What is a dysphagia soft diet?

A dysphagia soft diet is needed for people who have trouble chewing or swallowing.

On a dysphagia soft diet you may eat foods that are soft and moist. Foods that are not soft or moist enough may need to be diced, finely shaved, or minced. Foods that need to be diced should be less than 1 cm (½ inch).

Example of 1 cm: 

Eating well

Canada’s Food Guide recommends choosing a variety of foods from all four food groups each day. This includes: Vegetables and Fruit, Grain Products, Milk and Alternatives, and Meat and Alternatives.

Vegetables and Fruit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adults (over 18 years) - 7 to 10 servings a day</th>
<th>Teens (14 to 18 years) - 7 to 8 servings a day</th>
<th>Children (2 to 13 years) - 4 to 6 servings a day</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples of 1 serving before dicing:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 1 medium size vegetable or fruit</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ½ cup (125 mL) fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables or fruit</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ½ cup (125 mL) vegetable or fruit juice</td>
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Foods to choose:

- soft cooked, diced or mashed vegetables
- mashed potatoes or other well-cooked potato side dishes (such as scalloped potatoes)
- canned creamed corn
- diced or mashed, soft cooked, canned or ripe fruit, with skins removed
- fruit cocktail without pineapple or grapes
- canned crushed pineapple
- vegetable or fruit juice

Foods that need to be minced:

- lettuce, tossed salad, or cabbage
- cooked vegetables that are fibrous or stringy (such as broccoli stems, wax or green beans)

Foods that need to be pureed:

- cooked dried fruit
- fresh fruit mixed into a smoothie

Foods to avoid:

- hard, raw vegetables, even if diced
- potato skins
- whole kernel corn, even in soup
- fresh or canned fruit or vegetables with membranes or tough skins (such as citrus fruits, whole apple, grapes, whole tomatoes
- fruits with hard seeds (such as raspberries, blackberries)
- fresh or dried coconut
- pineapple, fresh, tidbits, or sliced
### Grain Products

**Adults (over 18 years)** - 6 to 8 servings a day  
**Teens (14 to 18 years)** - 6 to 7 servings a day  
**Children (2 to 13 years)** - 3 to 6 servings a day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of 1 serving before dicing:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• ⅓ cup (175 mL) hot cereal</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 1 slice of bread</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ½ cup (125 mL) cooked pasta or rice</td>
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**Foods to choose:**
- soft breads, buns, or buttered toast
- soft baked items (such as biscuits, muffins) with a spread
- pancakes, waffles, or French toast with apple sauce or syrup to moisten
- hot cereals (oatmeal, cream of wheat, oat bran, cream of rice)
- cold cereals softened in milk (such as cornflakes, bran flakes)
- wheat bran or ground flax seed stirred into cereals
- pasta served in a sauce
- rice, couscous, or barley in a sauce, casserole, or moist sticky rice
- rice pudding, bread pudding, or soft and moist bread stuffing without nuts, seeds, dried fruit, or any other hard particles
- soft crackers (such as soda crackers, Ritz®)
- soft cereal bars (such as Nutri-Grain® bars)

**Foods to avoid:**
- dry, crusty or chewy breads (pitas, crusty buns, bagels, English muffins, soft tortillas)
- pizza crust
- grain products or cereals with chocolate chips, dried fruit, nuts, or seeds
- dry, loose rice (steamed, wild, brown)
- hard or chewy granola or cereal bars

### Milk and Alternatives

**Adults (over 18 years)** - 2 to 3 servings a day  
**Teens (14 to 18 years)** - 3 to 4 servings a day  
**Children (2 to 13 years)** - 2 to 4 servings a day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of 1 serving:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 1 cup (250 mL) milk or fortified soy beverage</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ⅓ cup (175 mL) yogurt</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ½ cup (125 mL) pudding or custard (made with milk or fortified soy beverage)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 1½ oz (50 g) cheese</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 1 cup (250 mL) cottage cheese</td>
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**Foods to choose:**
- plain or flavoured milk, buttermilk, soy milk, or smooth milkshakes
- smooth yogurt (such as plain or vanilla) or those with small soft pieces of fruit or seeds (such as peach or strawberry)
- smooth custard or milk pudding (such as tapioca and rice pudding)
- all cheeses (hard or soft), diced, sliced, or grated
- cottage cheese

**Foods to avoid:**
- yogurt, custard or puddings with large fruit pieces, dried fruit, nuts, seeds or granola
- crispy, melted cheese topping

