

Dysphagia Eating Tips

When you have a hard time swallowing, you have dysphagia. Dysphagia raises the risk of getting food or liquid into your lungs. This is called aspiration. Changing the texture and consistency of the things you eat and drink can help keep them out of your lungs.

This factsheet gives tips to prevent aspiration. It also tells about different ways to prepare food so you can swallow it safely.

Your Speech Pathologist

Your speech pathologist will work with you to improve your ability to swallow. You may have some exercises to do. You may learn some new ways to swallow that help keep food and drink out of your lungs.

The speech pathologist will also help you choose foods and ways to prepare them that are safer for swallowing. As your treatment progresses, your diet and way of swallowing may change. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your speech pathologist.

Lower the Risk of Aspiration

These tips can help lower your risk of getting food or liquid in your lungs:

- Sit upright when you eat or drink. Stay upright for 30 minutes after meals.
- Eat and drink slowly.
- Focus on chewing and swallowing. Avoid talking and other distractions such as watching TV while you eat and drink.
- Take small bites and sips.
- Make sure your mouth is empty before you take the next bite or sip.

Consistency of Liquids

When you have dysphagia, we talk about the thickness of liquids with these terms: thin, nectar, and honey.

Liquids at the consistency of water are **thin**. Here are some thin liquids:

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| • Broth | • Milk |
| • Coffee | • Soft drinks |
| • Ensure | • Tea |
| • Fruit juices | • Water |

Jello, ice cream, and ice are also in this group because they melt to a thin consistency.

You can use a thickening agent to bring thin liquids to a **nectar** consistency that is easier to swallow. Here are examples of nectar-thick liquids:

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| • Buttermilk | • Tomato juice |
| • Fruit nectars | • V-8 |
| • Some shakes | |

You can thicken liquids even more to the consistency of **honey**.

Food Textures

When you have dysphagia, we group foods in different levels from 1 to 3, from very easy to swallow to less easy to swallow.

Level 1 foods are pureed and need no chewing. You can puree many vegetables, fruits, and meats. Here are some examples of other Level 1 foods:

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| • Applesauce | • Pudding |
| • Baby foods | • Sherbet |
| • Cream of Wheat | • Soup, strained |
| • Potatoes, mashed | • Yogurt, no chunks |

Level 2 foods must be soft, moist, and easy to chew. You can think of these foods as ground, rather than pureed. Here are some examples of Level 2 foods:

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| • Cottage cheese | • Noodles |
| • Eggs | • Potatoes, baked |
| • Fish, well-cooked | • Refried beans |
| • Ground meats | • Tortillas, flour |

Level 3 foods are soft, easy to chew, and cut into ½-inch pieces. Here are some examples of Level 3 foods:

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| • Bananas | • Meats, chopped and moist |
| • Breads, soft | • Tortillas, corn |
| • Cookies, soft | • Vegetables, well-cooked |
| • Eggs | |
| • French fries | |

At the **soft diet** level, your food should be easy to cut with a fork. Avoid hard, crunchy foods and tough meats. On the **general diet** level, you can eat all foods with no restrictions.