

# Swallowing Problems

## **Introduction**

This booklet has been compiled to help with swallowing problems. We hope the following information will be useful.

## **Causes of swallowing problems**

These can be many and varied. They range from acute, short-term problems such as mouth ulcers to longer chronic illnesses such as oral cancer or strokes. Longer term swallowing difficulties may require the input of the dietician, speech and language therapists or the nurse.

## **Food textures**

Food textures vary from liquids to smooth, chewy or crunchy. As a general rule, the chewy textures such as meat, dried fruit or raw carrots are the most difficult to swallow. If something cannot be swallowed safely, it is better to spit it out than to persist in trying to swallow it.

## **Advice on swallowing problems**

The diet of people who have swallowing problems can become boring and limited but with a little imagination and effort it can be both appetising and nutritious. It is still possible to eat your favourite foods, but small changes can be made to make them easier to chew. For example, add sauces and gravies to minced or chopped cooked meats and cut crusts off bread for softer sandwiches. Some people find day old bread, toast or wholemeal bread easier to chew than fresh bread as these are less doughy. If you have access to a blender you could liquidize foods.

## **Suggestions for softer meals**

### **Breakfasts**

- Porridge—serve with milk or cream
- Instant hot cereals
- Cereals such as Weetbix, cornflakes and bran flakes—hot milk will help to soften them
- Try a thick and creamy yoghurt or bowl of hot milk pudding with jam or soft tinned fruit
- If you can manage bread or toast, remove the crusts and serve with butter or margarine, jam or marmalade

### **Savoury meals**

- Tender, minced beef or well cooked lamb, ham, pork or chicken can be suitable
- Try dishes such as shepherd's pie, lasagne, ravioli, moussaka, spaghetti bolognese or

chicken supreme. These can be homemade or bought already prepared

- Some cold meats, e.g. corned beef, meat paste or pate are also suitable. Corned beef can be served with a sauce or gravy
- Homemade, tinned or packet gravies and sauces are useful to help give variety

### **Fish**

- Fish, best bought filleted, can be steamed, baked or microwaved and then flaked and served with a savoury sauce such as cheese, parsley or white sauce.
- A simple sauce can be made by heating undiluted condensed soup such as mushroom or tomato
- Tinned fish such as tuna, salmon, pilchards and sardines are also soft

### **Eggs**

- These are useful for a quick nourishing meal. Try them scrambled or in omelettes

### **Cheese**

- Grated cheese can be added to sauces and mashed potatoes or served as a main meal such as cauliflower cheese or macaroni cheese. Cheese can also be added to egg dishes

### **Pasta**

- There are many types of pasta which can be made into soft, tasty meals
- Try macaroni cheese, ravioli, lasagne and spaghetti bolognaise, either homemade or already prepared

### **Potatoes**

- Serve mashed potatoes with a meal or try baked potatoes (do not eat skin) with a soft filling such as corned beef and ketchup, baked beans with grated cheese or egg mayonnaise
- Instant mashed potato is a useful alternative

### **Vegetables**

- Fresh, frozen or tinned vegetables should be cooked until soft
- Many vegetables can be mashed, e.g. carrots and turnips

### **Pulses**

- Pulses such as peas, beans and lentils can also be added to soups, stews and casseroles
- Use tinned beans for convenience

### **Puddings and Sweets**

#### **Hot milk puddings**

- Homemade, tinned or packet varieties such as rice, custard, semolina are all suitable

#### **Other soft puddings**

- Try sponge, jam roll, eve's pudding or crumble, served with custard, ice cream or

cream

- Other suitable puddings include trifle, mousse, blancmange, Instant Whip, Angel Delight, jelly, crème caramel, yoghurt and ice cream
- Use a sauce on top of puddings such as crumbles and sponges. This will soften them and make them easier to swallow. Try adding cream, evaporated or condensed milk, pouring custard, natural or Greek yoghurt

## **Fruit**

- Fruit can be mashed or liquidised if necessary
- If fresh fruit is eaten this should be peeled and any seeds removed before eating
- Soft tinned fruits or fruit stewed in a little fruit juice are also suitable

## **Desert sauce recipes**

### **Mint chocolate sauce**

6 chocolate mint creams  
1 small tin evaporated milk

*Melt the mint creams and milk together over a low heat. Serve hot over ice cream*

### **Chocolate sauce**

1 bar chocolate  
100 mls evaporated milk

*Melt chocolate over a low heat and add evaporated milk*

### **Mars Bar sauce**

1 Mars bar

*Melt the Mars Bar over a low heat. Serve hot over ice cream*

## **Pureed foods**

Sometimes food is not soft enough to chew easily and needs to be pureed to make it smoother. However, sometimes this can lead to a runny consistency. If this happens, maizena or Thick & Easy (Fresenius) can be added to hot and cold foods to thicken and improve consistency. Alternatively, you can add mashed potato to a runny savoury dish to thicken it.

## **Use of a liquidiser/food processor**

- Foods should be prepared and cooked as usual before putting into the liquidiser. (Remove any skins, bones, fat or gristle.)

- Adding stock, gravy, sauces, milk or condensed soup to food makes them easier to puree. The thickness of the meal will depend on how much liquid is added
- If the food is to be served hot, return to the pan and reheat thoroughly. Check for taste and season as required.
- To make your meals more attractive—
  - Purée meat separately from vegetables so that each food can be eaten separately to enjoy the flavours
  - Use bowls instead of plates for serving

## **Fluids**

Remember it is important to have a good fluid intake. Aim for 8-10 cups of any fluid per day. Sometimes it is necessary to thicken up fluids (drinks or soups) using Maizena or Thick & Easy.