

# Pureed 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 and buy pureed 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
- leftover food stays in your mouth after 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 an 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 **pureed and thickened liquid diet** for dysphagia. This booklet tells you how to do this. You will learn how to buy and prepare pureed foods 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.

## Pureed foods

Pureed foods do not need chewing. They are completely smooth with no lumps, skins, strings or seeds.

### How to check that food is pureed

Food that is pureed:

- Is usually eaten with a spoon
- Holds its shape on a spoon
- Flows very slowly
- Is not sticky
- Falls off spoon when tilted in a single spoonful
- Does not separate into liquid and solid
- Cannot be sucked through a straw



## Eating out

Try calling ahead if you plan to eat out. You may be able to have the restaurant accommodate your needs. Try checking restaurant menus online to decide on the best foods for you 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 pureed foods at home

You can puree most foods using a blender or food processor.

1. Prepare soft and well-cooked foods from the lists on page 11.
2. Place food in a blender or food processor.
3. Depending on the type of food, add liquid to the blender or food processor.
4. Blend until smooth.
5. Use the checklist on page 4 to make sure the food is pureed.
  - If food is too runny, you may need to add a thickening powder or gel (see page 7).
  - If any lumps or skins remain, strain the food with a fine mesh strainer.

<b>Adding liquid:</b>		
<p>To make pureed foods more smooth, you can add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• water</li> <li>• juice</li> <li>• broth</li> <li>• milk</li> <li>• gravies</li> <li>• yogurt</li> <li>• sauces</li> <li>• supplement drinks</li> </ul>		
 <b>Do not add too much liquid or the food may be too runny.</b>		
<b>Pureeing meats:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use meats that have been cooked with moisture (boiled, poached, steamed, or braised).</li> <li>• Add 4 tablespoons (60 ml) of liquid for every 2 ounces (60 grams) of meat and puree. Add more liquid if needed.</li> </ul>		
<b>Pureeing meals:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can buy or prepare meals made with soft and well-cooked foods that can be pureed at home</li> <li>• These foods include entrees such as pasta dishes, cooked meats, and canned foods (soup, chili, and stews).</li> </ul>		

Some very soft foods like ripe bananas, well cooked potatoes and avocado can be mashed with a fork or masher until smooth. A small amount of liquid may be added to make the food smooth and moist.

## Buying pureed foods

Some foods naturally have a pureed texture. You can buy them at the grocery store and they are ready to eat.

These foods include:

- yogurt
- smooth puddings
- smooth hummus
- applesauce and other fruit sauces
- instant cereals like oat bran and cream of wheat
- baby food

**Do not buy foods that have added nuts, seeds, fruit or other chunks.**

You may also buy pureed foods online or over the phone and have them delivered to your home. Ask your Registered Dietitian or Speech Language Pathologist for a list of companies that offer this service.

## Thickened liquids

Your health care team will check one box 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 find 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 full 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.

A yellow sticky note icon with a red pushpin at the top left corner. The text "Helpful Tips!" is written in black on the note.

- You may need to use a blender to remove lumps of thickener.
- Some thickeners 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 premade 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. Some stores may not have thickening powders or thickened liquid products on hand. You may need to place an order with them in advance.

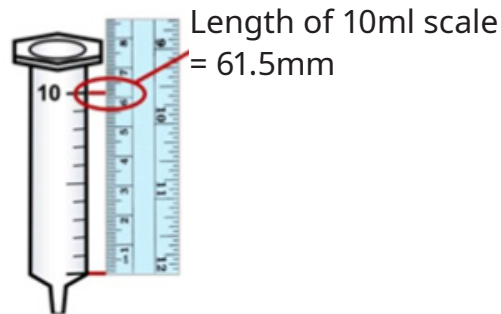
Ask your health care provider for a list of where to buy these products. Make sure you purchase thickened liquids that are the same thickness as your health care team recommendation.



## 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:

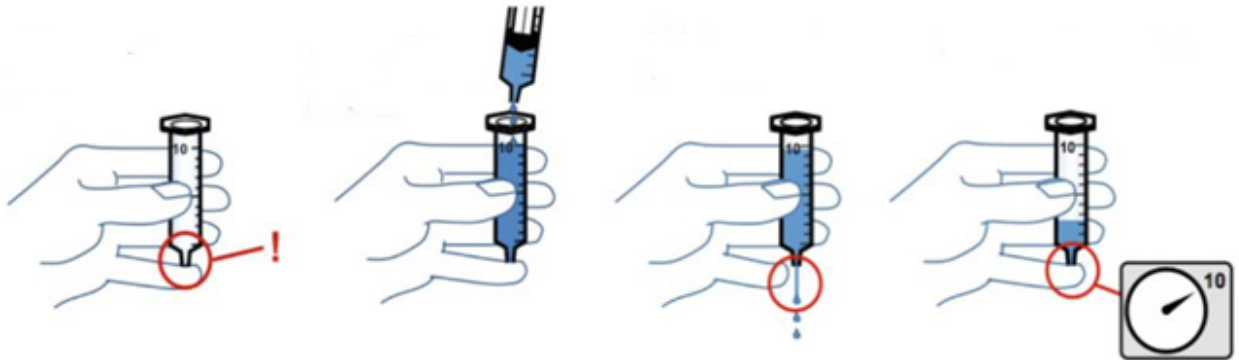
- ✓ Prepare the thickened liquid by following the instructions on the package
- ✓ Make sure the inside of the syringe is clean and dry
- ✓ Have a 10 second timer ready

