foods that are spicy or salty. Also try to stay away from foods that are too hot or too cold.
- Liquid or soft foods such as soufflés or casseroles may be easier to swallow than solid foods. Experiment with textures to see what feels best.

Dry mouth

Eating can be difficult if your mouth is dry and doesn't make enough saliva. Try these tips:

- Choose soft, moist foods.
- Add gravies, sauces, applesauce, or other liquids to your foods.
- Have a spoonful of warm soup or other liquid between mouthfuls of food.
- Try foods prepared with gelatin, such as mousses. They tend to slide down the throat more easily.
- Always carry a bottle of water with you. You can also try carrying a small, clean spray bottle filled with water. Spray water in your mouth throughout the day to keep it moist.
- Try eating sugar-free mints or sugar-free gum to make more saliva.
- If you are having trouble maintaining your weight, drink beverages that have calories instead of water. Examples are fruit juices, fruit nectars, and liquid nutritional supplements such as Ensure®.

Sample Menus

Everyone has his or her own way of eating. If you are used to eating 3 nutritious meals a day and can keep or regain your weight, you are doing fine. Many patients find that it is easier to eat 6 or 7 small meals throughout the day. Below is a sample menu for both puréed and mechanical soft diets.

Meal/Snack	Puréed Diet	Mechanical Soft Diet
Breakfast	• Puréed banana • Cooked cereal with milk • Puréed cooked egg	• Soft, diced fruit without skin or peel • Cereal softened in milk or diced soft pancake with syrup and butter • Scrambled eggs
Mid-morning snack	• Vanilla or flavored yogurt	• Rice pudding
Lunch	• Any puréed or strained soup • Puréed chicken salad • Puréed beans • Puréed fruit	• Vegetable barley soup • Chicken salad or egg salad • Diced, well-cooked vegetables • Canned peaches
Mid-afternoon Snack	• Ensure Plus®	• Boost Plus®
Dinner	• Puréed or strained soup • Puréed meat or fish • Mashed potatoes • Puréed vegetables with olive oil or butter • Applesauce	• Soup • Baked fish filet (boneless) with sauce • Diced, soft potatoes • Diced, well-cooked vegetables with olive oil or butter • Canned, diced pears
Evening Snack	• Pudding	• Ice cream with diced, soft cookie

These menus are suggestions. Feel free to substitute other foods for any of those listed. You may divide the foods throughout the day as you like. If you need help planning your meals, please call the Department of Food and Nutrition to speak with a dietitian.

What to Look for When Shopping for Food

There are many products you can buy at the grocery store that need little or no preparation. Below is a list of recommended foods and where they can be found in the grocery store. If you are following a low-fat diet, use low-fat or reduced-fat versions of some of these foods.

Dairy case

- All types of milk (whole, low-fat, or skim). Use lactose-free brands, if lactose is a problem for you.
- Buttermilk
- Pasteurized eggnog
- Non-dairy creamer (the powdered form in a jar does not need to be refrigerated)
- Cheeses, including cottage, farmers, ricotta, and Parmesan. Make sure the consistency is right for you.
- Sour cream

- Eggs or egg substitutes
- Butter and margarine
- Pudding
- Gelatin desserts
- Yogurt

On the shelves

Canned foods are very convenient. They can be stored without refrigeration until they are opened. Some products are high in salt. If your doctor has told you to restrict your salt intake, always check the label on the can. A dietitian can explain how to read food labels. Some foods can be eaten "as is," but others must be ground or puréed. Make sure that the texture of the food is right for you before you eat it.

The following packaged and canned foods don't require much preparation and may be convenient for you:

- Baby foods come in many varieties, such as meats, fruits, and vegetables. Most are already puréed and ready to eat. While these foods are good and easy, **do not rely on the chicken and meat types for your protein needs.** They do not have enough protein for adults.
- Instant mashed potatoes
- Canned chicken or vegetable broths
- Dry milk powder
- Cocoa or hot chocolate mix
- Regular or instant hot cereals
- Pasta or rice meals in a bag

Main dishes

- Roast beef hash or corned beef hash
- Stews
- Vegetable or bean soups
- Smooth peanut butter or other smooth nut butters
- Pasta with meat or cheese (ravioli or spaghetti)
- Canned or jarred fish, such as tuna, salmon, and gefilte fish
- Soft or silken tofu
- Quiche

