



# Soft and Bite Sized

## Information for patients with dysphagia and for their carers

**This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having a soft and bite sized diet recommended to you by your speech and language therapist. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your speech and language therapist, GP or nurse.**

### What is dysphagia?

Dysphagia is the medical term for swallowing difficulties. Some people with dysphagia have problems swallowing certain foods or liquids, while others can't swallow at all. Your speech and language therapist has recommended changing the consistency of your liquids to make them safer to swallow.

### What is soft and bite sized food?

Soft and bite sized food is food which could be mashed with a fork. It is small, soft, tender and should only need a very small amount of chewing. It is best served with a sauce or gravy but should not be sticky or crumbly.

#### Soft and bite sized food

- Is in bite sized pieces, (1.5cm x 1.5cm) the size of an adult thumb nail.
- Is soft, tender and moist, though with no separate thin liquid
- Has no tough skins, pips or seeds
- Is free from bones
- Can be mashed until it forms soft lumps
- Can be eaten with a fork, spoon or chopsticks
- Can be mashed / broken down with pressure from a fork, spoon or chopsticks

- A knife is not required to cut soft and bite sized food but may be needed to help load a fork or spoon
- Chewing is required before swallowing
- Biting is not required
- Tongue force and control is required to move the food for chewing and to keep it within the mouth during chewing.

Whilst on a soft and bite sized diet you may have problems eating enough to maintain your weight. Ask for advice from the dietitian or speak to your GP if you are losing weight.

### **Why do pieces have to be 1.5 x 1.5cm?**

Your speech and language therapist would have recommended this diet to ensure you are safe when you eat. Lots of research has looked at swallow safety and this has shown that pieces of food this size are least likely to cause choking if something does go wrong.

### **How do I swallow soft and bite sized food safely and comfortably?**

- Follow this advice when you eat, drink and take medication.
- Ideally sit upright in a chair while you eat and for at least half an hour afterwards.
- You should be awake and fully alert when you eat and drink.
- Make sure you only have one mouthful of food or fluid at a time.
- Swallow food and clear your mouth before you take the next mouthful. This might mean swallowing twice.
- Don't rush mealtime. Take frequent pauses during the meal and try to chew well
- Take sips of fluid with your food.
- At the end of each meal, make sure your mouth is empty and check for any food in the cheeks.
- If you feel something has gone down the wrong way, try to clear it with a cough and have a short break from eating and drinking. If this is happening often, contact your speech and language therapist or GP.
- Make mealtimes a pleasant and relaxed experience.

If you already have exercises and specific advice from your speech and language therapist please follow these.

### What should I eat?

- Choose a variety of foods to get the nutrients you need.
- Try to have a variety of meals and snacks each day.
- Include foods high in protein at every meal time (meat, fish, eggs, cheese, pulses, legumes, milk, yoghurt, nut pastes).
- Stay well hydrated by sipping fluids throughout the day.

### What should I do if I'm not sure if a food fits the criteria?

We have given you some examples of foods that would fit the criteria, but if you are not sure there are a few tests you could try at home:

**Fork / spoon / thumb test:** You should be able to use a fork / spoon to cut the food into small pieces. Use fork / spoon / thumb and index finger to push down on the piece of food with some effort (until your thumbnail is blanched white). The piece of food should not bounce back to its original shape when you release the pressure.



## Food examples

When serving all these foods they must be in pieces no bigger than 1.5cm x 1.5cm.

### Breads and cereals- for fibre and energy

Food	Choose	Avoid
<b>Breakfast cereals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cereals that are fully softened and have absorbed (soaked up) the milk (with no loose thin fluid)</li><li>• Porridge or instant oats, that is smooth with soft lumps</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Muesli or toasted cereals</li><li>• Cereals with clusters</li><li>• Cereals containing dried fruit, nuts, seeds or coconut</li><li>• Any excess milk or fluid</li></ul>
<b>Bread</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Soft filling that can be mashed with a fork (e.g., egg mayonnaise)</li><li>• Crusts removed</li><li>• Cut into 1.5 cm pieces</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pizza</li></ul>
<b>Pasta</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Well cooked pasta with plenty of thick sauce and cut into bite sized pieces</li><li>• Shell or tube pasta, ravioli or tortellini with meat or cheese filling and sauce, cut into bite sized pieces</li><li>• Macaroni cheese</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Al dente / undercooked pasta</li></ul>

