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Meal ideas and advice when you need to follow a level 6 soft and bite-sized diet

Nutrition and Dietetics

Adult Speech and Language Therapy

Information for Patients

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Main points

1. Your food needs to be very soft and moist.
2. Bite sized pieces of food should be no bigger than 1.5cm x 1.5cm in size.
3. You should try to have lots of different foods in your diet.
4. Some foods should be avoided (see page 3).

Introduction

If you are having difficulty with chewing or swallowing food, you may need to have a **soft and bite-sized diet** as advised by a speech and language therapist.

A **soft and bite-sized** diet may also be easier to eat if you have pain on chewing or swallowing, missing teeth or poorly fitting dentures

The aim of this leaflet is to give you ideas for suitable meal choices and useful tips on how to make mealtimes enjoyable.

It is important that you keep eating lots of different types of food to make sure you get all the vitamins and minerals that your body needs to stay healthy

If you have recently lost weight or are underweight, you will find some useful ideas on how to make food as nourishing as possible.

What is a soft and bite sized diet?

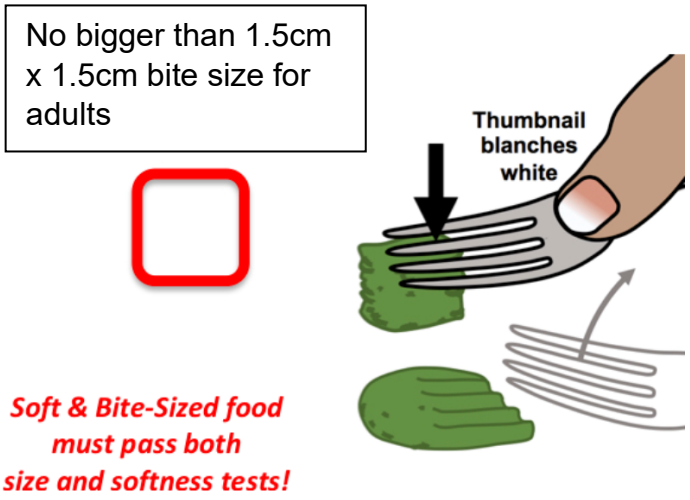
A soft and bite sized diet is made of foods that are very soft, tender and moist. It has no separate thin liquid dripping from the food. It is in bite sized pieces to reduce choking risk. **For adults, 1.5cm x 1.5cm** that is roughly the size of a thumb nail / width of standard dinner fork.

- Can be eaten with a fork or spoon.
- Can be mashed/ broken down with pressure from a fork or spoon.
- Chewing is needed before swallowing.
- A knife is not needed to cut this food. Pressure from a fork or spoon held on its side can be used to cut or break this texture into smaller pieces.

IDDSI Fork Pressure Test

For **adults** the limp size **is no bigger than 1.5cm x 1.5cm,** which is about the width of a standard dinner fork.

To make sure the food is soft enough, press down on the fork until the thumbnail blanches to white, then lift the fork to see that the food is completely squashed and does not regain its shape.



The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative v2.2 2026 https://iddsi.org/framework/

Examples of suitable foods

- Bite sized pieces of cooked, tender meat. If texture cannot be served tender or soft at 1.5 cm x 1.5 cm, serve minced and moist.
- Soft fish (no bones) that can be broken into pieces with fork.
- Casserole/ stew/ curry. If final cooked pieces of meat, fish or vegetables are soft and tender and bite sized, no hard lumps and liquid portion very thick.
- Soft bite sized pieces of fruit or serve mashed, no stringy parts or excess juice.
- Steamed or boiled vegetables with final cooked size or pieces = 1.5cm. Stir fried vegetables are often too firm and are not soft and tender so should be avoided.
- Fully softened smooth cereal with soft tender lumps no bigger than 1.5cm and no excess fluid/ milk.
- Rice should not be dry, grainy or sticky It should not separate into separate grains. It may need a thick smooth sauce to hold the rice together for example, rice pudding, risotto.