Side dishes

- Canned vegetables
- Canned or jarred fruits, such as applesauce, canned peaches, or crushed pineapple

Fruit and vegetable juices

- Nectars
- 100% vegetable or fruit juices, as tolerated

Seasonings

- Catsup
- Mayonnaise
- Jellies
- Honey
- Maple and chocolate syrups
- Sauces (cream, tomato, soy, Worcestershire, BBQ)
- Gravies
- Spices and herbs, as tolerated

Freezer case

These items must be stored in a freezer. Make sure you have room in your freezer at home. Some of these products may have to be blended or ground to change the texture. This will depend on what you can tolerate. Check the list or talk to your doctor, dietitian, or speech/swallowing therapist.

Meat and main dishes

- Lasagna
- Macaroni and cheese
- Frozen fish fillets
- Blintzes
- Meat loaf and meatballs

Breakfast items

- French toast
- Pancakes
- Egg substitutes
- Potato pancakes

Soups

- Creamy or strained vegetable soups
- Broths
- Chicken noodle or chicken and rice soups
- Chowders

- Bean soups
- Stews

Side dishes

- Vegetables (Frozen vegetables are the next best thing to fresh. Choose these over canned ones whenever possible.)
- Chopped spinach
- Mashed squash
- Rice or rice dishes
- Potatoes
- Stuffed baked potatoes
- Soft potato puffs or croquettes

Fruit

- Thawed, frozen fruit
- Fruit ices
- Popsicles

Desserts

- Ice cream
- Frozen yogurt
- Mousse
- Whipped toppings
- Sherbet

Bakery items

For some patients on a mechanical soft diet, bread can be soaked in liquid until soft. You may want to soak it in soup, coffee, broth, or milk.

Deli counter

Look for items that are the right texture for you, such as tuna or egg salads. Some deli counters might also have puddings and gelatins.

Produce section

Eat different colored fruits and vegetables (orange, green, red, purple, and yellow). This can help you meet your daily needs of vitamins and minerals.

Fruit can help add variety to your meals. Some can be mashed or puréed raw. It is helpful to add some extra fruit juice when blending. This will help you get the right texture and prevent it from getting brown. You can also add fruits to milkshakes to give them extra flavor and nutrients.

It is best to eat fresh vegetables because some nutrients can be lost from freezing and canning. Most vegetables need to be cooked in a small amount of water to keep the nutrients. After cooking, they can be ground, chopped, or blended to the consistency that is right for you.

For baking, try white potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, beets, or squash. For steaming, boiling, microwaving, or adding to soups, try all the above items plus onions, celery, peas, carrots, green beans, cabbage, parsnips, spinach, eggplant, rutabagas, turnips, broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes (without the seeds), asparagus, mushrooms, and zucchini.

Fresh herbs

Fresh herbs provide flavor and variety and may help flavor foods if you are experiencing taste changes. Buy them by the bunch. Wash and dry them. You can then place them in a Zip-Loc® bag, freeze them, and use them as needed. Dill, parsley, garlic, and basil go with most foods. You can add them to meats, fish, and vegetables. Dill adds flavor when steamed with potatoes and carrots. Basil is delicious in tomato sauces and soups. Garlic can be used with almost anything.

Tofu

Tofu is also known as soybean curd. It is bland, soft, high in protein and free of lactose and cholesterol. You can add it to shakes or soups or use it as a meat extender in ground meat products such as meatballs. Tofu is found in sealed packages in the produce section and in health food stores. Some places might sell tofu out of large open containers soaked in water. For your safety, only buy tofu in sealed packages.

Meat counter

Ground meats are the most versatile kind of meat. You can use them in sauces, casseroles, soups, meat loaf, and meatballs. There are several types of ground meats that you can find, such as beef, turkey, chicken, veal, and lamb. Ground turkey breast is low in fat. Make sure it is ground turkey breast and not just ground turkey. Ground turkey contains the skin, so it is higher in fat. You can use ground turkey breast to replace all or some of the red meat in your recipes. You can also ask your butcher to grind any meat that you want.

Seafood counter

When buying fresh fish, avoid bony fishes because they do not blend or process well. Fresh flat fish such as flounder and sole are best. They are flaky, soft, and easy to blend or process. Shellfish such as shrimp or lobster may be thoroughly steamed, removed from the shell and blended. Frozen fish fillets are very convenient and often cheaper than fresh fish. They are best cooked when partially thawed in the refrigerator for a few hours.

