

Eating and Drinking after Head & Neck Cancer Surgery

Departments of Speech & Language
Therapy and Nutrition & Dietetics



What are the effects of surgery?

Surgical treatment of head and neck cancer can change the way you eat and drink. This can be due to swelling, the type of reconstruction you have had, pain and/or removal of teeth. Sometimes surgery can affect the nerves and muscles that control the way you swallow making it more difficult to manage food in your mouth.

This information leaflet will provide you with advice and guidance as to what to eat and drink at home and to prevent weight loss after surgery.

What swallowing problems may I experience?

The following swallowing problems could be experienced after surgery:

- Difficulty chewing
- Difficulty swallowing
- Reduced mouth opening
- Drooling and dribbling when eating
- The feeling of too much saliva in the mouth
- Difficulty clearing food from the mouth
- Coughing when swallowing.

What will happen after surgery?

It takes time for your mouth to recover and heal after head and neck surgery. During this time you may not be able to have any food or drink by mouth, so you may have a feeding tube to ensure that you receive adequate nutrition.

If you have a 'flap' reconstruction (a piece of skin/muscle that has been transferred into your mouth) you will not damage it or harm it by eating once you have been advised it is safe to do so by the surgeons and speech and language therapists (SLTs).

The SLTs and nursing staff on the ward will give you advice and support on keeping your mouth clean and the dietitian will advise on your nutritional requirements.

After surgery, patients normally start with a liquid diet, as this is easiest to swallow, before gradually progressing onto pureed and easy chew, moist foods. Generally, the more you eat the quicker the function in your mouth will improve as eating food acts as exercise for your tongue, jaw and mouth.

The SLTs will support you and provide information on how to swallow food and drinks most effectively and safely after surgery. This may include particular head positions or techniques to make swallowing easier.

What will happen when I go home?

Before you go home the dietitian will advise on your individual diet and this may include advice on boosting your calorie & protein intake.

It is likely that you will be given nutritional supplements (e.g. milkshake drinks) to help meet your nutritional requirements while you get used to eating and drinking again.

As you begin eating and drinking and your swallowing improves you may not need as many supplement drinks.

You may see a SLT and dietitian as an outpatient if you require support once you have returned home.

If you require further treatment such as post-operative radiotherapy, you will receive additional information and advice at the planning stages of this treatment and as required during the treatment.

Types of nourishing drinks.

To start with, you may find it easier to get energy and protein from fluids.

- Use full fat milk.
- Add full fat milk or cream to tinned/homemade soups.
- To fortify milk add 4 tablespoons of milk powder to 1 pint of full fat milk and use this to make nourishing drinks.
- Add a couple of scoops of ice cream or some thick and creamy yoghurt to milkshakes and smoothies.
- Avoid 'no added sugar' or 'diet' drinks unless you are diabetic.
- Supermarkets provide a wide range of milkshakes, smoothies and yoghurt drinks.
- *Meritene Energy/Complan* – other brands may be available (available as soups and milkshakes). These contain protein as well as vitamins and minerals that are needed for a balanced diet and can be purchased in most chemists & supermarkets.

Nourishing Recipes

Enriched milkshake

Ingredients: 1/3 pint enriched milk, milkshake syrup / powder

Directions: Mix ingredients together and serve chilled. Add a scoop of ice cream if desired.

Cup a Soup

Ingredients: 1 sachet Cup a Soup

200ml (1/3pt) fortified milk

Directions: Heat the milk until hot, add milk to the Cup a Soup, stirring continuously

Yoghurt Drink

Ingredients: 1 small tub yoghurt

1 cup fortified milk

1 tablespoon skimmed milk powder

Directions: blend together and serve

Fruity Float

Ingredients: ½ glass of fresh fruit juice

1 teaspoon sugar, ½ glass of lemonade, 1 scoop ice cream

Directions: Mix all the ingredients together. Serve chilled.

Advice and guidance for following a puree diet

Most foods can be made into a pureed consistency using a liquidiser, food processor, hand-held blender or a sieve.

You can puree the food to the consistency that you would like and gradually increase the texture as your healing progresses. Pureed meals can be bulky and quite filling. Use nutritious fluids (e.g. sauces, soups, cream) to make the puree consistency rather than using water which contains no calories or protein.

You may find that eating takes a long time so have 6-7 small meals per day. You may decide to reheat in the microwave some of the food that you have made.

Some foods that are naturally similar in texture to purees include smooth yoghurts, custards and mousses. These can be used as snacks between meals.

The following meal items are suggested for those following a puree diet:

Breakfast:

- Instant oats or wheat biscuits, like Weetabix, with full cream milk and sugar, honey or golden syrup. You can also add cream.
- Smooth full cream yoghurt or fromage frais with fruit puree.

Main meals (lunch and dinner):

- Pureed chicken/meat with gravy.
- Fish (pureed) and potato pie.
- Pasta with tomato and cheese sauce pureed.
- Pureed shepherds or cottage pie.
- Pureed hot pot.
- Pureed casserole.
- Pureed cauliflower with cheese sauce.
- Soup – choose homemade, tins or cartons of soup over instant soups. Aim to choose 'cream of' soups or those with potatoes, lentils or protein e.g. meat or fish, rather than just vegetable soups. Add extra foods to enrich the soup e.g. grated cheese, cream, milk powder, pureed beans, pureed lentils or pureed rice.
- Mashed potato – instant or homemade mashed potato can be used. Add grated cheese, butter/margarine, milk, cream, sauces or gravy.
- Eggs – add cheese, cream, crème fraiche, butter or margarine.