Food textures to avoid on a soft and bite sized diet

Food characteristic to avoid	Examples of foods to avoid
Mixed thin and thick textures	Soup with pieces of food, cereal with milk
Hard or dry food	Nuts, raw vegetables (for example carrot, cauliflower, broccoli), dry cakes, bread, dry cereal
Tough and stringy food	Steak, pineapple, celery
Chewy food	Lollies, sweets, cheese chunks, marshmallows, chewing gum, sticky mashed potato, dried fruits, sticky foods
Crispy food	Crackling, crisp bacon, cornflakes
Crunchy food	Raw carrot, raw apple, popcorn
Sharp or spiky food	Corn chips, crisps
Crumbly bits	Dry cake crumble, dry biscuits (add sauce to make these suitable)
Pips, seeds	Apple seeds, pumpkin seeds, white of an orange
Foods with skins or outer shell	Peas, grapes, sausage skin, chicken skin, salmon skin
Foods with husks	Corn, shredded wheat, bran
Bone or gristle	Chicken bones, fish bones, meat with gristle
Round, long shaped food	Sausage, grape
Sticky or gummy food	Nut butters; overcooked oatmeal/ porridge, edible gelatine, sticky rice cakes
Stringy food	Beans, rhubarb
‘Floppy’ foods	Lettuce, cucumber, uncooked baby spinach leaves
Crust formed during cooking or heating	Crust or skin that forms on food during cooking or after eating for example cheese topping, mashed potato
‘Juicy’ food	Where juice separates from the food piece in the mouth, for example watermelon
Large or hard lumps of food lumps	Casserole pieces larger than 1.5cm x 1.5cm. Fruit, vegetable, meat, pasta or other food pieces larger than 1.5cm x 1.5cm

Bread: no bread, sandwiches or toast of any kind are suitable for this diet.

Fruits like watermelon where the juice separates from the fruit when chewing can be difficult. Your speech and language therapist will assess this on an individual basis.

Ice-cream and jelly may also not be recommended if you are also having thickened fluids. Check with your speech and language therapist.

Practical tips

It is important to enjoy your food and mealtimes. The following points may help:

- Adding sauces to drier foods may make them easier to chew and swallow (for example thick gravy, parsley sauce, custard, double cream).
- Include a variety of foods to avoid boredom (see food choice ideas on page 6 to 8) and to make sure you get lots of different nutrients to keep you healthy.
- The way food is presented can help to increase your appetite.
- Foods should be served at the correct temperature to bring out the flavour.
- Try to eat slowly and serve a small amount at a time so your food does not get cold before you finish it. You could heat up another small portion later if you feel you can manage more. Warming your plate before serving may help to keep your food hot for longer.
- Eat in a quiet and relaxed atmosphere where there is no hurry to finish and sit upright during your meal.
- Finish 1 mouthful before taking the next. If you feel any food is at the back of your throat, swallow again before continuing with your meal.
- If you cannot manage to eat 3 meals a day, try eating ‘little and often’. Use the times or days when your appetite is good to eat more.
- Have nourishing snacks or drinks handy for when you feel hungry, for example, mousses, milkshakes, yogurts and custard. See page 6 for more ideas.
- Drinks such as water, tea and coffee give very little nourishment and can fill you up. Try milky drinks instead. Try not to drink just before a meal, as you may not be able to eat as much.
- If you are struggling to cook or shop on a regular basis, make use of convenience foods, which need very little preparation, or order in pre-prepared food from delivery companies (also see links for these and store cupboard ideas on page 8 and 9).
- If possible, weigh yourself once a week. If you are losing weight or your appetite is poor, please make sure you are following the ideas on page 9.

Your dietitian or speech and language therapist will be happy to help you. Please contact them if you are worried or have any questions about your diet or swallowing.