If it is hard for you to shop, find a market that will deliver in your area. Also look into online grocers that deliver, such as Fresh Direct®. Ask your dietitian or social worker if you are eligible for a home meal delivery service such as Meals on Wheels or God's Love We Deliver. Many restaurants also offer delivery service.

Planning Your Meals

Changing your eating habits can be difficult. It is best to plan ahead for meals. This can help make sure you have enough of the right foods to eat at mealtimes. Here are some questions to consider when planning your meals:

- Where will you be eating (at home, a restaurant, work, someone else's house)?
- If you are eating at a restaurant, can you call ahead and request special meals?
- Do you have refrigeration and cooking facilities available? Can you boil water? Can you microwave? Can you use a blender or food processor?
- Can you carry a Thermos® with food already prepared and ready to eat?

Eating at Home With Family and Friends

Most foods can be adapted to meet your needs. For example, one portion of soup can be put aside, then strained or blended.

Many main dishes, such as noodles, stews, and casseroles can be put into a blender with some liquid. For the liquid, you can use milk, gravy, tomato sauce, broth, juice, or just water. Add liquid until the food is the right thickness. Many people find it more appetizing to prepare each item separately. For instance, blend the noodles and then add the sauce on top.

Here is some equipment that you may find very helpful to prepare your foods at home:

Blender: This item can be used for all types of foods but requires liquid to make the right texture. They are excellent for soups and shakes. However, they are not always the best to use for making 1 portion. The Magic Bullet® is a convenient blender that does not take up a lot of space. The Vitamix® is another powerful blender that can purée a variety of foods.

Food processor: This is the most expensive item of all the equipment, but it is good for all foods. It can be purchased in different sizes. If you often prepare just 1 portion of food, buy a small processor.

Hand-held blender: This is a convenient device because you can use it purée your favorite soups right in the pot. It can also be used to soften well-cooked foods in a small bowl for 1 or 2 portions.

Household mesh strainer or sieve: This is an excellent tool for straining fruits and vegetables but not meats. They are inexpensive, good to make 1 portion, and do not need electricity. However, this method can be slow.

Food mill: This is an excellent tool to strain fruits, vegetables, and soups, but do not use it with meats. It is faster than a strainer and does not require electricity to work.

Meat grinder: This item can be hand-operated or electric. It can be used to grind meats and vegetables. The foods do not come out as fine as they would from a strainer or sieve. Therefore, the grinder may not be useful for some patients.

Baby-food grinder: This item can often be found in stores that sell baby clothes or furniture. They are good for all foods and require no liquid. The small ones are ideal for grinding 1 portion of food. They can be hand- or battery-operated. Food may not come out as smooth as necessary for some patients. Ask your dietitian, doctor, or speech/swallowing therapist if it is right for you.

Eating Out

Eat at restaurants that offer a variety of foods and that will cater to people on special diets. Many places will purée or prepare foods for your needs. Call ahead and speak to a manager or chef. You may be surprised at how accommodating they will be. It can be helpful to order sides of broth, gravy, or milk to moisten your foods.

Here are some ideas of things you can order. Some of these may need to be mashed or blended for the puréed diet:

Breakfast

- Fruit and vegetable juices
- Fruits as tolerated
- Hot cereal
- Cold cereal softened in milk (for mechanical soft diets)
- Scrambled eggs or chopped, hard-boiled eggs for mechanical soft diets

- Soft breads, such as muffins and pancakes, soaked in liquid to soften them for mechanical soft diets
- Coffee, tea, or hot chocolate

Lunch and dinner

- Fruit and vegetable juices
- Soups, which can be easily blended or strained in the restaurant. Egg drop soup is a good source of protein

Main dishes

- Ground meat products, such as hamburger patties, meatloaf, and meatballs
- Soft, flaky fish steamed, baked, or broiled, such as fillet of sole, flounder, or tilapia
- Noodles and macaroni dishes blenderized for puréed diets
- Soufflés
- Cottage cheese and soft fruit platters
- Sandwiches such as tuna or egg salad on soft bread

Vegetables

- Baked or mashed potatoes
- Any soft cooked vegetables such as cooked carrots
- Creamed spinach
- Vegetable soufflé
- Guacamole (be aware of your tolerance to spicy foods)
- Hummus

Desserts

- Ice cream or frozen yogurt
- Gelatin desserts
- Milkshakes
- Mousse
- Puddings and custards
- Applesauce or other soft fruits
- Fruit sorbets

It is also possible to eat away from home, such as at work or at a friend's house. Here are some tips for taking food with you while you are away from home:

- Bring a food grinder or small food processor. If electricity is needed, make sure it is available where you are going.

