

Eating Well After an Esophageal Procedure

What is an esophageal procedure?

Your esophagus is the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach.

A procedure (surgery) on your esophagus may be done to help you to swallow better or lower acid reflux (heart burn). These include:

- fundoplication
- Heller myotomy
- peroral endoscopic myotomy (POEM).

After your procedure

After your procedure, swelling or tightness can make it harder for food and fluids to pass through your esophagus.

Swelling or tightness can last for 6–8 weeks while your body heals. During this time, you may have side effects like trouble swallowing or you may lose weight without trying.

Eating

How and what you eat after your procedure is an important part of helping your body heal.

The tips in this handout will help you:

- Eat safely and feel better after surgery.
- Choose the right food texture to help you heal.
- Manage common nutrition-related side effects.

Tips to feel better when eating

These tips may help you reduce pain, gas, diarrhea, and swallowing difficulties while you heal.

- Take small bites and chew all solid foods well.
- Stop eating when you start to feel full.
- If a food causes you pain or discomfort, avoid it for now. Try it again when you have had more time to heal. Talk to your healthcare team if the pain or discomfort continues.
- If eating solid foods, take small sips of fluid during meals to help with swallowing.
- Choose moist foods and add sauces, gravies, or fluids to make them easier to swallow.
- Eat and drink slowly to limit swallowing air, which can cause pain and bloating (see page 4).
- Sit up in a chair while you eat. Stay sitting for at least 30 minutes after eating.
- Stop eating at least 3 hours before going to bed.
- During recovery, keep your head elevated (higher than your body). When in bed, you can do this by:
 - placing bed risers under the headboard posts
 - using extra pillows
 - using a foam bed wedge pillow to raise the head of your bed about 15–20 cm (6–8 inches)



Diet textures

Your healthcare team will let you know how long to follow each texture.

Everybody is different. Some people may need more or less time with each texture.

Swallowing should improve as you heal. If swallowing becomes harder, return to a texture that was easier and choose moist foods within that texture.

Follow your surgeon's guidance when moving to the next texture.

My diet texture plan

Full fluid for _____ days.

Pureed foods for _____ days.

Soft and minced foods for _____ days.

Try regular texture foods after _____ days.

Notes:



For recipes, meal ideas, and tips for each diet texture, go to Nutrition Education (ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) and search using the topic filter, "Dysphagia (Difficulty Swallowing)."

Full fluid

A full fluid diet includes smooth food and drinks that you can sip through a straw or eat with a spoon, like:

- cooked cereals, like oatmeal and Cream of Wheat®
- smooth soups
- smoothies

A full fluid diet may not give you all the nutrients your body needs. If you need to have a full fluid diet for more than a few days, nutrition supplement drinks can help. See the "Nutrition & protein supplements" section to learn more.

Pureed foods

A pureed diet texture includes foods that are too thick to drink but do not need to be chewed. Foods should be moist, smooth, and free of lumps.

You can make your own pureed meals and snacks or buy foods that already have a pureed texture, such as:

- fruit sauces, like applesauce
- smooth mashed potatoes and gravy
- smooth yogurt and ice cream (without chunks or pieces)

For more protein, try blending foods like soft or silken tofu, cottage cheese, cooked eggs, or legumes (beans, lentils, split peas, and chickpeas).

Soft and minced foods

This texture includes foods that are soft, moist, and cut into small pieces.

For foods to choose and avoid, see page 3.

- Foods in the avoid column may be included if they are blended or finely chopped and mixed with fluid to make them softer and easier to swallow.
- This includes tough or fibrous foods like leafy greens, meats, and nuts.

Some people may find dry bread products, like bread, buns, crackers, cakes, pie crust, and tortillas feel like they get stuck in their throat. To make these foods easier to swallow:

- add moisture, like butter or sauces
- take small bites and chew them well
- have a sip of fluid after each bite of food

Swallowing after a POEM

If you had a POEM procedure and have little or no peristalsis (the muscle movements that move food through your throat and gut), follow your diet texture plan closely. You will likely need to follow a full fluid and pureed diet for about 14 days.

Only have food and drinks that fit within your diet texture plan.

As you move to different diet textures, choose moist foods and add sauces, gravies, or fluids to make them easier to swallow. Continue to do this even after returning to regular textures.

Soft and minced foods to choose or avoid

Use the examples below to start eating solids foods. Take small bites, chew your food well, and sip fluids during meals to help you swallow.

