

Soft Nourishing Diet

How do I have a
soft nourishing diet?



If your mouth is sore or you are having difficulty chewing or swallowing, you may need to choose a softer diet. Depending on your swallowing difficulties you may need further guidance from a Speech and Language Therapist. Discuss this with your medical team.

Diet is a significant part of your care, so it is important that it is as varied and nourishing as possible. Making the right food choices will help you to get all the nourishment you need. This is very important if you have a poor appetite or have lost weight without trying to. Simple changes to your meals can really help.

This leaflet can be used as a guide to help you adapt foods in your diet, making them softer and increasing their calorie and protein content.

Keep up the calories

Eating little and often is the best way to increase your calories. The list below is a useful guide to help you get all the calories you need.

- Aim for 3 small meals and 3 snacks per day.
- Try to eat something every 2-3 hours.
- Use convenience foods if cooking smells affect your appetite or you are unable to stand for long periods.
- Avoid 'low-fat', 'diet' or 'reduced-sugar' foods for now.

If you normally follow a special diet, for example if you have raised cholesterol or diabetes please discuss this with your dietitian.

If you are experiencing difficulties taking your medication, discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist who may be able to arrange for liquid medicines.

Food fortification

Normal foods can be 'fortified' to be made more nourishing. Even though you may only manage a small amount, the following ideas will help to maximise your intake of nutrients.

- Add butter, spread, cream or cheese to mashed potatoes.
- Add grated cheese to soup, scrambled eggs, vegetables or sauces.
- Add cream, ice cream, syrup or extra sugar to puddings or stewed/canned fruit.
- Try 'full-fat' and 'thick and creamy' yoghurts and avoid those labelled 'low-fat' or 'diet'.
- Use mayonnaise, salad cream and dressings generously.
- Add extra meat, chicken, rice, lentils, pulses, tofu, Quorn or pasta to soups and casseroles, and serve with dumplings, bread and butter or potatoes.
- Frying foods can add extra calories; however, fried foods may be unpleasant if you are unwell.
- Try to have a pint of full-fat milk or fortified milk (see recipe sheet) every day. Use this in cereals, drinks, soups, sauces and puddings.

Don't forget your vitamins

It is still important to try and take some fruit and vegetables with your meals when your appetite is poor. The following list provides some suggestions to help you have more fruit and vegetables.

- A small glass of blackcurrant juice, vitamin C containing squash or fresh fruit juice*.
- Chopped banana or dried fruit with cereal.
- Whole or chopped soft fresh fruit or canned fruit as a snack – add yogurt or cream to increase the calories.
- Canned or fresh fruit as part of a pudding.
- Vegetable soup with added cream or grated cheese for extra calories.
- A portion of vegetables with main meals. Add sauce, butter or grated cheese for extra calories.

Ask your dietitian about multivitamin and mineral supplements if you are concerned.

Helpful hints

- Try readymeals and convenience foods to make cooking and preparing foods easier. Suitable soft ready meals include:
 - lasagne
 - macaroni cheese
 - spaghetti Bolognese
 - vegetarian moussaka
 - shepherd's pie
 - chicken supreme
 - fish in sauce or fish pie with potato topping.

- Packets, cans and mixes make preparing meals simpler. To make things easier try:
 - canned, packet or readymade soup
 - packet sauces such as white or cheese sauce. These can be made more nourishing by making them with milk rather than water
 - jars of creamy pasta sauces or sauces for chicken
 - vegetables – frozen or canned are just as nutritious as fresh
 - potatoes – instant or frozen mashed.
- Take drinks after meals rather than before. This ensures you do not fill yourself up too much.
- Aim to have at least one pint of full-fat milk a day, preferably 'fortified' (see recipe sheet).
- Try drinking high-calorie drinks between meals, particularly full-fat milk and nourishing milky drinks (see recipe sheet).
- A small glass of wine or sherry or a measure of spirits half an hour before a meal can help to stimulate your appetite - check with your doctor or nurse that you can have alcohol.