Desserts:

- Well mashed banana with ice cream, cream or custard.
- Pureed or stewed fruits with ice cream, evaporated milk or custard.
- Pureed sponge with custard or cream or ice cream or evaporated milk.
- Thick and creamy yoghurts, custard, mousse, fruit fools, instant whips.
- Ice cream/sorbet with flavoured sauces, e.g. strawberry, chocolate, toffee.
- Semolina made with full cream milk, with sugar, golden syrup or jam.

Sample Menu

Puree Foods

Breakfast	Porridge, (strained if required), with added cream and sugar Stewed apple and strained yoghurt
Mid Morning	Milkshake
Lunch	Liquidized soup with grated cheese Fromage frais
Mid Afternoon	Glass of fortified milk
Evening Meal	Liquidized flaked fish in cheese sauce Mashed potatoes with cream and butter Liquidized carrot Fruit mousse and blancmange
Supper	Hot chocolate, Horlicks or Ovaltine (Other brands may be available) made with fortified milk Weetabix (other brands may be available) served with hot fortified milk

Advice and guidance for following an easy chew (soft) diet

Ideally, with a soft diet you should be able to mash or break up food with a fork.

When moving from a puree diet to a fork mashable or softer diet you may want to add extra sauces to meals to make it easier to move food around inside your mouth.

Breakfast:

Meal suggestions for a pureed diet can be consumed, but you can also progress to meals such as:

- Scrambled egg with grated cheese.
- Porridge or instant oats made with full cream milk with added golden syrup, sugar or jam. You can also add cream if you wish.

Main meals (lunch and dinner):

- Casseroled or stewed meats with vegetables.
- Cottage or shepherd's pie
- Omelette with cheese and soft vegetables.
- Inside of a jacket potato with baked beans and cheese or tuna mayonnaise.
- Corned beef hash.
- Macaroni or cauliflower cheese.
- Spaghetti bolognaise.
- Pasta bakes.
- Flaked fish in sauce with mashed potato.

Examples of different sauces to have with food include gravy, white sauce, cheese sauce, parsley sauce, butter sauce, curry sauce, stock. Extra cheese, butter, smooth peanut butter, pesto, milk, evaporated milk, cream or coconut milk can be added.

Desserts:

Dessert suggestions for a pureed diet can be eaten but you can also include the following:

- Rice pudding.
- Sponge or plain cake with custard, cream or ice cream.
- Trifle or other readymade desserts from supermarkets, e.g. cheesecakes, mousses, sundaes.
- Jelly – this can be made with evaporated milk.
- Crème caramel.

Sample Menu

Soft Foods

Breakfast

Porridge with added cream and sugar

Mashed banana with fortified milk

Mid Morning

Thick and creamy yoghurt with a spoonful of jam

Lunch

Chicken soup with added cream

Slice of bread, with crusts removed and generous spreading of butter

Mid Afternoon

Glass of fortified milk and sponge cake

Evening

Meal Flaked fish in cheese sauce

Mashed potatoes with cream, butter and grated cheese

Mashed carrots with butter

Jelly made with fortified milk served with ice cream and soft tinned fruit in syrup

Supper

Milkshake, hot chocolate or coffee made with fortified milk

Slice of bread with crusts removed and cheese spread

Food Fortification

Introduction

You may need to fortify your food if you are not eating well & losing weight. You can use ordinary foods to increase the energy and nutrient content of your diet.

To a pint of full fat milk add- 2-4 tablespoons of milk powder to make enriched milk. Use this instead of milk or water to make coffee, packet soups, sauces, jelly, milk puddings, porridge and breakfast cereals

To soup add -

Grated cheese
Cream, crème fraîche
Evaporated milk
Lentils

To breakfast cereals add -

Yoghurt - full fat or Greek
Enriched milk
Evaporated milk
Cream
Honey
Seedless jam
Syrup, pureed fruit

To puddings add -

Cream
Evaporated/condensed milk
Ice cream
Chocolate sauce
Sorbent
Custard
Honey
Syrup
Jam (seedless)
Sugar
Yoghurt, full fat or Greek

To milk based sauces add -

Cream
Evaporated milk
Grated cheese
Butter or margarine

To mashed potato add -

Cream
Crème fraîche
Margarine, butter
Grated cheese
Pesto sauce (from jar)
Olive oil
Milk powder

More ideas to increase calories-

Sugar in drinks
Eat puddings twice a day

How can I save time?

You may be tempted to try commercial baby foods but these do not provide adequate nourishment for adults and can be expensive.

Ready-to-eat meals.

Tinned, packet, frozen or boil-in-the-bag foods can be reheated according to the instructions and then blended or sauce added to reach the appropriate consistency.

Portioning and freezing food

If you have a freezer, you may find it convenient to make up a full recipe (4-6 servings) and then divide into portions to be frozen.

Meal delivery services

Some companies deliver pre-prepared pureed or soft meals to your home, e.g. Wiltshire Farm Foods, Kealth Foods, Mrs Gill's Texture Modified Meals. Contact them directly for a brochure detailing menus, fees and further information on their services.

Contact details:

Speech & Language Therapy department: 01342 414526

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