Balanced diet

You should try to have foods from each different food group every day. **All foods must be cut up into 1.5 cm x 1.5cm pieces as needed.**

Protein foods: try to have one of these foods 2 times a day:

- Meat (pieces of meat should be no bigger than 1.5cm x 1.5cm) or soft fish in sauce
- Lentils, beans, pulses well cooked, tofu, Quorn
- Scrambled egg
- Cheese in sauce

Starchy foods: gives energy, have a food from this group at least 3 times a day:

- ‘Ready Brek’, smooth porridge or ‘Weetabix’ with warm milk
- Mashed potato or chopped pasta, rice with a sauce
- Rice pudding, semolina or custard

Vegetables: which will cook until soft enough to mash/ chop for example:

- Carrots
- Turnips
- Cauliflower
- Broccoli
- Parsnip
- Swede

Fruit: try to have 2 portions a day of stewed/ soft tinned or fresh fruit chopped/ pureed/ mashed fruit for example:

- Mango
- Banana
- Apple (without the skin)
- Tinned peaches or pears
- Or fruit which can be pureed and sieved if needed or put in a drink for example banana or strawberry milkshake.

Dairy products: has calcium and protein. Try to have an amount equal to at least 1 pint of milk per day:

- 1 smooth yogurt (no bits) = ⅓ of a pint
- 30g/1oz cheese = ⅓ of a pint

Use full cream varieties and wherever possible make custard, semolina or rice pudding with full cream milk.

Fatty and sugary foods: add more of these foods if you need to gain weight for example butter, margarine, oil, cream or grated cheese, sugar, honey or syrup.

Soft and bite sized meal ideas

All meals/ snacks must be cut up into 1.5cm x 1.5cm pieces.

Breakfast:

- Cereals soaked or cooked in milk for example Ready Brek, Weetabix, smooth instant porridge (make sure milk is absorbed fully into the cereal).
- Yogurt
- Eggs: boiled or poached, scrambled

Between meals drinks and snacks:

Milky drinks for example: (if adding extra sugar caution if you have diabetes)

- Cocoa, 'Horlicks'
- Drinking Chocolate
- Coffee made with milk
- Milk
- Milkshakes
- Smoothies
- Complan / Aymes shakes
- Fruit juice for example orange, cranberry
- Full fat yogurt or soft pudding, see pudding list on next page

Drinks may need to be thickened, check with your speech and language therapist.

Snack meal ideas:

- Smooth soup: home made, packet or tinned. Do not have soups like minestrone as they have a lot of chunks of different sizes. Add dried potato flakes, for example, Smash or breadcrumbs to thicken. Try adding grated cheese. Condensed cream of soups such as Campbell's can be made up with milk, Tomato/ Chicken/ Mushroom/ Asparagus.
- Scrambled, poached or soft-boiled egg, served with chopped tinned tomatoes and creamed potato or tinned spaghetti.
- Corned beef, tinned tuna or salmon, served with tinned spaghetti or creamed potato.
- Jacket potato (without the skin) with soft filling for example cream/ cottage cheese, pate, tuna mayo, egg mayo.

Main meal ideas:

- Minced / tender and chopped beef, lamb, pork, chicken or turkey (pieces of meat should be no bigger than 1.5cm).
- Shepherd's pie/ cottage pie
- Corned beef hash
- Omelette (plain or with cheese)

- Flaked fish in a thick, smooth sauce for example cheese, parsley or white sauce.
- Cauliflower cheese, broccoli cheese (make sure vegetables are cooked until soft), cheese soufflé.
- Vegetable or lentil stew/ curries, dhal (well-cooked)
- Quorn mince/ lentil bolognaise
- Tofu in thick, smooth sauce

Serve above with, creamed potatoes, instant mashed potatoes, soft boiled potatoes/ soft chips in gravy, or well-cooked pasta and soft/ mashed vegetables for example carrots, swede, cauliflower, parsnip, broccoli with butter, gravy or sauce for example white sauce or mushy peas, tinned chopped tomatoes (no juice).