<b>Rice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well cooked rice with plenty of thick sauce</li> <li>• Rice pudding, creamed rice or semolina</li> <li>• Risotto is suitable if creamy and moist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undercooked, dry rice</li> <li>• Friend or steamed rice which can be sticky and dry</li> <li>• Grainy rice</li> </ul>
<b>Potatoes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steamed or soft boiled potatoes with all skin removed cooked thoroughly</li> <li>• Can be mashed with butter / margarine, cheese, milk or cream.</li> <li>• Instant mashed potato</li> <li>• Skinless jacket potato with moist fillings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jacket potato skin</li> <li>• Crispy potatoes such as hash browns, fries, fried potatoes or wedges</li> <li>• Mashed potato with hard lumps</li> </ul>
<b>Cakes and pastries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biscuits soaked in tea, hot chocolate or milk until very soft</li> <li>• Soft moist cake with plenty of custard</li> <li>• Eve's pudding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cakes with dried fruit or nuts</li> <li>• Crackers</li> <li>• Danish pastries</li> <li>• Flapjacks</li> <li>• Dry biscuits</li> </ul>

### **Meat, fish and alternatives- for protein**

<b>Food</b>	<b>Choose</b>	<b>Avoid</b>
Meat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well cooked meat with skin, bones, fat and gristle removed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gristly, stringy or chewy meat</li> <li>• Tough or dry meat</li> </ul>

	<p>and thick sauces added to moisten</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moist mince and tomato Bolognese sauce</li> <li>• Shepherd's or cottage pie, extra gravy for moisture</li> <li>• Casseroled or slow cooked meat or chicken in gravy with meat sized 1.5cm x 1.5cm</li> <li>• Liquid portions must be thick</li> <li>• Pieces of soft tender meat, must be served no bigger than <b>1.5cm x 1.5cm</b></li> <li>• <b>If your meat cannot be finely minced or mashed or 1.5cm x 1.5cm in size it should be pureed</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole cuts of meat or poultry such as pork chops or steak</li> <li>• Bacon</li> <li>• Dry casserole or hard dry pieces of minced meat</li> <li>• Hard pieces of mince</li> <li>• Casseroles, stews or curries with thin sauce</li> <li>• Any hard lumps</li> </ul>
Fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh, frozen or tinned fish with skin and bones removed, soft enough to break up into small pieces with a fork that are no bigger than <b>1.5cm x 1.5cm.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fish bones</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poached white fish with cheese or parsley sauce</li> <li>• Fish pie or fish cakes with soft breadcrumbs and sauce</li> <li>• Tinned fish with mayonnaise, mackerel with tomato sauce</li> <li>• <b>If your fish cannot be finely minced or mashed or 1.5cm x 1.5cm in size, it should be pureed</b></li> </ul>	
Eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scrambled, boiled or poached eggs (cut into 1.5cm x 1.5cm)</li> <li>• Omelette with added cheese, cream or sauces</li> <li>• Quiche or frittata with vegetables and crusts removed</li> <li>• Soufflé</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Omelettes with fillings which are not considered soft and bite sized i.e., cannot be mashed with a fork and are bigger than 1.5cm x 1.5cm</li> </ul>
Beans, pulses, lentils, nuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>These all require suitable preparation to make them soft and bite sized</b></li> <li>• Canned baked</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nuts</li> <li>• Crunchy peanut butter</li> <li>• The skin of beans, lentils or pulses.</li> <li>• Anything that cannot</li> </ul>

	<p>beans - must be skinless</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skinless lentils, chickpeas, bean pate or dahl, cooked or soaked until mashable These may need blending.</li> <li>• Soya beans, miso soup and tofu</li> <li>• Smooth peanut butter</li> <li>• Nut pastes like tahini (sesame paste) humus or pesto</li> </ul>	<p>be blended smooth or is in pieces bigger than 1.5cm x 1.5cm.</p>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soya milk, soya yoghurt</li> <li>• Yeast extract spreads (e.g. Marmite or Vegemite)</li> <li>• Quorn mince</li> <li>• Very soft tofu</li> <li>• TVP (textured vegetable protein)</li> </ul>	

