

Soft Diet and Mechanical Soft Diet

What is a soft diet?

A soft diet is a diet that limits or avoids foods that are hard to swallow and chew.

Your healthcare provider may tell you to eat a soft diet if:

- You have been on a liquids-only diet after surgery or a long illness. It is a way to add solid foods back to your diet gradually.
- You are very weak or have problems with your teeth or swallowing. Softer, moister textures are easier to chew and swallow.
- You are having chemotherapy or radiation treatment of the head, neck, or stomach area. These treatments can cause digestive problems and pain in the mouth and throat.

Which foods should I avoid?

Examples of foods that are hard to swallow and chew are:

- Chewy foods, like some breads and tough meats
- Raw fruits
- Raw vegetables
- Dry, sticky foods
- Nuts and seeds

If you need to rest your intestinal tract or have a sore mouth, you may also need to avoid or limit these foods:

- Greasy foods, such as fried foods or foods prepared with a lot of fat
- Spicy foods
- Foods that cause gas, such as brussels sprouts, beans, broccoli, and cauliflower
- High-fiber foods such as whole grains and cereals
- Dairy products if you have lactose intolerance

What foods should I eat?

- Eat soft fruits or cooked or canned fruits and vegetables instead of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Eat refined breads and cereals, not whole-grain products.
- Eat tender poultry and fish, lean ground beef, and eggs.
- Eat small meals more often through the day. This helps to relieve the discomfort of gas and bloating.
- Have sherbet, fruit ices, custards, and very moist cakes or cookies as desserts.
- Cook all foods until they are very soft, or mash them.
- Add liquids, such as broth, gravy, or milk to drier foods.
- Use moist cooking methods such as steaming, boiling, slow cookers, and soups.

Ask your provider when you can add other foods back into your diet. Often you can add foods if they do not cause discomfort.

What is a mechanical soft diet?

A mechanical soft diet does not restrict fat, fiber, spices, or seasonings. All foods are allowed that can be made easier to chew and swallow by using machines. Foods may be blended, pureed, ground, or finely chopped. This diet can help if:

- You have no teeth, poor-fitting dentures, or a narrowed throat (food tube).
- You are recovering from mouth or neck surgery.

Here are some foods that you can prepare mechanically:

- Meats, fish, and poultry can be cooked then ground or pureed with sauce to moisten.
- Fruits and vegetables can also be blended, mashed, or pureed. Pureed vegetable soups work well.
- Nuts ground until fine can be added to yogurts or cereals.

Milk products such as yogurt and cottage cheese usually can be eaten as is. Drier breads and crackers can be harder to swallow, but you may be able to eat them if they do not cause discomfort.

Are the soft diets healthy?

Both soft and mechanical soft diets include foods from all food groups, so they are healthy diets. However, if you have a poor appetite, or just can't eat enough food, you may also need to take liquid supplements. You may also need to take vitamins and minerals.

Check with a dietitian or your healthcare provider to make sure you are getting the nutrients you need.

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