

Making the most of your pureed meals

Head and Neck Oncology

Nutrition & Dietetics Department



Patient information leaflet

Who is this leaflet for?

This booklet has been designed for people who are having difficulty chewing or swallowing. This may be as a result of your diagnosis, surgery or treatment. You may find your usual food choices too hard and difficult to swallow. Eating solid foods may cause you pain, make you cough, and it may take you a long time to finish your meals. This can result in you eating less than you need, causing nutritional deficiencies and weight loss. You are likely to find pureed foods easier to manage.

This booklet aims to help you choose suitable foods, and adapt your meals and snacks to a pureed consistency. It also provides advice on how to get the most nourishment from your pureed meals.

What is pureed food?

Pureed food is smooth and has no lumps. Most food can be pureed by blending it with gravy, sauces, milk or water. By adding more or less liquid you can change the thickness of the puree. Some foods are naturally a pureed consistency, i.e. smooth yoghurts (without bits) or custard.

What equipment do I need?

Most foods can be made into a pureed consistency using one of the following pieces of kitchen equipment:

- A liquidiser
- A food processor
- A hand-held blender – ideal for small quantities
- A sieve

How do I puree food?

Most food can be pureed. Prepare using the following method:

- Remove skins, seeds, pith, bones, tough membranes and other inedible parts of foods
- Steam, boil or bake foods that require cooking until soft
- Cut into small pieces
- Place small quantities of the food into the liquidiser or blender
- Then add fluid if required (e.g. milk, fruit juice, soups, stock or sauces) to gain the desired consistency and ensure the meal is not too dry
- If you are using a sieve, push the pureed mixture through the sieve using the back of a spoon to remove any remaining pips, lumps or skins
- If food has cooled down reheat to desired temperature.

Why is it important for me to eat well?

Poor appetite and/or weight loss are common during illness, after a period of time in hospital or during some medical treatments.

It is important to ensure that you eat well during these times to help with your recovery. Foods high in fat, sugar and carbohydrate provide lots of calories (energy) in small portions, making it easier for you to eat what you need and maintain your weight.

The tips in this leaflet are intended to help you make the right choices and ensure that you eat as well as possible.

NOTE: If you have high cholesterol, diabetes or another medical condition which has required a change of diet in the past, and you are unsure if some of the suggestions in this leaflet are appropriate for you, please contact your Dietitian for advice.

Which foods should I choose?

Variety is important to get all the nutrients you need, and prevent boredom in your diet.

- Aim to include meat, fish, eggs or pulses at least twice a day. These are rich sources of protein, which are important for wound healing, muscle function and your immune system
- Pureed meals can be bulky and quite filling. Use nutritious fluids, e.g. sauces, soups, cream, to make the pureed consistency, rather than using water which contains no calories or protein.
- Eat small, frequent meals and snacks throughout the day, i.e. three meals per day with snacks in between. This helps reduce the risk of weight loss and nutrient deficiencies
- Make meals as nourishing as possible by increasing the calorie content. See the section “How can I increase the Energy content in my Food?”
- Fruit and vegetables provide useful dietary fibre and protective vitamins and minerals, but are low in calories. Add high calorie foods/sauces to them to increase the total energy content, e.g. pureed apple and custard, cauliflower with cheese, broccoli and stilton.
- For planned social occasions try having a big leisurely meal earlier in the day if you are concerned about how long it takes you to eat your food. This means you can choose lighter, easy to manage meals and snacks when socialising, enabling you to enjoy the occasion without compromising your overall daily food intake.

How often should I eat?

If your appetite is poor you may find that your usual portion sizes are off-putting. You may be eating less than usual at mealtimes. If this is the case:

- Eat “little and often”
- Try to include a small snack or nourishing drink between meals
- Have a dessert after meals

- Avoid low fat or diet foods
- Opt for frequent snack meals instead of large main meals if you find this easier
- Do not be afraid to use convenience foods; supermarkets stock a wide range of frozen, chilled, canned or packet ready meals. These will save you time and effort.

