DIFFICULTY WITH SWALLOWING

Cancer and its treatment can sometimes make it hard to swallow food. If you are having trouble swallowing, try eating softer, more liquid foods. Using liquid nutrition drinks may be helpful if you are not able to eat the food you usually would eat. Your doctor may also refer you to a speech therapist to teach you how to swallow more easily.

- If appropriate, get a swallowing evaluation for recommendations about what the best diet and fluid consistency are for you.
- Drink 6 to 8 cups of fluid each day and thicken the fluid to the right consistency for you.
- Eat small meals often during the day.
- If you need thicker liquids to help you swallow, try adding gelatin, tapioca, flour, cornstarch, pureed vegetables, instant potatoes, dry infant cereals, or commercially prepared thickeners.
- If you cough or choke when you eat, report this to your doctor immediately, especially if you also have a fever.
- Talk with your health care team! Let them know if food does not taste good or if you are having a hard time swallowing food or fluids.

Selection of Thickening Agents

- Gelatin: Can be used with cakes, cookies, crackers, sandwiches, pureed fruits, and other cold foods. It forms a soft gel that aids in swallowing these foods. Mix 1 tablespoon unflavored gelatin until dissolved in 2 cups liquid and pour over food. Allow food to sit until it is saturated.
- Tapioca, flour, or cornstarch: Will thicken liquids to different consistencies but needs to be cooked.
- Pureed vegetables: Useful for soups but can alter the flavor.
- Dry infant cereal, instant potatoes: Useful for soups but can alter the flavor. Useful when a very thick cereal produce is needed.
- Commercial thickeners: A fluid’s consistency can be adjusted depending upon the amount used. Follow the instructions on the label.

Food List

Pureed Thick-Liquid Diet

- Meat and meat substitutes: Thickened milk; yogurt without fruit; cottage cheese; sour cream; pureed meat, poultry, and fish; casseroles; soft scrambled eggs.
- Breads, cereals, rice, and pasta: Cooked cereals, such as cream of wheat or cream of rice; slurred* breads as tolerated; pureed pasta or rice.
- Fruits and vegetables: Pureed fruit and vegetables without seeds or skins; mashed potatoes; thickened juices and nectars.
- Condiments, beverages, and desserts: Thick syrups or honey; butter or margarine; spices; milkshakes; custard or pudding; slurred* cakes or cookies as tolerated.
Mechanical Soft Thick-Liquid Diet

- Meat and meat substitutes: Milk, yogurt, cheeses, and sour cream; all eggs, ground meats and ground meat casseroles; fish; sandwiches made with ground meats or spreads.

- Breads, cereals, rice, and pasta: Soft breads; graham crackers; cookies; soft cold cereals in milk; pancakes and waffles; pasta, rice

- Fruit and vegetables: Bananas; canned fruit; soft, well-cooked or pureed vegetables.

- Condiments, beverages, and desserts: Syrups and honey; butter and margarine; spices; thick fluids; soft desserts that do not require much chewing, such as ice cream, sherbet, flavored gelatin, pudding, custard, soft cakes, or soft cookies.

If thin liquids are recommended for you, select from the following: coffee, tea, soft drinks, liquid nutritional supplements, Italian ice, sherbet, broth, or thin cream soups.

* A slurry is a thickener dissolved in a liquid. A slurried bread or cake has a thickened liquid poured on top to make it easier to swallow.