



# Safer swallowing advice

## Level 6 (soft and bite-sized)

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Version 2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

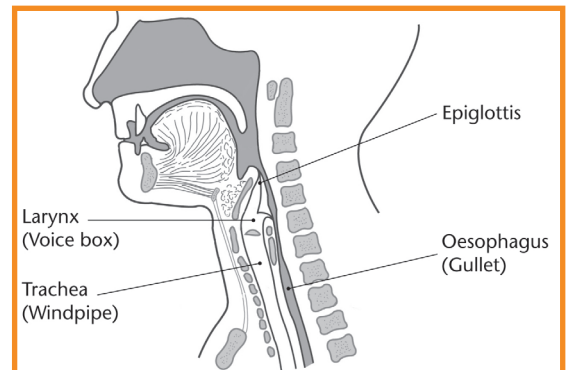
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### > About this leaflet

As you are currently having some mild difficulties swallowing, your speech and language therapist recommends that you change the consistency of your food slightly.

The consistency that we recommend for you is: **Level 6 (soft and bite-sized)**.

You should follow these recommendations at all times. Depending on the nature of your difficulties, your speech and language therapist may review these recommendations.



### > What is a Level 6 (soft and bite-sized) diet?

- ✓ Food is soft, tender and moist, but with no thin liquid leaking or dripping from the food.
- ✓ Ability to “bite-off” a piece of food is not required.
- ✓ Ability to chew “bite-sized” pieces so that they are safe to swallow is required.
- ✓ Bite-sized pieces no bigger than 15mm x 15mm in size for adults (8mm x 8mm for children).
- ✓ Food can be mashed or broken down with pressure from a fork.
- ✓ A knife is not required to cut this food.
- X No mixed (thick – thin) textures.
- X No hard, tough, chewy, fibrous, stringy, dry, crispy, crunchy or crumbly bits. No pips, seeds, pith, inside skin.
- X No skins or outer shells e.g. on peas, grapes. No husks.
- X No skin, bone or gristle.
- X No round or long-shaped foods e.g. sausages, grapes, sweets.
- X No hard chunks e.g. pieces of apple.
- X No sticky foods e.g. cheese chunks, marshmallows.

- X No 'floppy' foods e.g. lettuce, cucumber, uncooked baby spinach leaves.
- X No juicy food where juice separates off in the mouth to a mixed texture e.g. watermelon.

Please note: In hospital this diet is called Level 6 (soft and bite-sized). If you are speaking to any staff (e.g. doctor or nurse) please refer to the diet as Level 6 (soft and bite-sized).

### Preparing a Level 6 (soft and bite-sized) diet

- **Meat**  
Pieces of soft tender meat must be served no bigger than 15mm x 15mm (8mm for children), or serve meat finely minced. No hard bits of mince. Serve in a thick smooth sauce or gravy.
- **Fish**  
Cooked soft enough to break and serve in pieces no bigger than 15mm x 15mm, 8mm for children.
- **Fruit**  
Soft fresh or tinned fruit chopped to pieces no bigger than 15mm x 15mm (8mm for children) or mashed. Drain any excess liquid. Do not use hard fresh fruit, fibrous citrus fruit or dried fruit.
- **Vegetables**  
Steamed or boiled with final cooked size no bigger than 15mm x 15mm for adults, 8mm for children. Stir fried vegetables are too firm and are not suitable.
- **Casserole, stew, curry**  
Must be thick. Can contain meat, fish or vegetables if prepared as above and fully mixed in.
- **Bread**  
No bread due to high choking risk.
- **Rice**  
Requires a thick, smooth, non-pouring sauce to moisten it and hold it together. Rice should not be sticky or gluey and should not separate into individual grains when cooked and served.
- **Cereal**  
The texture of thick smooth porridge, or the texture of fully softened wheat-biscuit breakfast cereal with milk fully absorbed. Any milk or fluid must not separate off i.e. no thin loose fluid, no mixed (thick - thin) textures.
- **Desserts**  
The texture of soft sponge cake with smooth filling, fully softened with thick smooth custard and broken into bite-sized pieces. Milk puddings such as custard, yoghurt or rice puddings are acceptable. No ice-cream or jelly if you require thickened fluids (because these can change to normal fluid thickness in the mouth).

### Examples of suitable foods

Always prepare to Level 6 – Soft and bite-sized pieces, no bigger than 15mm x 15mm for adults, 8mm for children.