- Buy a thermos. Make soup or hot cereal and carry it with you.
- Ask if there is a microwave where you are going. You can make food at home and freeze it in portion-sized, microwave-safe containers or Zip-Loc® bags. Bring the food with you in an insulated pack and heat it when you want to eat.
- Freeze soups or puréed foods in ice cube trays. Cover the tray with foil or plastic wrap to prevent freezer burn. When you are hungry, use 2 or 3 cubes for a small meal or snack, or more cubes if you are really hungry.

Recipes

Many of the following recipes and ideas came from patients just like you. We hope they are helpful. For additional recipes, tips, and ideas, please check out the book *Eat Well Stay Nourished.* It was written by Support for People with Oral and Head and Neck Cancer (SPOHNC). You can purchase it online at www.spohnc.org or by phone at 1-800-377-0928.

Beverages

Many of these beverages are good to drink if you want to boost your calories. Try various fruits and juices.

Fortified Milk

Use this recipe to boost the calorie and protein content of a glass of milk. Also, use it as a substitute for milk in your favorite recipes for soups or custards.

1 cup of non-fat dried milk powder
1 quart of skim or 1% milk (use whole milk if you need extra calories)

Combine and stir well.

Milkshake

1 cup of skim, 1%, or fortified milk (use whole milk if you need extra calories)
1 cup of ice cream or frozen yogurt

Blend well and drink.

Variation: add malted milk powder, syrups, nut butters, or fruits. Try other flavors and textures you may enjoy.

Choco-Banana Swirl

⅔ cup of vanilla yogurt
⅔ cup of vanilla ice cream or frozen yogurt
¼ cup of chilled and sliced ripe banana (about half of a medium banana)
2 teaspoons of chocolate-flavored syrup

Combine everything except the chocolate syrup in a blender. Blend until smooth. Pour ½ cup into 2 glasses; set them aside. Add the chocolate syrup to the remaining mixture in the blender and blend it until it is all 1 color. Pour the remaining mixture into the 2 glasses and mix it gently with a spoon.

Fruit Smoothie

⅔ cup of vanilla yogurt
½ cup of fruit nectar
⅔ cup of chilled or frozen fruit of your choice
1 tablespoon of honey
4 ice cubes

Put all the ingredients into a blender. Blend until smooth. Makes about 2 servings.

Blender Breakfast

This drink is easy to make and is full of calcium, vitamins, and fiber.

1 banana, peach, or nectarine, peeled and cut into chunks
½ cup of skim, 1%, whole, or fortified milk (you can also use ½ cup of low-fat yogurt)
1 teaspoon of sugar or honey
1 tablespoon of natural bran

Combine all the ingredients into a blender and process until smooth. Pour into a tall glass. Makes about one 8-ounce serving.

Sauces

Use these sauces to moisten your foods and make them more tasty and attractive. Some are used in other recipes in this resource.

Basic White Sauce

1 cup of skim, 1%, whole, or fortified milk
2 tablespoons of any kind of oil or butter
2 to 3 tablespoons of flour

Mix the flour and oil or butter in a saucepan. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly until the mixture is smooth and bubbly. Remove from heat. Stir in the milk. Boil for 1 minute, stirring constantly. After a few minutes, it will begin to thicken. The more flour you add, the thicker the sauce will be.

Variation: to make a basic brown sauce, substitute ⅔ cup of low-sodium beef or chicken broth for the milk.

Soups

Eating soup is a good way to get more liquid and vegetables in your diet. Patients on a mechanical soft diet can tolerate some of these soups without any processing. The soups must be put through a blender or strainer for patients on a puréed diet. Try some of these recipes or substitute ingredients to make it right for you.

Creamy Soup

This is a recipe for a basic creamy soup. Add whichever vegetables and spices you like.

1 cup of cooked Basic White Sauce (see recipe above)
½ cup of puréed vegetables or baby food vegetables
Salt and pepper to taste

Follow the recipe for Basic White Sauce. Mix in the puréed vegetables. Add salt and butter to taste.

Variations:

- Try adding green beans, carrots, broccoli, squash, peas, mushrooms, or asparagus.
- Try adding dill, garlic, thyme, onion, or celery.