	Foods to choose	Foods to avoid
Protein foods	- beans, split peas, and lentils, canned or cooked - canned or flaked meat or fish - casseroles or stews, soft and moist - custard, frozen yogurt, ice cream, milkshakes eggs (poached, boiled, or scrambled) - milk, cheese (grated brick or soft like cottage or ricotta cheese), yogurt - smooth nut butters - tofu (soft)	- bacon or bacon bits - crispy coatings - crunchy nut butters - dry, tough, stringy meat, fish, or poultry (chicken wings, dried fish, jerky, spareribs) - meat with casings (hot dogs, sausages) - milk products with hard fruit pieces, coconut, dried fruit, granola, nuts, or seeds - nuts and seeds - stringy or crispy cooked cheese, like mozzarella cheese topping
Grain foods	- barley, pasta, or rice, soft and well-cooked - crackers and plain cookies that can be chewed well or soaked in soup or milk - dry cereals softened with milk - hot cereals (cream of rice, cream of wheat, oat bran) - soft breads with allowed spreads like butter or sauces (remove crusts if dry or hard)	- any foods with nuts, seeds, or dried fruit - dry or crusty bread products like whole grain breads, hard crackers, pancakes and buns (allowed if moisture added like butter, margarine, or syrup) - hard, chewy granola bars or cereal bars - pizza, hard crackers, melba toast - wild rice
Vegetables and fruits	- fresh fruit, soft, skins and seeds removed, like bananas, peaches or pears - vegetable and fruit juices - vegetables, canned or cooked, peels and seeds removed - vegetables in soups, sauces, and stews	- fruits with seeds, skins, and membranes - raw or hard vegetables and fruits - stringy, hard vegetables or fruit like celery, coconut, dried fruit, green beans, pineapple, and rhubarb
Other foods	- butter, cheese spread, cream cheese, margarine, oils - gelatin desserts, plain or with soft foods - honey, jam, jelly, marmalade, sugar, sugar substitutes, syrup - ketchup, mayonnaise, mustard - smooth cheesecakes, crème caramel, puddings, pie filling - soups	- cake, pastry, pie crust - chips, popcorn, pretzels - chocolates, hard candy, licorice, toffee - deep-fried foods

Nutrition & protein supplements

Nutrition supplements may help you get more calories and protein.

- Nutrition supplement drinks, like Ensure®, Boost®, Resource® 2.0, and PediaSure® have calories, protein, vitamins, and minerals. Choose high calorie and high protein options.
- Unflavored protein supplements can be added to smoothies, soups, mashed potatoes, yogurt, and oatmeal without changing the taste.
- Store brands often offer similar nutrition at a lower cost.

Managing side effects

Tell your healthcare team about any side effects after surgery. They can help you manage them.

Bloating and gas

Bloating is from a buildup of gas in your body usually after eating or drinking.

Some people notice that certain foods, fluids, or actions cause gas and bloating. While gas and bloating are normal, they may cause you pain and discomfort.

To manage bloating, limit or avoid:

- beans (canned or dry)
- beer
- broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, garlic, and onion
- chewing gum or sucking on candy or ice cubes
- carbonated (fizzy) drinks like soda
- gulping fluids, drinking fast, or using straws

Dumping syndrome

Dumping syndrome is when food leaves, or dumps, quickly from your stomach to your gut.

Symptoms can start as early as 30 minutes after eating or can be up to 3 hours after a meal. These include:

- cramping, stomach pain, or diarrhea
- flushing or sweating
- nausea or vomiting
- weakness, dizziness, or feeling shaky

Tips to try:

- Eat slowly, take small bites, and chew food well.
- Avoid drinking large amounts of fluids with meals; drink fluids 30 mins before or after eating. If you need to drink with meals, take small sips.
- Limit foods higher in sugar, including sweet drinks like pop and desserts.
- Lay down for 20–30 mins after eating (don't do this if you still have acid reflux or heartburn).

Feeling full quickly while eating

- Eat slowly and try to relax during meals.
- It may be easier to eat 5–6 small meals during the day rather than 3 large meals.
- Take small bites and chew your food well.
- Drink fluids like water, coffee, or tea after meals to leave more room for food. If you need to drink during meals, take small sips.

Losing weight

Many people lose some weight after surgery.

If you suspect you are losing weight (clothes feel looser), you may need more calories (energy).

- You need to eat more food or eat more often.
- Try to eat foods higher in calories and protein.
- Add extra calories to your meals and snacks.
 - Try adding smooth nut butter, olive oil, avocado, or regular coconut milk to a fruit smoothie.
 - Add heavy cream, full fat sour cream or yogurt, or blend cottage cheese into soups or mashed potatoes.
 - Add oil, butter, or margarine to vegetables.
- Limit pop, candy, alcohol, and diet foods. These have few nutrients and may keep you from getting enough calories.
- See “Nutrition & protein supplements” section.

More information

For tips on foods that help with healing, go to ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts and search, “Eating Well for Wound Healing.”

- When choosing food, prepare them as needed so they are a safe texture for you.

Visit MyHealth.Alberta.ca for more information on:

- [Achalasia](#)
- [Fundoplication Surgery for Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease \(GERD\)](#)

