

Oesophageal Cancer

Eating When Swallowing is Difficult

Being diagnosed with Oesophageal cancer can mean you experience problems with swallowing, or food going down, which can make it difficult to eat normal consistency foods. If you are feeling food 'getting stuck' or you bring food back up after eating (vomiting or regurgitation), adapting the texture of your diet can help. It may also be recommended that you adapt the texture of your diet whilst undergoing treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy, after having an oesophageal stent placed, or following surgery.

Eating slowly, chewing your food well, and avoiding lying down after eating can also help and for some, it can be helpful to have a drink during or after eating. Eating smaller amounts more often during the day can be easier than having large meals. The following foods are most likely to cause a problem, so it may be best to avoid these if you find them difficult:

- Bread, toast and doughy foods such as thick pastry or pizza bases
- Raw fruit and vegetables with skins on, such as potato skins
- Tough meats

There are several companies such as Wiltshire Farm Foods or Oakhouse Foods who supply a range of ready prepared meals of a suitable texture- look for 'Soft and bite sized (Level 6)' or 'Purée (Level 4)' on their websites.

You can ask your doctor or specialist nurse to be referred to a specialist dietitian for more personalised advice and support.

Choosing a Softer Consistency Diet

You might find it easier to change to a softer consistency diet. This can include:

- Finely chopping food into 'bite-sized' pieces (no bigger than 1.5cm x 1.5cm in size)
- Choosing food that can be mashed or broken down with a fork or spoon
- Adding sauces and gravies to moisten food and make it easier to swallow
- Soften meat and vegetables with slow cooking

Below are some suggestions for meals and snacks that would be suitable for a 'soft and bite sized' diet, you may have your own that you can add to the list too.

Breakfast Ideas

- Porridge or Ready Brek made with milk
- Weetabix or Oatibix soaked in milk
- Scrambled egg
- Mashed banana
- Yoghurt or fromage frais
- Stewed fruit with yoghurt

These could also be included as nutritious snacks.

Main Meal Ideas

Try to include some protein, carbohydrates and vegetables in every main meal, here are some suggestions:

Protein

Meat, poultry, fish and vegetarian alternatives

- Minced meats in stews and casseroles
- Minced Quorn or textured vegetable protein
- Tofu or soya mince
- Thin slices of cold meat, such as ham, cut up small
- Smooth paté
- Well-cooked lentils mashed with a fork and served with a sauce, like dhal

Fish

- Boneless fish cooked by steaming, baking, poaching or microwaving, and served with a sauce
- Tinned tuna or salmon with mayonnaise

Eggs

- Scrambled or poached eggs
- Omelette

Adding extra butter, milk or margarine can help to make eggs softer.

Cheese

- Soft or cream cheese
- Cottage cheese
- Grated cheese added to mashed potatoes, sauces and soups

Carbohydrates

Pasta and potatoes

- Well-cooked pasta with plenty of sauce
- Boiled soft noodles or rice
- Mashed potato with butter, margarine, gravy or sauce
- Jacket potato without skin

Fruit and Vegetables

Fruit

- Ripe bananas, mangos or pears
- Peeled peaches, nectarines or plums
- Stewed fruits, such as apple or pear
- Tinned fruit such as peaches

Vegetables

You can cook fresh, frozen or tinned vegetables until soft and mash with a fork if necessary.

- Carrots, parsnips, swede or butternut squash
- Cauliflower or broccoli florets (no stalks)
- Tinned tomatoes (no skin)
- Mashed avocado
- Courgettes or aubergines (with tough outer skins removed)

Sauces

Sauces can be used to moisten foods as well as add extra calories and protein.