Companies that deliver frozen ready-made pureed meals are available. Ask your Dietitian or Speech Therapist for further information.

How can I increase the energy content of my food?

Add extra calories and protein to your food wherever you can. This means you increase the energy content of your meals without having to eat a larger volume of food. This helps prevent weight loss. Use full fat products wherever possible to help you maintain or gain weight. Avoid low calorie or diet products unless advised otherwise by your dietitian.

■ **Breakfast cereal**

Add full fat milk, yoghurt, cream, sugar, honey or golden syrup to porridge, Ready Brek® or Weetabix®. Mix to a smooth consistency.

■ **Soups**

Choose homemade, tinned or cartons of soup over instant soups. Aim to choose "cream of" soups or those with potatoes, lentils or protein, eg meat or fish, rather than just vegetable soups. Make soup with full fat milk rather than water and add extra foods to enrich the soup, e.g., grated cheese, cream, milk powder, pureed beans, pureed lentils or pureed rice.

■ **Sauces**

Granules, tinned or packet mixes can all be used to make sauces. Extra cheese, margarine/butter, smooth peanut butter, pesto, evaporated milk, cream or coconut milk can be added.

■ **Dips**

Try taramasalata, satay, salsa, guacamole, but ensure all dips are smooth (no bits).

■ Potatoes and vegetables

Instant mashed potato can be used as a powder or thickener in other pureed dishes. Add grated cheese, butter/margarine, milk, cream, sauces or gravy to mashed potato or vegetables

■ Eggs

Add cheese, cream, crème fraiche, butter or margarine.

■ Puddings and desserts

Add well-mashed banana, jam, honey, maple syrup, chocolate/strawberry sauce, margarine/butter, cream, evaporated, condensed or Channel Island milk to yoghurt, custard, pureed rice pudding, semolina.

How do I make pureed meals look more appealing?

Attractive looking foods help stimulate the appetite. Pureed food lacks texture and can look bland and uninteresting. The following tips may help improve this.

■ Presentation

Present pureed food separately e.g, vegetables separate from meat and separate from potato. Pureed food can look better served in a bowl instead of a plate. A plate with dividers can be useful to prevent food from collapsing and running into each other.

■ Portions

Larger portion sizes can be off-putting. Small to medium, attractively presented meals look more appetising and are more likely to get eaten. Try using a smaller plate so that you can finish meals.

■ Flavour

Try to vary the flavours in meals. Flavours can be enhanced by marinating foods before pureeing, e.g. with garlic, flavoured oils, spices, lemon juice, red wine. Use pickles, spices and a variety of sauces e.g., soy, sweet and sour, Worcester®, tomato, barbeque, pesto, smooth peanut butter, curry or mint to intensify the flavours of pureed food. Avoid spicy and acidic sauces if you have a sore mouth.

■ Colour

Choose foods with a variety of colours to make meals look more interesting. Fish in white sauce with mashed potato and cauliflower can look very bland! Combine brightly coloured vegetables with pale food, e.g. carrots or green beans with creamed potato and beef in red wine sauce.

■ Garnish

Pale foods, such as creamed potato or chicken, can be livened up with a sprinkling of paprika, pepper or very finely chopped fresh herbs (not dried), or a dash of brown sauce/gravy.

■ Temperature

Food often cools down when it is being liquidised. Try to serve small portions or reheat food (only reheat a meal once). A short burst in the microwave whilst eating the meal may be helpful or add extra hot gravy or sauce to the food. Plate warmers are available from specialist suppliers.

■ Desserts

Serve desserts in individual bowls or glasses, pipe some cream on the top and dust with icing sugar, cocoa or drinking chocolate. Alternatively, drizzle strawberry, chocolate or caramel sauce over desserts as a topping.

How can I save time?

You may be tempted to try commercial baby foods but these do not provide adequate nourishment for adults and can be expensive.

■ Ready-to-eat meals

Tinned, packet, frozen or boil-in-the-bag foods can be re-heated according to the instructions and then blended. They can be thickened with instant mashed potato and flavoured with sauces or gravy.