## Dairy foods- for protein and calcium

Food	Choose	Avoid
Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any variety of milk <b>(thickened as per clinician)</b></li> </ul>	



	<b>instruction)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buttermilk</li> <li>• Evaporated and condensed milk</li> <li>• Milkshakes or flavoured milk</li> </ul>	
Cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheese sauces</li> <li>• Soft cheeses e.g., cottage cheese and ricotta cheese</li> <li>• Cheese soufflé</li> <li>• Grated cheese can be added to most savoury dishes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard cheeses</li> <li>• Cheese with fruit or nuts</li> <li>• Cheese blocks or cubes</li> </ul>
Yoghurt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any smooth yoghurt</li> <li>• Greek yoghurt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dried fruit or nuts</li> <li>• Yoghurt topped with granola or dry oats</li> </ul>
Milk based desserts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cream, custard</li> <li>• Cheesecake with biscuit base removed</li> </ul>	<b>*Please discuss: Ice cream and sorbet with your clinician.*</b>

## Fruit and vegetables- for vitamins, minerals and fibre

Food	Choose	Avoid
<b>Fruit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh or tinned fruit, mashed and soft (drain excess fluid) in pieces 1.5cm x 1.5cm</li> <li>• Fruit smoothies - well blended</li> <li>• Fruit juice (thickened as</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard fruits e.g., apple, melon</li> <li>• Fruit with skin e.g., grapes</li> <li>• Seeds and pips</li> <li>• Dried fruit</li> <li>• Fibrous parts of fruits</li> </ul>

	recommended)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ask your clinician about fruits with high water content e.g., watermelon</b></li> </ul>
<b>Vegetables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh, tinned or frozen vegetables, peeled and well cooked until soft (boiled, steamed, microwaved or roasted)</li> <li>• Pulses which are easily mashed (try lentils, kidney beans, chickpeas, butter beans)</li> <li>• Mixed vegetables mashes such as carrot and swede or sweet potato and parsnip</li> <li>• Add cheese sauce or other sauces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stir-fried vegetables unless very soft and tender (must not be firm)</li> <li>• Raw vegetables</li> <li>• Floppy foods e.g., lettuce, cucumber, baby spinach</li> <li>• Vegetable skins</li> <li>• Whole corn kernels</li> <li>• Stringy or rubbery non-tender vegetables (Brussels sprouts, asparagus, celery)</li> <li>• Crispy vegetables (fried potatoes, potato skins)</li> </ul>

## Sample meal plan

### Breakfast

- Oats with full cream milk and / or cream and honey
- Yoghurt with mashed or pureed fruit
- Fruit juice (thickened as recommended)

### Mid-morning

- Tub of yoghurt or custard
- Flavoured milk or milkshake (thickened as recommended)

## Lunch

- Moist mince and tomato Bolognese sauce
- Mashed potato
- Well cooked, soft vegetables

## Mid-afternoon

- Nourishing drink
- Rice pudding

## Dinner

- Soft casseroled or slow cooked meat in a thick gravy
- Skinless jacket potato with cheese
- Soft, well cooked vegetables

## Before bed

- Hot chocolate / malted drink

## How can I make my soft and bite sized meals look good?

Food that looks good helps your appetite, to help you can try:

- Presenting food using **garnishes** to liven up meals e.g., paprika or pepper.
- **Varying flavour** by adding herbs, spices, lemon juice or sauces e.g., soy sauce, curry sauce, mint sauce or ketchup.
- **Choosing different colour foods** e.g., mixing brightly coloured vegetables with paler foods like creamed potato or cheese to make meals look good.
- Serve food at **the right temperature** to make sure it tastes good, reheat after mashing if needed.
- Adding grated cheese, butter or margarine, milk, cream, sauces or gravy to mashed potato or vegetables.
- Serving desserts in individual glasses and adding sauces or cream or dusting with chocolate or icing sugar.

## What can I do to save time?

Tinned, packet, frozen or boil in the bag **ready-to-eat meals** can be reheated according to instructions then blended or mashed. You might need to add fluid to make sure they are smooth.

If you have a freezer you might like to portion and freeze food by:

- Making up 4-6 servings of a dish and dividing it into portions
- Cooling the food after cooking
- Putting each portion into clean, empty yoghurt pots, margarine tubs or plastic containers.
- Labelling and dating containers
- Freezing immediately.