You could try adding:

- Cheese sauce, parsley sauce, white sauce, butter sauce or curry sauce
- Gravy
- Mayonnaise or salad cream
- Natural yoghurt
- Soured cream
- Custard, or evaporated or condensed milk

Desserts and Snacks

- Milk puddings, such as semolina, tapioca, rice pudding or custard
- Soft sponge puddings with added cream or custard to make puddings moist
- Blancmange or crème caramel
- Smooth yoghurt or fromage frais
- Mousse or whips
- Trifles (without hard fruit pieces)
- Fresh or tinned fruit (see fruit and vegetable section)
- Tiramisu
- Jelly
- Ice-cream or sorbet
- Homemade or shop-bought milkshakes

Purée Diet

If you are struggling to manage a soft consistency diet, moving more towards a blended, smooth (or purée) consistency diet can help. Puréed foods are foods that have been ground, pressed or strained to a smooth consistency:

- Food can be puréed using a blender, liquidiser or food processor, or by being pushed through a sieve
- Cook food as per cooking instructions and cut into small pieces before puréeing
- You may need to add liquid to food before puréeing it. For example, you could add gravy to meat or milk to macaroni cheese

The following foods are not suitable for blending:

- Stringy foods (green beans, celery, rhubarb, pineapple)
- S Crunchy foods (muesli, crisps, toast, nuts, crusty bread)
- Foods with skins or husks (sausages, beans, peas, sweetcorn)
- Chewy foods (tough meat, toffees)
- Seeds and pips (summer fruits, citrus)
- Doughy foods (bread, pizza, bun)

Suggested puréed meal ideas:

Breakfast Ideas

- Purée porridge, Ready Brek or Oatso Simple
- Purée stewed fruit or banana with yoghurt
- Smooth yoghurt or fromage frais
- Smoothies (without bits)

Main Meal Ideas

Protein

Meat, poultry, fish and vegetarian alternatives

- Meat, poultry or boneless fish puréed using a sauce or soup, such as a white, cheese or smooth tomato sauce
- Macaroni or cauliflower cheese puréed
- Lentils, such as dhal, cooked until soft and then liquidised
- Cheese added to sauces (Avoid grating cheese onto hot food as it may become stringy and difficult to swallow when melted)

Carbohydrates

Pasta and potatoes

- Mashed potato with added milk and butter, margarine or soft cheese to make it smooth and add calories
- Pasta, cooked and puréed with a sauce, such as cheese, white or smooth tomato sauce

Fruit and Vegetables

It's important to make foods high in fibre (such as fruit, vegetables and puréed lentils) a regular

part of your diet.

- Fresh, frozen or tinned vegetables cooked until soft and then puréed (avoid green beans, peas and sweetcorn)
- Vegetables with added margarine or butter, or a sauce such as cheese, white or smooth tomato sauce
- Stewed, puréed fruit with added cream, sugar or honey (remove all skins, seeds and pips from fruit before puréeing)

Desserts and Snacks

- Packet desserts made with milk and added extra cream, evaporated or condensed milk or sugar for extra energy
- Smooth yoghurt, fromage frais and mousse
- Blancmange, instant whips or smooth fruit fools
- Smooth milky puddings (puréed semolina, sago or tapioca) and custard
- Puréed fruit (remove skins, seeds and pips before puréeing)
- Crème caramel
- Ice-cream

Nourishing Fluids

Soups

- Soups enriched with cream or crème fraîche
- Packet soups made using fortified milk (see recipe below on our 'building yourself up' page)

Most soups will need to be puréed and strained to remove any bits. Choose 'cream of ...' or concentrated soups whenever possible.

Drinks

- Pure or fresh fruit juice (with no bits)
- Fruit smoothies (with no bits)

Building Yourself Up

It's important to eat and drink enough calories and protein to maintain your weight and strength. The following information is designed to give you advice on adding extra calories to everyday foods if you have a reduced appetite or are losing weight:

- Eat little and often. Try having small, regular meals and snacks. Six small meals are as good as three large main meals
- Make the most of opportunities when you feel hungry for example; eat a larger meal when you feel hungry
- Drinks can be filling, have small amounts with meals and larger, more nutritious drinks in between (see the 'nourishing fluids' section below for ideas)
- Use ready meals or a meal delivery service if you find cooking meals reduces your appetite, increases fatigue or puts you off eating
- Choose a variety of foods. Alternating what you eat can help keep things interesting

- Liquid food supplements can also be helpful to increase your calorie and protein intake - ask your dietitian for advice on this- many are available on prescription

Food Fortification

Food fortification involves adding higher energy and protein foods to your meals and snacks to increase the nutrient density of your meal, without significantly increasing the overall volume of food. Foods which are commonly used for fortification are listed below. If you are diabetic speak to your healthcare team for advice that will be suitable for you.