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>• Pureed cooked or canned vegetables</li> <li>• Pureed, canned or soft fruits (such as applesauce)</li> <li>• Pureed or smooth mashed potatoes</li> <li>• Mashed soft fruits and vegetables (such as banana, avocado)</li> <li>• Thickened fruit or vegetable juice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tough, raw, or stringy vegetables (such as celery)</li> <li>• Tough, stringy, pulpy or watery fruits (such as orange, pineapple, watermelon)</li> </ul>
<b>Grain Products</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooked cereals (such as cream of wheat, oat bran, infant cereal, cream of rice)</li> <li>• Pureed barley, bulgur</li> <li>• Pureed congee or rice</li> <li>• Pureed pasta or noodles</li> <li>• Pureed bread, pancakes or muffins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dry cereal</li> <li>• Grain products with seeds, nuts or fruit</li> <li>• Crackers, melba toast, rice cakes</li> <li>• Waffles, French toast</li> </ul>

	✓ <b>Foods to choose</b>	✗ <b>Foods to avoid</b>
<b>Milk and Alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smooth yogurt without fruits, seeds or nuts</li> <li>• Cheese as an ingredient in pureed foods</li> <li>• Pureed cottage cheese</li> <li>• Smooth pudding and custard</li> <li>• Thickened milk or soy beverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yogurt with fruit, seeds or nuts</li> <li>• Hard cheeses, soft cheeses, cheese spread and cream cheese (not as an ingredient in pureed foods)</li> <li>• Ice cream</li> <li>• Rice pudding, tapioca pudding</li> </ul>
<b>Meat and Alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pureed meat, poultry and fish without bones</li> <li>• Pureed beans, lentils, chickpeas and other legumes</li> <li>• Mashed soft or silken tofu</li> <li>• Pureed scrambled egg</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> </ul>
<b>Mixed Dishes and Entrees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pureed casseroles and entrees made with ingredients in this 'Foods to choose' column (such as macaroni and cheese, lasagna)</li> <li>• Smooth, pureed soups with thickener if needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dishes or soups with ingredients from this</li> <li>• 'Foods to avoid' column, as they do not puree well</li> <li>• Thin soups</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 (puddings, custard etc.)</li> <li>• Honey, syrups, sugars,</li> <li>• seedless jams and jellies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ice cream, sherbet, frozen yogurt, Popsicles</li> <li>• Gelatin desserts (such as Jell-o)</li> <li>• Hard or soft candies</li> <li>• Carbonated beverages</li> </ul>
<b>Condiments, Fats and Oils</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Butter, margarine, oil</li> <li>• Pureed or smooth gravies and other sauces</li> <li>• Ketchup, smooth mustard, mayonnaise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salad dressings with grainy spices (such as coarse ground pepper, grainy mustard)</li> </ul>

## Sample daily menu

Here is an example of eating well on a puree and thickened liquid diet.