To eat, defrost thoroughly at room temperature or in the microwave, then reheat.

**Never re-freeze food once you have defrosted it and never reheat food more than once as this can cause food poisoning.**

## Is there anything else I need to know?

Tips to help with a small appetite. If you have lost your appetite, had unintended weight loss or have been advised by your dietitian to fortify your foods then the information below will help.

Always follow your speech and language therapist's recommendations even when using this information.

You can add extra calories and protein to your food without increasing the amount, by:

- Adding grated cheese, butter or margarine, salad dressings, sauce, salad cream, mayonnaise or oil to vegetables.
- Adding yoghurt, jam, cream or honey to breakfast cereals.
- Adding yoghurt, cheese, margarine or butter, milk or cream to sauces.
- Adding one tablespoon of milk powder or two tablespoons of cream to soups

- Adding grated cheese, cream, margarine or butter to mashed potato.
- Adding jam, honey, syrup cream, milk or custard to puddings.

### General tips

- Eat frequent small meals, five or six a day
- Use full fat and sugar foods e.g., full cream milk, thick and creamy yoghurts, high juices
- Avoid diet or low fat products
- Have nourishing drinks in between your meals and use fortified milk. See recipes.
- Try to eat puddings often to add variety and calories.

### Managing constipation

Constipation can be a problem for some people following a soft and bite sized diet.

Make sure you include high fibre foods in your meals e.g., porridge oats, Weetabix, fruit and vegetables. Drink plenty of fluid, aiming for eight to ten cups or three to four pints of fluid per day. If needed, speak to your GP about laxatives and use them as prescribed.

### Nourishing drinks

The following can be made at home:

- **Fortified milk:** Mix two to three tablespoons of milk powder into one pint of full cream milk. Have on its own or use in milk based food and drinks.
- **Hot chocolate malted drink:** Heat 150ml of full fat milk for one and a half to two minutes, then whisk in two tablespoons of milk powder and three tablespoons of hot chocolate or malted drink powder. Stir in two tablespoons of double cream and serve.
- **Smoothies:** Blend together half a small banana, broken into chunks, 50g frozen strawberries: 100ml vanilla yoghurt and 50ml milk until smooth, adding extra milk if needed.

- **Milkshake:** Blend together 150 to 200ml fortified or full cream milk, one scoop of ice cream, four teaspoons of Nesquik or two teaspoons Crusha syrup and two teaspoons of cream.
- **Creamy soup:** Whisk together one sachet of powdered soup and 150ml of hot milk, making sure you get a smooth consistency.

Other nutritional drinks can be purchased over the counter. Complan, Meretine Soup or Meretine Shake, Ovaltine, Horlicks or drinking chocolate, Mars, Yazoo, Galaxy, Aero, supermarket smoothies and milkshakes are all suitable.

You may have had one of the following nutritional drinks prescribed by the dietitian to increase your energy (calorie) and protein intake, prevent weight loss and supplement your nutrition:

Nutricia Fortisip, Fortisip Compact Fibre, Fortisip Compact Protein, Abbott Ensure, Nutricia Scandishake.

**If you are taking thickened fluids remember to thicken these drinks as usual.**

### **Useful sources of information**

Wiltshire Farm Foods

Soft and pureed meals delivered to your door

[www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com](http://www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com)

Freephone: 0800 773 773 (24 hours, 7 days per week)

British Dietetics Association

[www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts](http://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts)

Age UK Advice

[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

Freephone: 0800 169 6565

Dysphagia Cafe

<http://www.dysphagiacafe.com>

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your speech and language therapy team (Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm):

Acute / general medical speech and language therapy: 020 8725 3007

Adult neurology speech and language therapy: 020 8725 4492

Stroke speech and language therapy: 020 8725 2001

Head and neck speech and language therapy: 020 8725 1163

Community Neuro-therapy speech and language therapy:  
020 8812 4060

### Queen Mary's Hospital:

Mary Seacole speech and language therapy: 020 8487 6146

Bryson White rehabilitation speech and language therapy:  
020 8487 6170

### Wolfson Neurorehabilitation:

Queen Mary's Hospital 020 8487 6142

St George's Hospital 020 8266 6549

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

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## Additional services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

## **NHS Choices**

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## **NHS 111**

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111

## **AccessAble**

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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