■ **Portioning and freezing food**

If you have a freezer, you may find it convenient to make up a full recipe (4-6 servings) and then divide into portions to be frozen.

- Cool the food after cooking.
- Portion into clean, plastic containers
- Label and date the container or pots
- Freeze immediately

To eat, defrost portions thoroughly at room temperature or in the microwave, then reheat. Remember not to re-freeze previously defrosted food or reheat food more than once because of the risk of food poisoning.

■ **Meal delivery services**

Some companies deliver pre-prepared pureed meals to your home, e.g, Wiltshire Farm Foods, Kealth Foods, Mrs Gill's Texture Modified Meals. Contact them directly for a brochure detailing menus, fees and further information on their services.

Meal Ideas

What can I eat for Breakfast?

- Sieved or blended porridge or Ready Brek® with pureed fruit, honey or syrup
- Weetabix® soaked in plenty of hot or cold milk. Stir to achieve a smooth consistency
- Smooth yoghurt (avoid ones with fruit pieces) – try Greek yoghurt, thick and creamy yoghurt or fromage frais
- Banana, tinned peaches, grated apple or pears liquidised with fortified milk or cream (see recipe later in leaflet)
- Milk pudding/rice pudding with jam or honey
- Scrambled or poached eggs pureed with milk and cheese
- Bread (crusts removed) soaked in tinned/chopped tomato or baked beans blended until smooth and sieved to remove husks.

What can I eat for lunch and dinner?

Soup

Any soup can be liquidised or strained:

- Try liquidised thick soups like lentil, or leek and potato, and push through a sieve to make smooth
- Add cream, cheese, potato, ham or minced meat before liquidising
- Make up condensed and packet soups with fortified milk or cream and sieve to remove any bits
- Thicken with bread (no crusts) or mash potato before liquidising

Pasta and rice

- Cook pasta or rice until very soft
- Add sauces (e.g. bolognese, cheese, curry, pesto, satay or carbonara). Then add extra cheese, cream, full fat milk as required to obtain the desired consistency, blending well until smooth

Extra ideas – all require blending to a smooth consistency:

- Spaghetti Bolognese/meatballs
- Macaroni and cheese or Lasagne
- Risotto with mixed vegetables
- Rice with curry and dahl

Vegetables

Any fresh, tinned or frozen vegetables can be used, e.g. green beans, cauliflower, avocado

- Pulses puree well (lentils, kidney beans, chick peas, butter beans, baked beans)
- Avoid fibrous vegetables like celery and cabbage
- Peel and cut into small pieces avoiding seeds and skins
- Steam, boil or microwave as preferred

- Drain off water then puree in blender until smooth/or push through sieve to remove any remaining “bits”
- Add butter/margarine, grated cheese, milk, cream, pepper
- Use cheese, hummus, taramasalata, guacamole, to add flavour

Potato

Potato can be easily mashed or liquidised to a smooth puree

- Cook thoroughly, then mash with margarine, fortified milk, crème fraiche, or grated cheese
- Add to blender or food processor
- Mix in more milk to make smooth and reduce lumps
- Alternatively instant potato can be used and easily made up to a puree consistency

Meat or poultry

All types of meat and poultry can be pureed

- Cook until soft and remove skins, bones, fat or gristle
- Blend meat on its own to make a paté
- Add sauce, curry, chutney, gravy or stock

Extra ideas:

- Chicken with barbecue sauce or honey
- Casseroled pork/beef in gravy
- Beef with tinned tomato soup
- Pork pureed with apple sauce
- Cooked ham with tinned mushroom soup
- Meatloaf – pureed served with beef broth or gravy

Fish

Fresh, frozen or tinned fish can all be pureed

- Cook until flaky, remove bones and then blend into puree

Extra ideas:

- Poached white fish with cheese, butter or parsley sauce
- Fish with condensed soup as a sauce
- Fisherman's pie
- Tinned salmon with mayonnaise and lemon juice
- Tinned mackerel with tomato juice
- Ready prepared fish in sauce can also be puree

What puddings and snacks should I choose?

