

Foods That May Raise Your Risk of Aspiration

Dietitian: _____
Phone: _____

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Prepared by: Nutrition and Food Services
Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services

LC85-0529 © April 2024 Nova Scotia Health Authority
To be reviewed April 2027 or sooner, if needed.

If you have dentures:

- Remove your dentures and brush them:
 - › each time you eat.
 - › before bedtime.
- Use a denture brush to brush your dentures.
- Use a toothbrush to brush your tongue with water, mouthwash, or toothpaste. Use long, sweeping strokes that go from back to front.
- Rinse your mouth with water or alcohol-free mouthwash, if you are able:
 - › Swish the water or mouthwash around in your mouth and spit it out.
- Soak your dentures overnight in a clean denture cup and denture cleaner.

Call your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) or 811 if you have:

- › Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
- › Trouble breathing
- › More chest congestion (more mucus and coughing)
- › More coughing during or after eating

Oral care tips

Good oral care is important to lower your risk of pneumonia.

If you have your own teeth (no dentures):

- Brush your teeth:
 - › each time you eat.
 - › before bedtime.
- Use a toothbrush with soft bristles.
- Use a fluoride toothpaste.
- **Do not** rush when you brush your teeth. Brush all surfaces of every tooth.
- Brush your tongue. Use long, sweeping strokes that go from back to front.
- Spit out the toothpaste when you are done brushing. **Do not** rinse your mouth with water after brushing. This helps the fluoride in the toothpaste work better.
- Floss your teeth every day. It may help to use an F or a Y-shaped flossing tool, or GUM® Soft-Picks®.

Foods That May Raise Your Risk of Aspiration

- Some people have problems swallowing. This means that some food or liquid may go into the airway. This is called aspiration. Aspiration is the word used when food or drink “goes down the wrong way”.
- Not everyone coughs right away when food or liquid goes down the wrong way. This is called silent aspiration.
- Some foods and/or drinks are harder to swallow safely for some people. This means there is a chance of aspiration or choking. Sometimes this can lead to a blocked airway or pneumonia (lung infection). It can also make eating and drinking uncomfortable.
- The Swallow Team recommends that you carefully choose foods that are safe for you.

Signs that you may have a swallowing problem:

- Coughing or choking during or after eating
- Clearing your throat often
- Hoarse (rough, scratchy, or cracked) voice
- Wet, gurgly voice
- Feeling like food gets stuck in your throat
- Pocketing food in your cheek
- Holding food or liquid in your mouth for a long time
- Drooling, or loss of food or liquid from your mouth
- Avoiding solid food
- Having a fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
- Having a chest infection

Rice: Add sauce to moisten and hold it together. Rice should not be sticky or gluey, and should not separate into single grains when cooked and served. It may need a thick, smooth sauce to moisten and hold it together (like a moist rice casserole).

Bread and baked goods: High-risk foods if dry or sticky. If breads have been checked off as safe for you, choose ones that are **not** dry or sticky.

- Make sandwiches with soft, moist fillings or toppings that are not dry or sticky and are the right texture for you (like moist tuna or egg salad without chopped vegetables, smooth jams or jellies).
- If bread is not safe for you, but you can eat minced, moist meats, you may be able to modify bread to make it safe. Watch the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) video *Preparing a Minced & Moist (IDDSI Level 5) Sandwich* by:
 - › Typing in Google “how to make a level 5 minced and moist sandwich”

Or

- › www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7bOufqmz18

What can I eat?

Food pieces should be no bigger than:

- 4 mm by 4 mm (distance between fork tines)
- 15 mm by 15 mm (width of a fork)
- A usual bite size for you

Meat: Cooked tender and chopped. If not moist, serve with a thick, smooth sauce or gravy.
Do not eat meat with gristle.

Fish: Cooked soft and moist. If not moist, eat with a thick, smooth sauce or gravy. **Do not** eat fish with bones.

Fruit: Mashed or chopped. Drain or thicken any extra liquid. **Do not** eat pits, skins, or stringy parts.