Sweet Options

- Double Cream
- Condensed Milk
- Full fat spreads or syrups e.g., jam, chocolate spread, nut butter, honey, golden or maple syrup
- Yoghurt
- Ice-cream
- Skimmed milk powder/fortified milk

Savoury Options

- Butter
- Olive oil
- Table sauces e.g., mayonnaise
- Cheese
- Skimmed milk powder/fortified milk
- Salad dressings
- Houmous

Fortified Milk

Fortified milk can be made up and stored in the fridge like you would with standard milk. This can then be used in place of your usual milk for example on breakfast cereals, porridge and in hot drinks.

It can also be used during cooking for example in savoury sauces, mashed potatoes, custards and milk-based puddings.

To make fortified milk add four heaped tablespoons of skimmed milk powder to 500ml of full cream (whole) milk and whisk until smooth.

Nourishing Snacks

Snacks are a great way to increase your nutritional intake between your meals and they don't require much preparation or cooking. Try to include 2-3 nourishing snacks a day between your meals. We have outlined some ideas below:

If you can Manage a Normal Textured Diet:

- Cheese or pâté and crackers
- Tinned fruit with cream, ice cream or custard
- Handful of nuts eg peanuts or cashews
- Crumpets with butter or margarine and topped with jam or cheese

- Pancakes with cream
- Slice of quiche
- Teacakes or malt loaf- Add butter or spread and top with marmalade or jam and clotted cream
- Scotch eggs
- Cocktail sausages

If you Require a Softer Consistency Diet:

- Mousse/custard/thick and creamy yoghurts/rice pudding/angel delight
- Tiramisu
- Panacotta/crème- caramel
- Porridge/Ready Brek©
- Cheesecake (Without the biscuit base if you struggling to swallow this)
- Smooth Hummus/smooth Pate
- Cake or sponge puddings
- Scrambled egg
- Omelette with ham or cheese
- Chocolate
- A mug of creamy soup

If you are Following a Puree Consistency Diet:

- Smooth yogurts (choose thick and creamy versions)
- Pureed fruits with honey and full fat yoghurt/fromage frais/double cream (fruit may need sieving)
- Ice cream
- Custard pots
- Pureed rice pudding (no bits)
- Mousse
- Mug of smooth creamy soup
- Any of the nourishing pudding or fluid recipes shown below
- Smooth blended cereals e.g., Ready Brek© or Weetabix made with fortified milk
- Smooth pates or savoury mousse
- Hummus (with no lumps)
- Very soft cheese e.g., cottage cheese/cream cheese, smooth with no lumps
- Pureed egg mayonnaise/scrambled egg
- Angel delight or instant whips made with fortified milk
- Cake blended with custard/cream
- Mousse/fools
- Crème- caramel
- Pannacotta

Nourishing puddings

Puddings can be an enjoyable way to add extra calories and protein into your diet. In addition to the ideas listed above, we have put together some quick and easy recipe ideas for nourishing puddings or snacks that you can try:

Fortified Instant Dessert

(four servings)

Ingredients

- 1 instant dessert packet (Angel Delight)
- 4 tablespoons milk powder
- 150ml double cream
- 150ml full cream milk

Method

1. Whisk all ingredients together with a fork

or a whisk.
2. Leave to set.

Cake & Ice Cream Chill

(one serving)

Ingredients

- 1 slice sponge cake
- 1 scoop ice cream
- 60 to 125ml full cream milk

Method

1. Blend the sponge cake and ice cream

together until smooth
2. Add milk as required, until it is suitable consistency. You can add single cream instead of milk for extra calories.