Choose full fat milk and dairy products as these contain the most calories.

Cold puddings

- Rice pudding put through blender until smooth, or made with ground rice
- Thick or set yoghurt, eg Greek style (avoid those with fruit pieces)
- Fromage frais, instant whip desserts, mousse, crème caramel, panacotta, blancmange, tiramisu (pureed to smooth texture)
- Ice cream, sorbet (unless advised to avoid by your Speech & Language Therapist)
- Cheesecake with biscuit base removed. Add extra milk, cream or ice cream if it is too sticky
- Jelly with pureed fruit added. Try making the jelly with milk instead of water to increase calories
- Egg custard
- Sponge cake soaked in fruit juice until completely soft, evaporated milk or cream

Hot puddings

- Home-made, tinned or packet puddings such as custard and semolina
- Hot, sponge puddings blended with custard, cream or ice-cream
- Rice, sago and tapioca may need to be blended further
- Pancakes – puree using milk and syrup
To make puddings thinner or less sticky, add fortified milk, cream, custard or evaporated milk

Fruit

- Tinned or stewed fruit liquidised well. If needed, add extra liquid, e.g., fruit juice, syrup, cream, coconut milk/cream, yoghurt, evaporated or condensed milk
- Cook apples, pears or plums. Remove cores, skins, stones and pips before pureeing
- Fruit fools/sundaes
- Well mashed banana until smooth with cream and honey
- Drizzle sauces over puddings/ice cream, e.g. caramel, strawberry, chocolate sauce

What nourishing drinks should I choose?

Extra drinks between meals can help to increase your daily calorie intake. Check with your Speech and Language Therapist if you are having difficulty with drinking liquids.

■ Fortified milk

Increase the nutritional value of milk by mixing 4 heaped tablespoons of skimmed milk powder into 1 pint of full fat milk. Condensed, evaporated or Channel Island milk and milk products are particularly high in calories as well as being a useful source of protein.

■ Milk shakes

Blend together full fat or fortified milk with 1 scoop of ice cream and a small tin of fruit or a banana.

- **Fruit juice**
Choose any fruit juice, e.g. orange, grapefruit, apple or pineapple. Avoid those “with bits”.
- **Fruit smoothies**
Commercially available fruit smoothies are a good source of fruit. Choose any smoothie, or make your own by blending peeled, cored and de-seeded fruit at home.
- **Hot drinks**
Ovaltine®, Horlicks® or Drinking Chocolate made with fortified milk and topped with cream.
- **Yoghurt drink**
Blend together a carton of fruit yoghurt with a glass of fruit juice.
- **Fortified supplement drinks**
Complan® and Build-Up® can be bought from the chemist or supermarket. Make up as directed using full fat or fortified milk. Neutral flavoured powders are available as well as milkshake sachets and sachet soups.
- **Prescribed supplement drinks**
These are nourishing drinks prescribed by your dietitian or GP if required. Some examples include Fortisip®, Ensure®, Fresubin® and Scandishake®. Speak to your dietitian if you feel you would benefit from these.

See *Simple recipes* on page 15 for further ideas.

What can I do to improve my swallow?

If you are finding swallowing difficult or effortful tell someone who can then refer you to a Speech & Language Therapist, if you are not already known to one. Try the following tips when you eat, drink and take medication:

- You should be awake and alert when you eat and drink
- Whenever possible, sit upright in a chair when eating, and for 30 minutes afterwards
- Make sure you only have one mouthful of food or fluid at a time

- Swallow food and clear your mouth before you take the next mouthful. This might mean swallowing twice
- Don't rush at mealtimes. Take frequent pauses during the meal and try to chew well
- Take sips of fluid between mouthfuls of food (unless advised otherwise by your Speech & Language Therapist)
- At the end of each meal, make sure your mouth is empty and check for any food in your cheeks and around teeth and gums. Brush your teeth or use a mouthwash to ensure mouth is clean.
- If you feel something has gone down the wrong way, try to clear it with a strong cough
- Make mealtimes a pleasant and relaxed experience.

