

Foods That May Increase the Risk of Aspiration

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Some people have problems swallowing. This means that some food or liquid may go into the airway instead of the stomach. 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 has been helping you. They recommend that you be careful when choosing foods that are safe for you.

Food and liquid texture recommendations

Recommended food texture:

Food pieces should be no bigger than:

- 4 mm x 4 mm (distance between fork tines)
- 15 mm x 15 mm (width of a dinner fork)
- normal bite size for you
- Only eat one teaspoon at a time.
- Chew your food well.

Recommended liquid thickness:

- _____ thick liquids

See pamphlet *How to Thicken Liquids*

- thin liquids, all regular drinks
- Drink from a cup or glass. Do not drink from a bottle.
- Do not use a straw unless the Swallow Team tells you that it is OK.
- Take one sip at a time and swallow before taking the next sip.
- Do not drink fast.
- If it helps, drink separately from eating.
Never take a sip of liquid with food in your mouth.

The following signs may mean you are having a swallowing problem with certain foods:

- Coughing or choking during or after eating.
- Clearing your throat often.
- Hoarse or wet, gurgly voice.
- Feeling of food getting stuck in your throat.
- Pocketing food in your cheek.
- Holding food or liquid in your mouth for a long time.
- Drooling, loss of food or liquid from your mouth.
- Avoiding solid foods.
- Frequent fever or chest infections.

Call your primary health care provider or 811 if you have:

- › fever
- › shortness of breath
- › increased chest congestion
- › increased coughing during or after eating

The groups of foods below increase the risk of aspiration. The groups of food that are checked off below 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 below.

Foods with more than one texture (mixed consistencies)

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

☐ **Dry or crumbly foods that do not stick together**

- Mixed vegetables, such as peas and corn
- Dry crackers or cookies
- Dry bread
- Crumbly muffins or cake
- Popcorn, chips
- Coconut
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Crisp bacon

- Plain rice
 - › To make safe: Cook until well done and mix in a very thick sauce to moisten and hold rice together.
- Plain ground meat
 - › To make safe: Mix in thick sauce or gravy.

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

Safe eating tips at home

Body position:

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

- Eat in a quiet area.
- Limit talking.
- Limit distractions. For example, don't eat in front of the TV or with a lot of people.

Feeding:

- Do not rush while eating. Swallow before taking the next bite or sip.
- Feed yourself if you are able to. If you need help, your caregiver can try the “hand-over-hand” technique.

Medications:

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

Other:

What can I eat?

Food pieces should be no bigger than:

- 4 mm x 4 mm (distance between fork tines)
- 15 mm x 15 mm (width of a dinner fork)
- normal 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.

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. May need a thick, smooth sauce to moisten and hold it together (e.g., moist rice casserole).

Bread and baked goods: high-risk foods if dry or sticky. If breads have been checked 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 (e.g., moist tuna or egg salad without chopped vegetables, smooth jams or jellies).

Make sandwiches that are minced and moist. Watch the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) video by typing in Google “how to make a level 5 minced and moist sandwich.”

Mouth care is important to lower the risk of pneumonia.

Tips for good mouth care

Natural teeth (no dentures):

- Brush your teeth after eating and before bedtime.
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush.

- Use fluoride toothpaste.
- Don't rush the brush. Brush all surfaces of every tooth.
- Brush your tongue from back to front using long, sweeping strokes.
- Spit out toothpaste, but do not rinse with water to get the full effect of fluoride.
- Floss your teeth daily. It may help to use an F or Y-shaped flossing tool, or GUM® Soft-Picks®.

Dentures:

- Take out your dentures and brush after eating and before bedtime.
- Use a denture brush.
- Brush your tongue from back to front using long, sweeping strokes with a soft-bristled toothbrush.
- Rinse your mouth with water or alcohol-free mouthwash, if you are able. Swish and spit out all liquids.
- Soak your dentures overnight in denture cleaner.

Dietitian: _____

Phone: _____