Egg Custard

(four servings)

Ingredients

- 4 medium eggs
- 100g caster sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 500ml full cream milk
- Pinch of nutmeg

Method

1. Mix together the eggs, sugar and

vanilla extract.

2. Gradually stir in the cold milk.
3. Sprinkle on the nutmeg.
4. Pour mixture into one large or four smaller ovenproof dishes.
5. Cook at 200°C or gas mark 6 for 45 minutes (or until set).

Banana Cream

(three servings)

Ingredients

- 280ml whipping cream
- 3 ripe bananas (peeled)
- 2 tablespoons (heaped) caster sugar
- 1 lemon (juice and grated rind)

Method

1. Whisk the cream until thick.
2. Blend the bananas with the sugar, grated

lemon rind and lemon juice.
3. Combine the banana mixture with the cream.
4. Chill until set.

Lemon Mousse

(three servings)

Ingredients

- 150g lemon curd
- Zest of ½ a lemon
- 150ml of double whipping cream

Method

1. Put two-thirds of the lemon curd in a large

bowl with the zest and cream.
2. Beat with an electric whisk until it holds its shape.
3. Dribble over the rest of the lemon curd, marbling the curd as you add it.
4. Transfer into small pots or glasses. Cover with clingfilm and freeze for 30-40 minutes until set.

Nourishing fluids

Including nourishing fluids are a good way to add extra calories and protein into your diet. Try to have your nourishing fluids after meals to avoid filling yourself up before you eat. The fortified milk recipe above can be used in hot drinks such as tea and coffee, smoothies or milkshakes or added to cereal and porridge.

Each of the following recipes makes one serving (unless specified otherwise):

Nourishing Coffee

150ml full fat milk
1 heaped tablespoon milk powder
teaspoon coffee powder
2 tablespoons of cream

Nourishing Malt Drink

150ml full fat milk
1 heaped tablespoon milk powder
3 teaspoons of malted drink powder such as Ovaltine or Horlicks
2 tablespoons cream

Berry & Cream Shake

Ingredients

100g full fat fruit yoghurt
100ml cranberry juice
5 tablespoons double cream
1 tablespoon strawberry milkshake powder

Method

1. Blend until smooth.
Per serving: 583kcal and 6g protein

Fruit Blast

Ingredients

100ml fresh fruit juice
100ml lemonade
1 scoop ice cream or double cream
1 tablespoon sugar

Method

1. Stir ingredients together.
Per serving: 273 to 387kcal and 0.5 to 2.5g protein

Banana Oatmeal Smoothie

(Vegan)

Ingredients

1 medium to large banana (peeled)
250ml unsweetened plant milk of your choice (rice, soy, almond or coconut)
25g instant oats, quick cook oats or regular oats (whichever you prefer)
1 tablespoon maple syrup
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon (ground)
1 tablespoon peanut butter

Method

1. Blend until smooth.
Per serving: 386kcal and 12g protein

Chocolate Hazelnut Dream

Ingredients

200ml whole milk
2 tablespoons condensed milk
2 tablespoons double cream
2 tablespoons hazelnut chocolate spread
1 tablespoon dried milk powder

Method

1. Whisk together all the ingredients.
Per serving: 621kcal and 12g protein

Basic Fruit Smoothie

(four servings)

Ingredients

400g/14oz tinned peaches or other tinned fruit

150ml/5fl oz double cream

175g/6fl oz thick, creamy yoghurt

1 scoop ice cream

400ml/13fl oz apple juice

Method

1. Blend until smooth.

Per serving: 349kcal and 3.5g protein

Chocolate Peanut Butter Smoothie

(Vegan)

Ingredients

500ml coconut water

1 tablespoon golden syrup

2 ripe bananas (peeled)

2 small avocados (peeled)

1 tablespoon cocoa powder

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 tablespoons smooth peanut butter

Method

1. Blend until smooth.

Per serving: 481kcal and 8g protein

You can ask your doctor or specialist nurse to be referred to a specialist dietitian for more personalised advice and support. See our website for more information on 'eating when swallowing is difficult' for soft and puree texture diets if you are struggling to swallow a normal consistency diet.