

Managing nutritional concerns: Difficulty chewing or swallowing

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Cancer treatment can affect the ability to chew or swallow solid textured foods due to oral soreness, pain, inflammation, irritation, and/or anatomical and muscular changes or weakness after surgery. Certain textures may be easier to eat, such as

soft solid foods, pureed foods, shakes, and smoothies. It is important to seek nutritional guidance to ensure that you are able to consume enough calories or if you have been prescribed a special diet for a diagnosis of dysphagia (a swallowing disorder).¹

Tips for People Experiencing Difficulty Chewing and Swallowing^{2,3}:

- Avoid foods that are spicy, acidic, and rough or coarse in texture
- Choose foods that are soft and easy to chew such as soups, smoothies, yogurt, hot cereals, casseroles, eggs, tender meats, and well-cooked and mashed fruits and vegetables
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco, which may irritate your mouth and throat
- Use sauces, liquid, or gravy to moisten food
- Consume foods at room temperature
- Eat small frequent meals (5-6 times a day) instead of 3 large meals
- Eat meals high in protein/calories or add a dietary supplement
- Sit upright while eating or drinking
- Do not lie down immediately after eating or drinking

How to puree food

1. Chop solid food (such as chicken or beef) into small pieces.
2. Place the food in a blender or food processor.
3. Add a liquid such as milk, juice, or broth to the blender or processor.
4. Puree the mixture. You will have to experiment with this to come up with the right proportions of liquid and solid food that meet your desirable consistency.

Always communicate with your doctor and nurse about what you are experiencing. Contact your MD if you are having trouble swallowing, difficulty with coughing while eating or drinking, you experience a choking sensation, have pain, or weight loss.

References:

1. Difficulty Swallowing. Cancer.Net. <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/side-effects/difficulty-swallowing-or-dysphagia>. Accessed December 6, 2016.
2. Elliot, L. Symptom Management of Cancer Therapies in Lesser M, Ledesma N, Bergerson S, Trujillo E, eds. *Oncology Nutrition for Clinical Practice*. Oncology

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3. American Institute for Cancer Research, Savor Health and LIVESTRONG. *Heal Well: A Cancer Nutrition Guide*. 2013.

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