Store cupboard ideas

It is handy to have a store of basic foods in case it is difficult to get to the shops. The list below provides useful essentials:

- milk – long-life, dried or evaporated
- canned meat and fish – corned beef, ham, minced meat in gravy, chicken in white sauce, tuna, salmon, pilchards
- soups – canned or packet

- starchy foods – canned spaghetti, breakfast cereals, pasta, rice, noodles, instant mashed potato or canned potatoes
- fruit – canned in syrup
- vegetables – canned vegetables, beans, lentils
- puddings – canned or packets of instant milk pudding, condensed milk, sponge pudding
- drinks – malted milk drinks like Horlicks, Ovaltine, drinking chocolate, fruit squash or long-life fruit juice*.

Remember:

- Always cook food according to the manufacturers' instructions.
- If you have a freezer, keep a small store of frozen ready meals, frozen meat, frozen chicken, frozen fish, fish fingers, frozen vegetables, frozen fruits and ice cream.
- Always check the dates of food in store cupboards and freezers and do not let them go out of date.
- Do not use low-fat or low-calorie products, unless advised to do so by your dietitian.

FLUID

Fluid intake is essential. Not taking enough fluids can lead to problems with dehydration and constipation. Aim for about 1.5-2 litres (3 pints) of fluid a day.

What if I have a small appetite?

This is a common problem that affects lots of people. There can be many causes, including illness, anxiety, pain, depression, tiredness, nausea or some medication.

The following ideas may help you to eat more.

- Try to make the food as attractive as possible and serve it on a smaller plate. Don't overload the plate. You can always have second helpings or a dessert if you are still hungry.
- Have drinks about half an hour before and after foods instead of with meals, but remember you need to drink plenty.
- Try drinking high-calorie drinks between meals, particularly milk and milky drinks.
- Cold food may be better tolerated than hot food.
- Try and have your favourite foods more often to tempt your appetite.
- Strong flavours may also tempt your appetite, for example spicy foods, sweet foods, bitter foods.
- Be positive about what you can manage, every extra mouthful helps.
- Allow plenty of time for meals.

Try to relax and eat slowly in comfortable surroundings with no distractions. After eating, relax for a little while before lying down or moving around again.

- Eating in company may be helpful.
- Make the most of 'good days' or good times of the day. If you feel hungry, make sure you eat even if it is not a mealtime.

- Try taking a gentle walk outside to improve your appetite.
- Smoking can decrease your appetite, so cut down or stop if you can. Contact your GP for help with this.
- A small glass of wine or sherry or a measure of spirits half an hour before a meal can help to stimulate your appetite - check with your doctor or nurse that you can have alcohol.
- If you are regularly missing meals, please ask to see a dietitian.

Meal Suggestions

Breakfast

Many people find that if they manage even a very small breakfast they often eat better for the rest of the day.

- Cereal, such as corn flakes or Weetabix soaked in full-fat milk.
- Porridge or instant hot cereal such as Ready Brek made using full-fat/fortified milk and sugar, honey or golden syrup.
- A glass of fresh fruit juice* or blackcurrant juice or vitamin C containing squash.
- Soft fruits like stewed apple with sugar or mashed banana with fortified milk or cream.
- Yoghurts – choose thick and creamy varieties or Greek yoghurt.
- Full-fat fromage frais.

- If you are able to take bread, remove crusts and spread with butter/spread, jam, smooth peanut butter, marmalade or cheese spread.
- Scrambled eggs or omelette.

Savoury foods

Meat and Poultry

- All well-cooked, canned and ready cooked meals can be minced or finely chopped with a sauce/gravy, for example minced beef, lamb, pork, chicken and turkey.
- Cold meats, for example corned beef and spreads are also suitable.
- Undiluted condensed soup makes a suitable sauce for meat and poultry. You may need to strain it to remove coarse textures.
- Suitable softer meals include shepherd's pie, spaghetti Bolognese, fish pie, corned beef hash, chicken casserole and stew.

