

Eating After Your Esophageal Surgery

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(Stomach Fundoplication, Hiatal Hernia Repair, Achalasia Surgery, etc.)

After your esophageal surgery, expect some sticking with swallowing over the next 1–2 months.

If food sticks when you eat, it is called "dysphagia." This is due to swelling around your esophagus at the wrap and hiatal diaphragm repair. It will gradually ease off over the next few months. To help you through this temporary phase, **we start you out on a pureed (blenderized) diet.**

Your first meal in the hospital was thin liquids. You should have been given a pureed diet by the time you left the hospital. We ask patients to stay on a pureed diet for the first 2–3 weeks to avoid anything getting "stuck" near your recent surgery. Don't be alarmed if your ability to swallow doesn't progress according to this plan. Everyone is different and some diets can advance more or less quickly.

Some BASIC RULES to follow are:

- Maintain an upright position whenever eating or drinking.
- Take small bites—just a teaspoon-size bite at a time.
- Eat slowly. It may also help to eat only one food at a time.
- Consider nibbling through smaller, more frequent meals and avoid the urge to eat BIG meals.
- Do not push through feelings of fullness, nausea, or bloatedness.
- Do not mix solid foods and liquids in the same mouthful.
- Try not to "wash foods down" with large gulps of liquids.
- Avoid carbonated (bubbly/fizzy) drinks. Understand that it will be hard to burp and belch at first. This gradually improves with time. Expect to be more gassy/flatulent/bloated initially. Walking will help you work through that. Maalox/Gas-X can help as well.
- Eat in a relaxed atmosphere and minimize distractions.
- Avoid talking while eating.
- Do not use straws.
- Following each meal, sit in an upright position (90-degree angle) for 60 to 90 minutes. Going for a short walk can help as well.
- If food does stick, **don't panic.** Try to relax and let the food pass on its own. Sipping WARM LIQUID such as strong hot black tea can also help slide it down.

Be gradual in changes and use common sense:

- If you are easily tolerating a certain "level" of foods, advance to the next level gradually.
- If you are having trouble swallowing a particular food, then avoid it.
- If food is sticking when you advance your diet, go back to thinner previous diet (the lower LEVEL) for 1–2 days.

LEVEL 1 = PUREED DIET

Do for the first 2 WEEKS AFTER SURGERY

- Foods in this group are pureed or blenderized to a smooth, mashed potato-like consistency.
- If necessary, the pureed foods can keep their shape with the addition of a thickening agent.
- Meat should be pureed to a smooth, pasty consistency. Hot broth or gravy may be added to the pureed meat, approximately 1 oz. of liquid per 3 oz. serving of meat.
- CAUTION: If any foods do not puree into a smooth consistency, swallowing will be more difficult. (For example, nuts or seeds sometimes do not blend well.)

Hot Foods

Pureed scrambled eggs and cheese
Baby cereals
Thinned cooked cereals (no lumps)
Pureed French toast or pancakes
Mashed potatoes
Pureed parsley, au gratin, scalloped potatoes, candied sweet potatoes
Pureed buttered or alfredo noodles
Pureed vegetables (no corn or peas)
Pureed soups and creamed soups
Pureed scalloped apples
Gravies
Sauces, cheese, tomato, barbecue, white, creamed
Any baby food
Alcohol in moderation (not beer or champagne)
Coffee or tea

Cold Foods

Pureed cottage cheese
Thickened juices and nectars
Thickened milk or eggnog
Ensure
Ice cream
Fruit or Italian ice, sherbet
Plain yogurt
Instant breakfast
Smooth pudding, mousse, custard
Whipped gelatin
Sugar, syrup, honey, jelly
Cream
Creamer
Margarine
Mayonnaise
Ketchup, mustard
Apple sauce

SAMPLE MENU: PUREED DIET

Breakfast

Orange juice, 1/2 cup
Cream of wheat, 1/2 cup
Scrambled eggs, mashed or blended with cheese, 1/2 cup
Tea or coffee, 1 cup
Whole milk, 1 cup
Non-dairy creamer, 2 Tbsp

Lunch

Pineapple juice, 1/2 cup
Mashed potatoes, 1/2 cup
Pureed cooled broccoli, 1/2 cup
Apple sauce, 1/2 cup
Coffee or tea

Dinner

Pureed turkey, barley soup, 3/4 cup
Pureed Hawaiian chicken, 3 oz
Mashed potatoes, 1/2 cup
Pureed spinach, 1/2 cup
Frozen yogurt, 1/2 cup
Tea or coffee

LEVEL 2 = SOFT DIET

After your first 2 weeks, you can advance to a soft diet. Keep on this diet until everything goes down easily.