<b>Breakfast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Muffin pureed with milk</li><li>• Cream of Wheat</li><li>• Pureed scrambled egg</li><li>• Thickened milk</li><li>• Thickened apple juice</li></ul>
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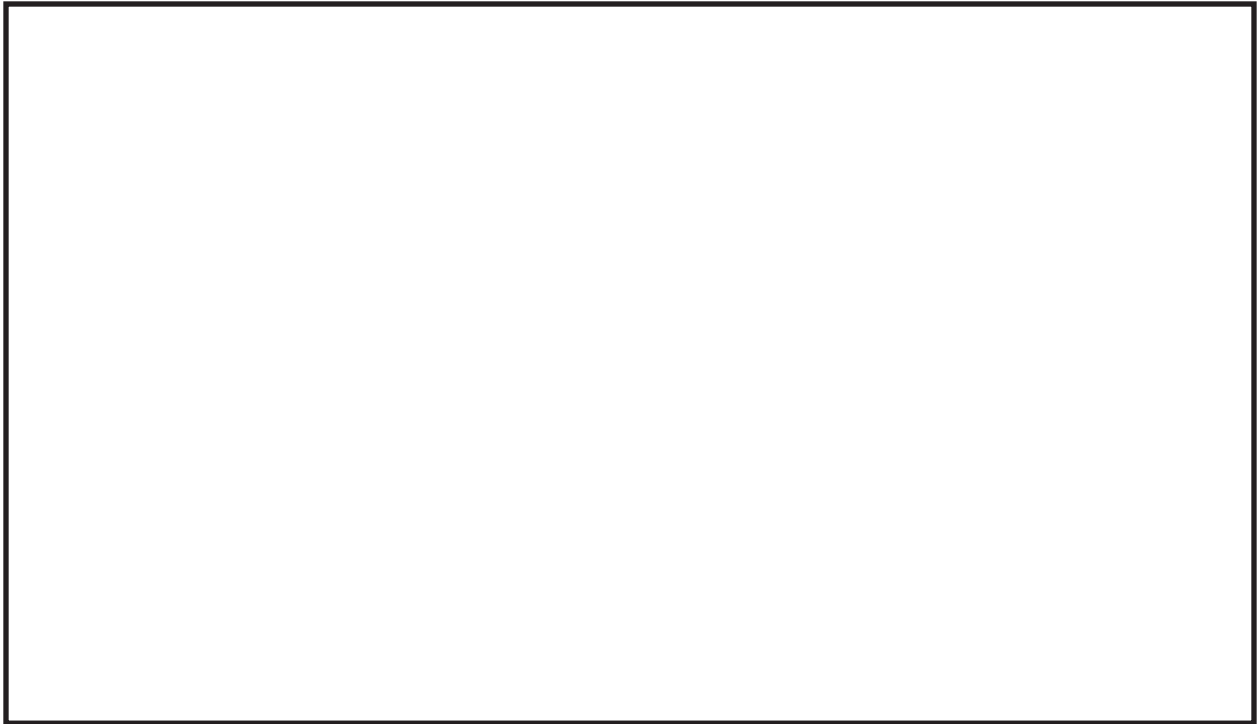
<b>Lunch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pureed turkey</li><li>• Mashed potatoes with gravy</li><li>• Pureed green beans</li><li>• Chocolate pudding</li><li>• Thickened milk</li><li>• Strained and thickened cream of mushroom soup</li></ul>
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<b>Afternoon Snack</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Applesauce</li><li>• Vanilla yogurt</li><li>• Thickened water</li></ul>
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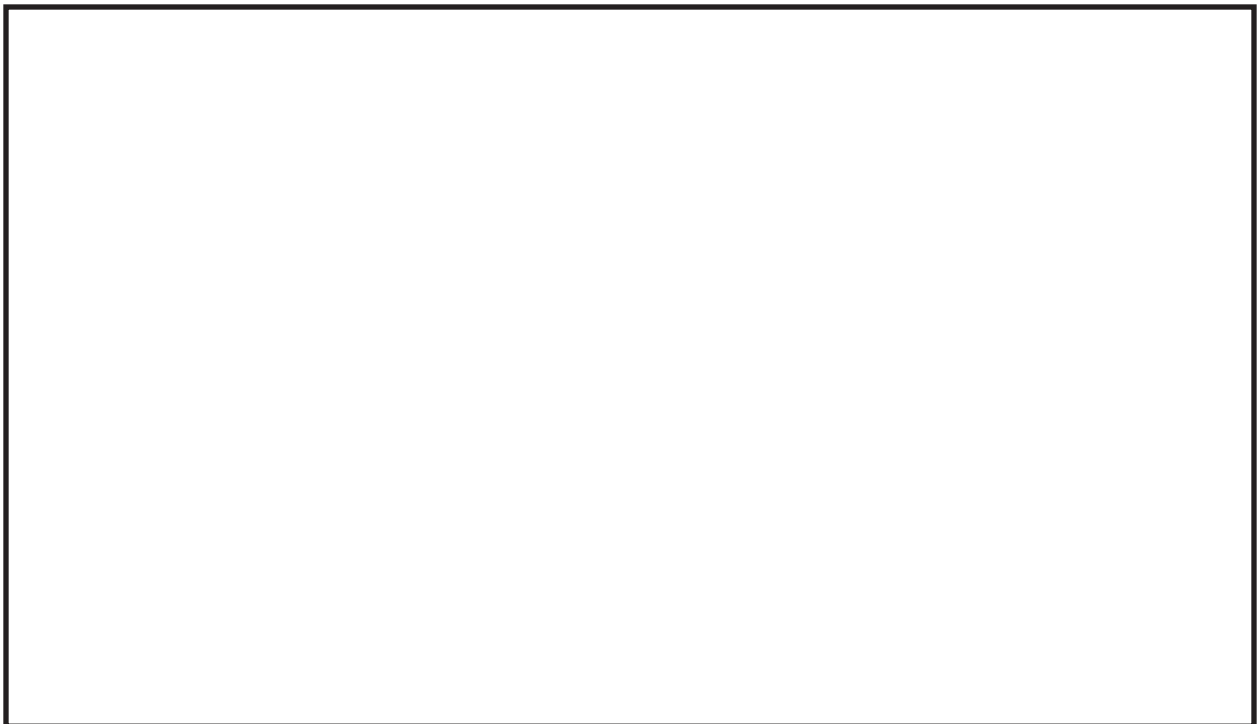
<b>Dinner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pureed pasta with tomato sauce, chicken, and broccoli</li><li>• Mashed banana</li><li>• Pureed and thickened minestrone soup</li><li>• Thickened milk</li></ul>
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<b>Evening Snack</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pureed cottage cheese</li><li>• Pureed canned fruit</li></ul>
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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.

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

**Disclaimers:**

This document does not include a full list of brands or products. The University Health Network does not recommend one brand over another and is not responsible for any products listed. Please contact each company directly to find out more about their products.

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