Soup

- All varieties – strain or liquidize these if needed.
- Condensed and packet soups can be made with fortified milk instead of water.
- Evaporated milk, cream or grated cheese can be added.
- Pulses, for example beans and lentils in soup can add to the nourishment.
- If you are able to take bread, remove the crusts and break some into soup.

Fish

- Choose filleted fish, for example haddock, plaice, canned tuna, or fishcakes.
- Steam, bake or microwave fish, flake and serve with sauces such as cheese, parsley or undiluted condensed soup. Sauces help to moisten the fish and add extra nourishment, especially if made with fortified milk.

Eggs

- Try them as an omelette, boiled, poached or scrambled.
- Add fortified milk, butter/spread or grated cheese whenever possible.

Cheese

- Add cheese to sauces and vegetables.
- Try macaroni cheese, cauliflower cheese or cheese pudding.

Potatoes

- Mash potatoes adding fortified milk, butter, cream, grated cheese, cheese spread or mayonnaise.
- Instant mashed potato is a useful alternative.
- Baked potatoes (do not eat skin) with a soft filling such as egg or tuna mayonnaise.

Pasta

- Cook pasta until soft and serve with extra sauce.
- Add creamy sauces where possible and/or grated cheese.
- Try macaroni cheese, ravioli, lasagne or spaghetti.

Vegetables

- Cook until soft, mash if necessary and serve with butter/spread.
- Try adding grated cheese, mayonnaise or salad cream.
- Fresh, frozen or canned vegetables are suitable.
- Add white or cheese sauces.
- The most suitable vegetables to mash include swede, carrots, parsnips, cauliflower, broccoli and butternut squash.

Puddings

- Home made, canned or packet varieties are all suitable. Try custard, semolina or rice pudding.
- Try sponge puddings, trifle, chocolate mousse, ice cream, milk jelly, blancmange, mousses, crème caramel, tiramisu, full-fat yoghurt and yoghurt drinks.
- Serve sponge puddings with cream, ice cream or custard to make them softer.
- Choose softer fruits such as ripe bananas or pears or choose soft canned fruit in syrup. Mash, stew or purée fruit if required.
- Add evaporated milk, cream, ice cream, honey, jam or syrup.

Snacks and nourishing drinks

If you are only managing small meals, it is important to try and have additional snacks and nourishing drinks. Here are some ideas.

- Milky drinks made with fortified milk (see recipe sheet).
- Flavoured milk drinks such as Mars or Nesquik.
- Glass of full-fat milk and a biscuit or cake.
- Suitable breakfast cereal soaked in full-fat/fortified milk.
- Porridge with full-fat/fortified milk and sugar.
- Individual desserts such as chocolate mousse, fromage frais and yoghurts.
- Jelly and ice cream.

Snacking throughout the day can increase your risk of dental caries; remember to look after your teeth by brushing regularly.

Special products

The following products can be bought 'over the counter' from most chemists and some supermarkets. They may be taken as a drink between meals or be used to replace a meal if necessary. Ask to see a dietitian if you are frequently missing meals as they will help to ensure that your diet is appropriate.

- Build Up – make up sweet flavours with cold milk and savoury flavours with hot milk.
- Complan – make up sweet and savoury flavours with cold or hot water. Milk gives a creamier taste and is more nourishing.

Sample menu

Breakfast – Porridge with added cream and sugar, mashed banana with fortified milk.

Mid Morning – Thick and creamy yoghurt with a spoonful of jam.

Lunch – Chicken and vegetable soup with added cream, slice of bread, with crusts removed and a generous spreading of butter.

Mid Afternoon – Glass of fortified milk and sponge cake.

Evening Meal – Flaked fish in cheese sauce, mashed potatoes with cream, butter and grated cheese, mashed carrots with butter, jelly served with ice cream and soft canned fruit in syrup.

Supper – Milk shake, hot chocolate or coffee made with fortified milk, slice of bread with crusts removed and cheese spread.

* Fruit juices, in particular cranberry, grapefruit, and Seville orange juice, may affect the way in which some drugs work. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or dietitian for further information.

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