Vegetables: Steamed, boiled, or stewed until tender.

Cereal: Fully softened with milk or liquid. Let liquid be soaked up or drain. Eat cooked cereal with liquid mixed in.

Your Swallow Team recommends:

Food texture: _____

Food pieces should be **no bigger** than:

- 4 mm by 4 mm (distance between fork tines)
- 15 mm by 15 mm (width of a fork)
- A usual bite size for you

Tips:

- Drink from a cup or a glass. **Do not** drink from a bottle or a can.
- **Do not** use a straw unless the Swallowing Team tells you that it is OK.
- Take only 1 sip at a time and swallow before taking the next sip.
- **Do not** drink fast.
- **Never take a sip of liquid with food in your mouth.**
- Only eat 1 teaspoon of food at a time.
- Chew your food well.

Liquid thickness:

_____ **thick liquids**

For more information, see pamphlet 0562,

How to Thicken Liquids:

> www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/0562

Thin liquids, all regular drinks

Foods that can raise your risk of aspiration

- The groups of foods on pages 5 to 8 increase the risk of aspiration.
- The groups of food that are checked off on these pages are high-risk foods for you. **Do not** eat these foods, or modify using the “To make safe” suggestions.
- You should also be careful when eating all of the other high-risk foods that are not checked off on these pages.

Tips for eating safely at home

Body position:

- Sit up.
 - Stay sitting up for 30 minutes after eating.
-

Place:

- Eat in a quiet area.
- Limit talking.
- Limit distractions. For example, **do not** eat in front of the TV or with a lot of people.

Eating:

- **Do not** rush. Swallow before taking your next bite or sip.
- Feed yourself if you can. If you need help, your support person can try the “hand-over-hand” technique (placing their hands over yours to help).

Medications:

- Take medications with liquid or food only if you can.
- Take medications **whole** in pureed food (like applesauce, yogurt, or pudding).
- Take medications **crushed** in pureed food (like applesauce, yogurt, or pudding). **Do not crush medications without talking to your pharmacist first.**

Other: _____

Chewy, tough, or stringy foods

- Steak
- Stringy or tough roast meats
- Pork or lamb chops
- Chewy toppings on casseroles
- Pineapple, citrus fruits
- Dried fruits
- Asparagus
- Celery
- Raw vegetables
- Raw or cooked greens
- Rapini or broccoli stems
- String beans
- Rhubarb

Round or long foods

- Hard candy
- Carrots
- Hotdogs
- Grapes

Foods with more than 1 texture (mixed consistencies)

- Citrus fruits
- All fruits other than bananas
 - › To make them safer: Puree fruit and thicken to the right thickness. Taste may get better after cooking.
- Canned fruit with juice
 - › To make it safer: Drain canned fruit well.
- Soups with solids (like vegetables, pasta, or meat)
 - › To make them safer: Blend soups to make them a single texture. Thicken, if needed.
- Or
 - › Strain, and eat the liquid and solids separately. Thicken the liquid and mince the solids, if needed.
- Cold cereal with milk
 - › To make it safer: Use a small amount of milk and let the cereal soak it up. Pour off the extra milk, if needed. Blend the cereal to make it a single texture.
- Cooked cereal
 - › To make it safer: Eat cooked cereal with milk mixed in.

Sticky or gummy foods

- Nut butters
- Bread dressing
- Fresh, white bread
- Cheese chunks
- Grilled cheese sandwiches
- Caramel
- Butterscotch sauce
- Marshmallows
- Sticky buns, doughnuts
- Thick fudge
- Sticky mashed potatoes
 - › To make them safer: Mix in more liquid.

Dry or crumbly foods that do not stick together

- Mixed vegetables (like peas and corn)
- Dry crackers or cookies
- Dry bread
- Crumbly muffins or cakes
- Popcorn, chips
- Coconut
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Crisp bacon
- Plain rice
 - › To make it safer: Cook it until it is well done and mix in a thick sauce to make it wet to hold the rice together.
- Plain, ground meat
 - › To make it safer: Mix in a thick sauce or gravy.