- Breakfast:**
- Soft fruit (bite-sized)
  - Cornflakes or Rice Krispies (well soaked and excess milk drained off)
  - Porridge
  - Weetabix (softened and milk fully absorbed)



**Lunch and Dinner:** Smooth soup with very soft and tender meat, fish, lentils. Avoid mixed texture such as chunky vegetable soup  
Scrambled egg  
Soft omelette  
Inside of a jacket potato with tuna, egg mayonnaise or spreading cheese  
Potato waffles mashed with tomato sauce (bite-sized)  
Tender roast meat in gravy (bite-sized)  
Fish in sauce (bite-sized)  
Fish pie (bite-sized)  
Fish cakes and sauce (bite-sized)  
Tuna mayonnaise (bite-sized)  
Macaroni cheese (bite-sized)  
Spaghetti bolognese (bite-sized)  
Pasta in sauce (bite-sized)  
Risotto  
Sweet and sour dishes with rice (bite-sized).  
When cooking rice, make sure it is soft, well cooked and mixed with sauce or gravy  
Corned beef hash or stovies (bite-sized)  
Casseroled meats and stews (bite-sized)  
Black pudding (skin removed)  
Curry and rice  
Quiche, avoid hard crusts (bite-sized)  
Shepherds pie with gravy (bite-sized)  
Haggis, neeps and tatties  
Soft well cooked vegetables mashed (must not be 'stringy' or 'woody', see high risk foods on page 4)  
Cauliflower cheese (bite-sized)

**Desserts:** Milk pudding  
Stewed fruit and custard (bite-sized)  
Rice pudding  
Semolina  
Yoghurts  
Mousse  
Angel delight  
Trifle with soft fruit (bite-sized)  
Sponge and custard (bite-sized)  
Crème caramel  
Cheesecake and cream (no base)  
Jelly (if you don't require thickened fluid)  
Ice cream (if you don't require thickened fluid)  
Soft tinned fruit (bite-sized)

**Points to remember:**

You can make food softer and more moist by adding a sauce or gravy. Harder foods like biscuits can be softened with hot drinks, milk or cream.



## High risk foods

Below is a list of 'high risk foods'. These are the foods that are most likely to make you cough and choke and therefore you should avoid them.

- Stringy fibrous textures e.g. pineapple, runner beans, celery.
- Vegetable and fruit skins including peas, grapes, baked beans, soya beans, and black eyed beans.
- Mixed consistencies e.g. cereals which do not blend with milk (e.g. Muesli), mince and thin gravy, soup with lumps.
- Crunchy foods e.g. toast, dry biscuits, crisps.
- Crumbly items e.g. bread crusts, pie crusts, dry biscuits.

## Swallowing strategies

Here is some general advice which you may find useful. Please note not all of the items will necessarily apply to you.

Please concentrate on the ones which your speech and language therapist has ticked specifically for you.

- Sit in an upright position.
- Take your time.
- Take small mouthfuls.
- Try to eat in a quiet place, with few distractions.
- Chew food well and make sure that your mouth is empty before taking another mouthful.
- Only heat up small portions of food at a time so that food does not get cold.
- Smaller, more frequent meals may be less tiring.
- Keep your chin tucked down towards your chest when swallowing.
- Swallow several times after each mouthful.
- Take regular alternate sips of fluid when eating to help clear any residue that may be in your mouth or throat.
- Clear your throat regularly when eating and drinking, then swallow again.
- Cough after swallowing.
- Consult your GP or pharmacist about taking medication in syrup or soluble form. **Do not crush tablets or open up capsules without checking with your pharmacist that it is safe to do this.**

## Things to avoid:

- Foods that you find difficult (for many people these will be hard, dry or stringy foods. See also 'high risk foods' on page 4).
- Taking very large mouthfuls.
- Tipping your head back.
- Eating and drinking when you feel short of breath.
- Talking while eating and drinking.
- Straws unless specifically recommended by your therapist.

Please refer to any additional information sheets your speech and language therapist has given you.

Your speech and language therapist also recommends the following advice specifically for your needs:

## Fluids

You have been advised to drink **normal thin fluids**. If so, please ignore the section below.

You have been advised to drink \_\_\_\_\_ **thickened fluids**. (Please refer to the section below for information on how to thicken your fluids.)

Drinks descriptor and level	
<b>Level 1</b> (Slightly thick)	Leaves a coating on an empty glass and can be easily taken through a straw (if recommended).
<b>Level 2</b> (Mildly thick)	Leaves a thin coat on the back of a spoon, can be drunk from a cup and easily taken through a straw (if recommended).
<b>Level 3</b> (Moderately thick)	Leaves a thick coat on the back of a spoon, can be drunk from a cup, but too thick to be taken through a straw.
<b>Level 4</b> (Extremely thick )	Unable to be drunk through a straw or a cup due to thickness. Needs to be taken from a spoon.

There are several different brands of 'thickening agent'. Please refer to the manufacturer's guidelines (usually on the side of the tin) for details of how much thickener needs to be added to your drink.

**Please check the fluid is the correct consistency before drinking.**

**Please note: Thickener and pre-thickened drinks are available on prescription from your GP.**

## Further information

Please contact the Speech and Language Therapy department if:

- You or your relatives have any worries or questions about your swallowing problem.
- Your swallow deteriorates.
- You develop new swallowing difficulties.

Your Speech and Language Therapy department phone number is **0141 951 5121**.

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