If you have already been provided with exercises and specific advice from your Speech and Language Therapist, please follow as prescribed.

Contact Speech and Language Therapy if you require any further information.

What can I eat if I suffer from constipation?

Constipation can be a problem for some people following a pureed diet.

- Drink sufficient liquid. Aim for 3-4 pints (8-10 cups) total fluid per day. Water helps to keep you hydrated but contains no calories. Try and include some other drinks each day, e.g. milk, smoothies, tea, coffee, juice, squash, lassi, Bovril® and soups. Fizzy drinks can be refreshing but may worsen symptoms of pain or bloating in large volumes.
- Liquidising does not destroy the fibre content of foods so include high fibre foods. Choose porridge, Weetabix®, wholegrains, plenty of fruit and vegetables daily.
- Speak to your GP about laxatives and use them regularly as prescribed if they are needed.
- Incorporate some exercise into your activities every day. A sedentary lifestyle can make constipation worse.

Simple recipes

The following pureed recipes are for one serving/person.
Double the stated quantities as desired.

Sausage and eggs

- 1 or 2 skinless sausages, cooked and drained
- 2 soft cooked eggs
- ½ cup fried potatoes
- ½ slice buttered toast
- 1 cup warm milk

Chop sausage into small pieces. Put into blender and add eggs, potatoes, toast and milk. Blend until smooth.

High energy porridge

- 4 tablespoons of cooked porridge
- 6 tablespoons of hot milk
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon of cream

High energy sweetened porridge

- 1 sachet of instant porridge
- 1 glass of milk with chocolate milkshake powder
- 1 scoop of vanilla ice cream
- Chocolate sauce
- 1 tablespoon of cream
- Handful of frozen cherries (stones removed)

Puree all ingredients together or push through sieve. Add hot milk to make a smooth consistency.

Fortified high protein soup

- 1/3 pint (200ml) cream canned soup
- 2 tablespoons skimmed milk powder OR neutral Complian®/Build-Up® powder
- 2 tablespoons cream

Stir in the milk powder or Complian®/Build-Up® and heat.
Add cream before serving.

Spaghetti and meatballs

- ½ cup cooked spaghetti noodles
- 2 meatballs
- ½ cup spaghetti sauce
- Parmesan cheese or seasoning to taste
- Additional spaghetti sauce or hot water as required

Combine all ingredients in blender. Blend well.

Chicken and noodles

- 1 cup boiled chicken and noodles
- ½ cup mashed potatoes
- Up to 1 cup hot chicken broth

Place chicken, noodles and potatoes in blender. Blend until smooth. Add broth as required and puree to desired consistency.

Beef stew

- 1 cup cooked beef stew
- 1 cup beef bouillon

Put all ingredients into blender. Blend well.

Roast meat and potatoes

- 3oz (85g) cooked roast beef (beef, chicken or pork)
- ½ cup mashed potatoes
- ½ cup gravy
- 1 cup hot water or broth
- Further gravy or hot water as required

Put meat in blender and process until smooth. Add remaining ingredients and puree to desired consistency.

Steak and mushrooms

- 3oz (85g) cooked steak
- ½ cup mashed potatoes
- ¾ cup mushroom gravy or soup
- Up to 1 cup hot milk as required to achieve required consistency

Put steak in blender. Blend until finely minced. Add remaining ingredients and blend until smooth.

Macaroni and cheese

- 1 cup baked macaroni and cheese
- 1 cup hot milk

Add all ingredients to blender. Blend well.

Nourishing milk pudding

- 4 tablespoons milk pudding (e.g. rice pudding, semolina, tapioca) or custard
- 4 tablespoons hot milk
- 1 tablespoon skimmed milk powder
- 1 tablespoon cream
- 1 tablespoon seedless jam OR 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Liquidize together or push through sieve. Then warm in microwave.

Hot spiced apple sauce

- ½ cup apple sauce
- ½ cup apple juice
- A pinch of cinnamon
- Pinch of nutmeg

Add all ingredients to blender and blend until smooth.