Vegetarian Creamy Tofu Soup

2 ounces of tofu
8 ounces of creamy soup (see recipe above)

Place in blender and process until smooth. Heat and enjoy.

Avocado Soup

1 ripe, medium avocado (flesh only)
1 small onion, cut up
½ teaspoon of salt
3 cups of chicken or vegetable broth
1 cup of yogurt
3 tablespoons of lemon juice (strained, if fresh)

Purée the avocado and onion with 1 cup of broth. Add the salt, remaining broth, and lemon juice, and mix for a few seconds. Then add the yogurt and sour cream and blend until smooth. Serve cold.

Spa Vegetable Soup

This is an easy way to make vegetable soup. You can change the vegetables as much as you like.

3 cups of chicken or vegetable broth
1 carrot, sliced
1 cup of broccoli florets
1 cup of cauliflower florets
½ cup of red cabbage, thinly sliced (or try spinach)
1 green onion, thinly sliced
Salt and pepper to taste

In a saucepan, bring the broth to a boil. Add the carrot and simmer for 20 minutes. Add the remaining vegetables and simmer until completely cooked through. Place in a blender and purée. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Variations:

- Add other herbs and spices, as you want.
- Try adding tofu chunks to increase the amount of protein.
- Drizzle some olive oil into the soup as you purée it for extra calories.

Egg Custard

2 slices of white bread
2 slices of whole-wheat bread
1 ¾ cups of eggs
½ quart of milk or fortified milk

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Remove the crusts from the bread. Lay the bread into a baking dish, forming a checkerboard with the white and the whole-wheat breads. Combine the eggs and milk and pour the mixture over the bread. Let the mixture sit for 20 minutes. Cover with foil. Cook until internal temperature reaches 165° F. Remove the foil and cut into squares.

Cereals

Try these recipes for a healthy start to your day.

Cooked Cereals

- When making instant hot cereals, use milk instead of water to provide more nutrients and calories. You can use skim, 1%, whole, soy, almond, rice, or fortified milk. Some people also add heavy cream or half and half for extra calories.
- Add applesauce, puréed banana, cinnamon, honey, yogurt, nut butters, or brown sugar and blend.

High-protein Oatmeal

1 cup of cooked oatmeal, prepared as instructed on the package
½ cup of fortified milk
2 teaspoons of sugar, honey, or brown sugar
1 small jar of baby food bananas
Cinnamon to taste (optional)

Mix all the ingredients together and serve while hot.

Eggs

Try these recipes for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Soufflé

¼ cup of butter
¼ cup of flour
1 ½ cup of milk or fortified milk
¼ teaspoon of salt
½ teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce (optional)
4 eggs, separated (yolks and whites in different bowls)
½ pound of low-fat Cheddar cheese

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Melt the butter in a saucepan. Stir in the flour until it is well blended. Remove from heat. Add the milk and cook until thickened.

Turn off the heat, add the cheese, and stir until melted. Let the mixture cool. Beat in the egg yolks one at a time. In a separate bowl, whip the egg whites until they are stiff. Fold (mix gently, in small amounts at a time) the whipped egg whites into the sauce. Pour the mixture into a 2-quart size casserole dish and bake for 30 to 45 minutes.

Cottage Cheese Pie

This recipe is only for those on a mechanical soft diet.

3 medium eggs or egg substitute
2 springs of parsley, chopped
1 pound of cottage cheese
1 small onion, diced
½ cup of Parmesan cheese
½ cup of mozzarella cheese, diced or grated
Salt and pepper to taste
Cornmeal

Preheat oven to 350° F. Mix eggs, cottage cheese, onion, Parmesan cheese, mozzarella cheese, and parsley together in a bowl. Grease a 9-inch Pyrex® pie pan with oil. Sprinkle cornmeal lightly to cover the entire pan. Pour the mixture into the pie pan. Bake for 45 minutes. Insert a toothpick into the center of the pie; if it comes out dry, then it is done.

Quiche Custard

This version is appropriate for those on a puréed diet.

¼ of an onion, chopped finely
1 tablespoon of butter
1 tablespoon of Parmesan cheese
¼ cup of milk, fortified milk, or soy milk
¼ cup of heavy cream
1 egg or egg substitute
¼ cup of cheese (Swiss, Cheddar, or mozzarella)
Pinch of salt
Pinch of nutmeg

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Sauté the onion in the butter until transparent. Place onion, milk, cream, and egg in blender. Blend until onions are puréed. Place the cheeses into a small, greased casserole dish. Pour egg mixture and seasonings over the cheese.