Hot Foods

White fish
Stuffed fish
Baby food meals
Minced soft cooked, scrambled, poached eggs
Souffle & omelets
Cooked cereals
potatoes

Cold Foods

Cottage cheese
Junior baby fruit
Semi thickened juices
nectars
Ripe mashed bananas
Canned fruit, pineapple sauce, milk
Milkshake

Hot Foods

Buttered or Alfredo noodles
 Cooked cooled vegetable
 Sherbet
 Vegetable soup or alphabet soup
 Gravies
 Sugar, syrup, honey, jelly
 Sauces: Cheese, creamed, barbecue, tomato, white
 Coffee or tea

Cold Foods

Custard
 Puddings, including tapioca
 Yogurt
 Fruit ice, Italian ice
 Whipped gelatin
 Junior baby desserts
 Cream
 Margarine

SAMPLE MENU: LEVEL 2

Breakfast

Orange juice, 1/2 cup
 Oatmeal, 1/2 cup
 Scrambled eggs with cheese, 1/2 cup
 Decaffeinated tea, 1 cup
 Whole milk, 1 cup
 Non-dairy creamer, 2 Tbsp

Lunch

Pineapple juice, 1/2 cup
 Minced beef, 3 oz
 Gravy, 2 Tbsp
 Mashed potatoes, 1/2 cup
 Minced fresh broccoli, 1/2 cup
 Applesauce, 1/2 cup
 Coffee, 1 cup

Dinner

Turkey, barley soup, 3/4 cup
 Minced Hawaiian chicken, 3 oz
 Mashed potatoes, 1/2 cup
 Cooked spinach, 1/2 cup
 Frozen yogurt, 1/2 cup
 Non-dairy creamer, 2 Tbsp

LEVEL 3 = CHOPPED DIET

- After all the foods in level 2 (soft diet) are passing through well you should advance up to more chopped foods.
- It is still important to cut these foods into small pieces and eat slowly.

Hot Foods

Poultry
 Chopped Swedish meatballs
 Meat salads (ground or flaked meat)
 Flaked fish (tuna)
 Poached or scrambled eggs
 Souffles and omelets
 Cooked cereals
 Chopped French toast or pancakes
 Noodles or pasta (no rice)
 Cooked vegetables (no frozen peas, corn, or mixed vegetables)
 Canned small sweet peas
 Creamed soup or vegetable soup
 Pureed vegetable soup or alphabet soup
 Ground scalloped apples
 Gravies
 Sauces: Cheese, creamed, barbecue, tomato, white

Cold Foods

Cottage cheese
 Yogurt
 Milk
 Milkshakes
 Soft, cold, dry cereal
 Fruit juices or nectars
 Chopped canned fruit
 Canned fruit cocktail
 Pudding, mousse, custard
 Green salad
 Ice cream
 Fruit ice, Italian ice
 Non-dairy creamer
 Margarine
 Mayonnaise
 Ketchup

Hot Foods

Coffee or tea

Cold Foods

Mustard

SAMPLE MENU: LEVEL 3

Breakfast

Orange juice, 1/2 cup
Oatmeal, 1/2 cup
Scrambled eggs with cheese, 1/2 cup
Decaffeinated tea, 1 cup
Whole milk, 1 cup
Non-dairy creamer, 2 Tbsp
Ketchup, 1 Tbsp
Margarine, 1 tsp
Salt, 1/4 tsp
Sugar, 2 tsp

Lunch

Pineapple juice, 1/2 cup
Ground beef, 3 oz
Gravy, 2 Tbsp
Mashed potatoes, 1/2 cup
Cooked spinach, 1/2 cup
Applesauce, 1/2 cup
Decaffeinated coffee
Whole milk
Non-dairy creamer, 2 Tbsp
Margarine, 1 tsp
Salt, 1/4 tsp

Dinner

Pureed turkey, barley soup, 3/4 cup
Barbecue chicken, 3 oz
Mashed potatoes, 1/2 cup
Ground fresh broccoli, 1/2 cup
Frozen yogurt, 1/2 cup
Decaffeinated tea, 1 cup
Non-dairy creamer, 2 Tbsp
Margarine, 1 tsp
Salt, 1/4 tsp
Sugar, 1 tsp

LEVEL 4: REGULAR FOODS

- Foods in this group are soft, moist, regularly textured foods.
- This level includes meat and breads, which tend to be the hardest things to swallow.
- Eat very slowly, chew well and continue to avoid carbonated drinks.
- Most people are at this level in 4–6 weeks.

Hot Foods

Baked fish or skinned
Souffles and omelets
Eggs
Stuffed shells
Spaghetti with meat sauce
Cooked cereal
French toast or pancakes
Buttered toast
Noodles or pasta (no rice)
Potatoes (all types)
Soft, cooked vegetables (no corn, lima, or baked beans)
Creamed soups or vegetable soup
Canned chicken noodle soup
Gravies
Bacon dressing
Sauce: Cheese, creamed, barbecue, tomato, white
Decaffeinated tea or coffee
Pork chops

Cold Foods

Soft cheeses - cottage cheese
Cream cheese
Yogurt
Milk
Milkshakes
Cold dry cereals (no nuts, dried fruit, coconut)
Crackers
Fruit juices or nectars
Canned fruit
Ripe bananas
Peeled, ripe, fresh fruit
Cakes (no nuts, dried fruit, coconut)
Plain doughnuts
Ice cream
Pudding, mousse, custard
Fruit ice, Italian ice, sherbet
Whipped gelatin
Regular gelatin

Hot Foods**Cold Foods**

Canned fruited gelatin molds
Sugar, syrup, honey, jam, jelly
Cream
Non-dairy
Margarine
Oil
Mayonnaise
Ketchup
Mustard