High calorie fruit fool

- Handful (1 cup) of soft fruit (e.g. tinned peaches, pears, banana)
- 4 Tablespoons cream or evaporated milk
- 1 dessert spoon sugar

Liquidise together or push through sieve. Serve hot or cold.

Luxury hot chocolate

- 1 cup hot full fat milk
- Few pieces plain chocolate melted into milk
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- A dash of cream or topped with whipped cream

Mix together and drink warm.

Yogurt fruit drinks:

Combine the following ingredients in blender and blend well.

Peach-apple

- 1 carton peach yogurt
- 3 tablespoons cottage cheese
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup apple juice
- Pinch of cinnamon

Banana

- 1 carton of plain yogurt
- 3 tablespoons of cottage cheese
- 1 medium ripe banana
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk or fruit juice
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice (omit if you have a sore mouth)

Milk and fruit shake

- ½ cup fresh or frozen fruit (e.g. bananas or peaches)
- 1 cup full fat or fortified milk

Place fruit and milk in blender. Blend until smooth. If you use berries, strain to remove all seeds.

Prune nog

- 1 cup milk
- 1 jar strained baby prunes
- Pinch of cinnamon

Place all ingredients in jar or blender container. Cover. Blend and serve chilled.

Indian mango lassi

- 200mls (one cup) of full fat plain yoghurt
- 3-4 teaspoons sugar (less if the mango is very sweet)
- 1 ripe mango peeled and chopped into small pieces
- 100ml (1/2 cup) full fat milk
- A pinch of cardamom powder (optional)
- Crushed ice cubes (8-10)

Blend yoghurt, sugar, milk and mango to a smooth consistency. Add more milk if needed. Serve with crushed ice and sprinkle with cardamom powder before serving.

Sample meal plan

Breakfast

Smooth fruit juice

Weetabix® soaked in hot or cold milk with honey and cream

Pureed fruit and yoghurt

Mid-morning

Milky coffee or tea

Well-mashed banana with honey

Lunch

Pureed fish with a selection of puree vegetables and potato

Chocolate mousse

Mid-afternoon

Nourishing drink

Greek style yoghurt

Dinner

Thick, smooth fortified soup

Pureed spaghetti bolognese

Pureed apple with custard

Before bed

Milky, hot nourishing drink

Reference sources

- **Brenda's easy-to-swallow cookbook**
Published by Consilience Media in association with the Mouth Cancer foundation. November 2009
www.easytoswallowcookbook.wordpress.com
www.mouthcancrfoundation.org
- **British Dietetic Association**
www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/index.html
- **Mouth Cancer Foundation**
www.rdoc.org.uk/
Free helpline: 01924 950 950
Email: info@mouthcancerfoundation.org
- **Macmillan**
www.macmillan.org.uk
Free phone: 0808 808 0000 (Mon–Fri, 9am–8pm)
- **NHS Choices**
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Malnutrition/Pages/Introduction.aspx

Department disclaimer

This leaflet is produced by the dietetic department at Royal Surrey County Hospital, NHS Foundation Trust. It is not a substitute for dietary advice given to a specific individual by a dietitian. If you need to see a dietitian, ask your GP or consultant for a referral.

Please note that the information in this leaflet was correct at time of writing. The ingredients of manufactured products can change.

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet please contact the dietetic department at the address below:

Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Nutrition & Dietetics Department
Egerton Road
Guildford
Surrey
GU2 7XX

Telephone: 01483 464119

Fax: 01483 464868

Email: rsch.dietitians@nhs.net

Contact details

Head & Neck Dietitians

Telephone: 01483 571122 **ext** 4202

Direct line: 01483 464119

Fax: 01483 464868

Email: rsch.dietitians@nhs.net

Head & Neck Speech Therapy

Telephone: 01483 571122 **ext** 6421 or 4654

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

Past review date: November 2017

Future review date: November 2020

Author: Claire Hanika

PIN171127–1356