- Pasta dishes such as spaghetti bolognaise (baked pasta dishes such as lasagne may have a hard/ chewy texture especially on top layer so may not be suitable for this diet)
- Risotto

Puddings:

Make all desserts, where applicable, with full cream milk

- Smooth plain ice-cream/ kulfi. Check if suitable with speech and language therapist if on thickened fluids.
- Milk pudding for example rice, tapioca, sago, semolina or custard served with jam/ honey/ smooth marmalade/ cream/ sugar/ pureed fruit.
- Stewed fruit/ soft tinned fruit (pieces no bigger than 1.5cm) in syrup served with custard, evaporated or condensed milk.
- Sponge pudding with custard and stewed fruit
- Egg custard (no pastry)
- Fromage frais (full fat)
- Crème caramel
- Trifle (with raspberry, strawberry or other soft fruit)
- Yogurt such as thick and creamy or ‘Muller’ fruit corner yogurts
- Mousse such as ‘Cadbury’ chocolate mousse, ‘Nestle’ Rolo dessert
- Blancmange
- Milk jelly
- ‘Instant whip’, ‘Angel Delight’
- Banana (pieces no bigger than 1.5cm) and ice-cream/ custard

Try adding the following to your puddings:

- Cream
- Natural/ Greek yogurt (not low fat)
- ‘Complan’ powder, neutral flavour
- Condensed/ evaporated milk (make sure well absorbed/ thicken before adding if needed)

Buying ready prepared soft and bite sized meals

The following companies have meals delivered to your door:

- **Wiltshire Farm Foods:** softer foods range, includes soft and bite-sized meals and puddings.

  0800 077 3100 / www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com
- **Simply puree:** a range of texture modified meals and puddings.

  0191 4560456 / www.simplyfoodsolutions.co.uk
- **Oakhouse foods:** a selection of soft and bite-sized meals as part of softer foods range.

  0333 370 6700 / www.oakhousefoods.co.uk

Store cupboard ideas

- Breakfast cereal such as smooth instant porridge, 'Ready Brek'.
- Smooth tinned and packet soups, for example cream of chicken, tomato, mushroom and lentil.
- Tinned meats, for example corned beef and minced beef.
- Tinned fish for example tuna mayonnaise, salmon and sardines.
- Tinned pasta for example macaroni cheese, spaghetti bolognaise.
- Dried potato flakes for example 'Smash'.
- Tinned milk puddings such as custard, semolina and creamed rice.
- Packet mousses or instant whip.
- Long-life products such as ultra-high temperature (UHT) milk, fruit juice, yogurts, readymade custard pots.
- Powdered hot drinks for example 'Horlicks', 'Ovaltine', 'Cocoa', and drinking chocolate.
- Tinned cream, evaporated and condensed milk, Complan or milk powder.

If you are trying to gain weight, then do not have 'low fat' or 'diet' products.

What to do if you are losing weight

If you are **losing weight** you can add extra nourishment to the food that you are managing to eat. By doing this you will get more energy and protein, which will help to maintain weight or prevent further weight loss.

- **Milk:** use full cream milk. To make fortified milk, add 4 tablespoons of milk powder (for example Marvel) to 1 pint of full fat milk. Use this milk whenever you use milk for example in drinks, puddings, mashed potato and sauces. 1 tablespoon milk powder can also be added to porridge or soup.
- **Cheese:** add grated cheese to cooked vegetables, mashed potato, soups and sauces.
- **Soup:** make packet soups with fortified milk or add 2 tablespoons of milk powder to smooth tinned or packet soup. You could also try savoury ‘Complan’ or Aymes soups. These are available from your chemist and some supermarkets.
- **Butter / margarine /oil:** use plenty on pasta, potatoes and vegetables.
- **Double cream:** add to soup, potato, cereals, milk puddings and milky drinks.
- **Ice cream / evaporated milk / condensed milk / full cream yogurts like Greek yoghurt / custard:** use on puddings.
- **Sugar / syrup / honey (caution if diabetic):** add to drinks, desserts and cereals.

Remember to thicken all drinks/ foods if advised by Speech and Language Therapist.

Weight chart

Some people find it useful to write down their weight. If you would like to keep a record of your weight you can do that here. There is no need to weigh yourself more than once per week.

Date	Weight

Contact details

Nutrition and Dietetic Service: _

Adult Speech and Language Therapy Service: _

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