Place the casserole dish in a large pan containing hot water. Bake until the mixture sets, about 25 to 30 minutes.

Main dishes

Sweet Potato Pie

This dish can be eaten as is by patients on a mechanical soft diet. It must be mashed or puréed for those who are on a puréed diet.

1 ½ cup of cooked mashed sweet potatoes (or one 15-ounce can of pumpkin purée)
1 can of evaporated skim milk
½ teaspoon of nutmeg
1 teaspoon of cinnamon
½ cup of sugar (increase to 1 cup if you prefer a sweeter pie or want to add more calories)

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Mix the sweet potatoes (or pumpkin) with the evaporated milk and spices. Add the sugar and mix. Grease a 9-inch pie pan with oil. Sprinkle the pan with cornmeal to cover it. Shake off the excess. Bake for 45 minutes. Insert a toothpick into the center of the pie; if it comes out dry, then it is done.

Lentil and Carrot Stew

6 ounces of dry lentils
3 cups of water
4 medium carrots, peeled, quartered lengthwise, and cut into 1-inch pieces (2 ½ cups)
1 small stalk of washed, trimmed, and chopped celery (¼ cup)
3 bay leaves
1 teaspoon of salt (optional)
1 bunch of fresh cilantro or parsley, washed
2 teaspoons of olive oil

Sort the lentils and discard any stones or damaged lentils. Wash them in a sieve under cold water. Drain. Place the lentils in a large pot. Add the water, carrots, onions, celery, bay leaves, and salt. Gather the cilantro or parsley

leaves and set them aside as a garnish. Chop the stems and roots; add them to the pot. Bring the mixture to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook at a very gentle boil for 55 minutes. Let the mixture cool. Place it in a blender and process until smooth. Garnish with the cilantro or parsley leaves when serving.

Chicken Tamale Pie

½ cup of cornmeal (or polenta)
2 cups of chicken broth
1 to 2 cups of cooked chicken, cut up
1 cup (8-ounce can) of tomato sauce
Dash of garlic powder
Dash of oregano
Dash of thyme
Grated Parmesan or Cheddar cheese

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Cook the cornmeal in the chicken broth until it is thick. Cool it slightly and spread it into a greased casserole dish. Grind or purée the chicken according to your needs. Spread it on top of the cornmeal mixture. Season the tomato sauce with garlic, oregano, and thyme. Spread it on top of the chicken. Sprinkle cheese over the layer of tomato sauce. Cook for 30 minutes or until the cheese melts.

Meatloaf

1 ½ pounds of lean ground beef or turkey
2 cloves of garlic, minced
1 cup of dry bread crumbs
1 egg, beaten
¼ cup of minced onion
1 tablespoon of Worcestershire sauce
1 teaspoon of chopped parsley
2 tablespoons of tomato sauce
1 teaspoon of salt (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Mix all the ingredients thoroughly. Spread the mixture in an ungreased 9 x 5 x 3-inch loaf pan. Bake for 1½ hours. For those on a puréed diet, you may place the cooked meat loaf in a blender with some liquid and blend it to the consistency you need.

Salads

Tuna Salad

3 ½ ounces of canned tuna in water or oil
2 tablespoons of regular or low-fat mayonnaise
1 tablespoon of sweet-mixed pickle (optional)

Mash the tuna with a fork until fine. Place the mayonnaise in a blender. For extra flavor, add 1 tablespoon of sweet-mixed pickle. Blend until smooth. Add tuna and blend to desired consistency.

Variations:

- Replace the tuna with 1 or 2 hard-boiled eggs to make egg salad.
- Replace the tuna with 3 ounces of cooked chicken or turkey to make chicken or turkey salad.

Cottage Cheese and Fruit Salad

1 package (to make 2 cups) of gelatin (any flavor)
1 cup of boiling water
½ cup of peaches, sliced
1 cup of cottage cheese

Place the gelatin in a blender. Add the boiling water and blend for 1 second. Add the peaches and the cottage cheese. Blend until smooth. Pour into a container and chill until firm.