### Meat and Alternatives

**Adults (over 18 years)** - 2 to 3 servings a day  
**Teens (14 to 18 years)** - 2 to 3 servings a day  
**Children (2 to 13 years)** - 1 to 2 servings a day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of 1 serving before dicing:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 2½ oz (75 gram) or ½ cup (125 mL) cooked meat, poultry, or fish</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 2 eggs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 2 Tbsp (30 mL) peanut or nut butter</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ⅓ cup (175 mL) cooked beans or lentils</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ⅓ cup (175 mL) tofu</td>
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Foods to choose:
- minced meat formed into another product that is tender and made with allowed ingredients (such as casseroles, lasagna, shepherd’s pie, meatloaf, meatballs)
- tender, boneless fish that flakes easily
- canned fish with bones removed or mashed
- cooked eggs or egg substitutes including quiche and omelets, made with allowed ingredients
- sandwiches with finely minced fillings (egg, chicken, tuna salad) or cheese, without lettuce or raw vegetables
- smooth nut butters (such as peanut butter) used in cooking
- soft cooked beans, peas, or lentils
tofu
- broth or cream soups with tender diced meat

Foods that need to be diced:
- moist and tender meat or poultry (could also be served shaved)
- canned meat
- sausages or wieners with soft casings

Foods to avoid:
- crispy or dry meat, poultry, or fish
- bacon, bacon bits, or beef jerky
- wieners or hamburger in a bun
- fried eggs or egg substitutes
- nuts and seeds, whole or chopped
- processed luncheon meats, sausages, or wieners with hard casings (such as salami, Kolbassa, garlic sausage)
- crunchy nut butters or smooth nut butters spread on food

Desserts and Snacks

Foods to choose:
- ice cream, sherbet, popsicles
- Jell-O®, Bavarians
- soft baked desserts (such as moist cakes, pies) made with allowed foods
- soft, moist or easy to break cookies (such as shortbread, Peak Freans® Digestive biscuits)
- cheese puffs or popcorn twists

Foods to avoid:
- hard candy, toffee, licorice, gum
- baked desserts with chocolate chips, dried fruit, nuts, or seeds
- crispy or hard dry desserts and snacks
- chips, popcorn, pretzels, or Cheezies®
- whole, sliced, or cut pickles

Condiments, Sauces, and Dressings

Foods to choose:
- sugar, syrup, or sugar substitutes
- jam, jelly, and marmalade
- finely ground seasonings, herbs and spices without hard seeds
- condiments that are smooth or have small pieces (such as ketchup, BBQ sauce, relish, horseradish, mustard, chutney)
- smooth gravies or sauces (such as white sauce, cheese sauce, hollandaise sauce)
- non-hydrogenated margarine, butter, mayonnaise, salad dressing, sour cream

Foods to avoid:
- herbs, spices, and seasonings with hard seeds (such as coriander, whole pepper)
- jam or marmalade with pieces larger than 1 cm (½ inch)
- condiments with larger pieces (such as chutney, salsa with corn, cranberry sauce)
- spreads, gravies, or sauces that are not smooth

* Sticky foods, such as cream cheese, cheese spread, and honey are allowed if mixed into cooking or thinly spread on allowed foods. These foods are not allowed to be eaten alone.
Making diced food

Some foods, such as meat, poultry, or fruit need to be diced to be a safe texture. Other foods such as canned salmon need to be mashed to be a safe texture.

Foods that need to be diced should be less than 1 cm (½ inch).

Foods can be chopped or mashed with a knife, pastry blender, potato masher, or fork. If you need more information, ask your dietitian or swallowing team.

Vegetables and Fruit
- Drain vegetables or fruit before dicing.
- Cut into small pieces about 1 cm (½ inch) cubed or
- Chop or mash until you have small, even-sized pieces.

Meat
- Cut meat into small pieces about 1 cm (½ inch) cubed or
- Finely shave the meat with a meat slicer or knife so that it looks like thinly-sliced deli meat.

No mixed consistency guidelines

If you are not able to eat both thin fluids and solid foods at the same time (in one mouthful) or if you have been told by your healthcare provider to eat foods with no mixed consistencies, here is a list of foods to avoid:
- canned fruit in liquid
- jellied fruit
- juicy, fresh fruits that release juice when chewed (such as watermelon)
- diced stewed tomatoes or baked tomatoes
- dry cereal with milk
- ice cream and other frozen desserts with nuts, dried fruit, candy, or other hard pieces
- soups with pieces of solid food
- crackers in soup
- more than 1 oz (30 mL) of gravy pooling around the meat

*Try not to take pills with thin fluids. Instead, take with applesauce, pudding, or yogurt. For more information, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.