Side dishes

Winter Squash and Carrot Purée

1 butternut squash (2 ¾ pounds, halved lengthwise and seeded)
4 carrots, thinly sliced
1 clove of garlic, thinly sliced
¼ teaspoon of thyme
1 tablespoon of unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
2 cups of water
Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Set the squash, cut side down, on a lightly oiled baking sheet. Bake it for 45 minutes or until soft. Combine the carrots, garlic, thyme, and water in a saucepan. Cover and bring to a boil, then simmer over low heat for 20 minutes or until the carrots are tender. Transfer the contents from the pan to a food processor; purée. Scoop the squash out of its skin and purée it with the carrots. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Spread the purée on a buttered, shallow baking dish; dot with the butter. Bake for 20 minutes or until hot and serve.

Lima Bean Purée

8 ounces of large, dry lima beans
3 cups of water or vegetable broth
½ teaspoon of salt
1 teaspoon (or more) of olive oil

Sort the beans, discarding any stones or damaged beans. Wash the beans in a sieve under cold water and drain. Place them in a saucepan or pot. Add the water and salt. Bring the mixture to a boil. Cover, reduce the heat to low, and boil gently for 45 minutes, until the beans are very tender. Transfer the mixture (there should be about 3 cups, including the liquid) to a food processor. Add the oil and process for 20 to 30 seconds until very smooth.

Variation: use your favorite beans or chickpeas in place of the lima beans.

Butternut Squash Purée

1 large butternut squash
1 tablespoon of maple syrup
1 teaspoon of butter or margarine

Peel the squash and cut it into small pieces. Boil until tender. Mash the squash with a fork and mix it with the maple syrup and butter or margarine.

Purée of Broccoli With Garlic

1 bunch of broccoli (1 ¾ pounds)
1 cup of water
1 medium potato, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
2 cloves of garlic, peeled
1 teaspoon of salt
1 teaspoon of unsalted butter
1 teaspoon of olive oil

Separate the broccoli into stalks. Peel the stems with a vegetable peeler, removing the outer layer. Cut the stalks (including the florets) into 2-inch pieces. Place the broccoli in a large saucepan with the water, potatoes, garlic, and salt. Bring to a boil, cover, and reduce the heat to low. Boil gently for 15 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender. About ½ cup of liquid should remain. Place the contents of the saucepan in the food processor and add butter and oil. Process the mixture for 45 seconds, until it is very smooth. Serve immediately.

Desserts

Peach Sauce

Drain the syrup from any size can of peaches. Blend the peaches until they are smooth. Store in the refrigerator. This sauce is delicious over ice cream or frozen yogurt, or you can eat it as is. Those on a mechanical soft diet can also use it to soften cakes, etc.

Puréed Fresh Fruits

You can purée any fruit that is in season in a baby food grinder. Sprinkle apples with lemon juice to avoid browning. You can add cinnamon or mix a few different kinds of fruit together for a fruit punch flavor.

Ricotta Cherry Mousse

1 pound (2 cups) of ricotta cheese
3 tablespoons of sifted powdered sugar
¼ teaspoon of almond extract
1 teaspoon of vanilla extract
2 cups of dark cherries, pitted and sliced (or use frozen unsweetened cherries if fresh ones are not available)
½ cup of semisweet chocolate chips, ground to a coarse meal in a blender

Put the ricotta in a medium-size mixing bowl and beat it with an electric mixer at high speed for about 3 minutes.

Slowly add the sugar. Stir in the extracts, cover, and chill. Fifteen minutes before you serve the mousse, fold in the cherries. Serve it topped with the chocolate.

Peaches and Cream

1 banana
1 peach
½ cup of ice cubes
2 tablespoons of plain yogurt
Peach nectar

Place the banana, peach, ice cubes, and yogurt into a blender. Blend until smooth. Add enough peach nectar to reach the 16-ounce mark on the blender. Blend until smooth.

Contact Information for Nutrition Services at MSKCC

Department of Food and Nutrition in New York, NY
(212) 639-7071

Radiation Oncology Outpatient Nutrition in New York, NY
(212) 639-7622

Outpatient Nutrition in Commack, NY
(631) 623-4000

Outpatient Nutrition in Rockville Centre, NY
(516) 256-3651

Outpatient Nutrition in Sleepy Hollow, NY
(914) 366-0702

Outpatient Nutrition in Basking Ridge, NJ
(908) 542-3002

Memorial Sloan-Kettering
Cancer Center

©2013 Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center
1275 York Avenue, New York, New York 10065
B-137