

# Introduction to Food & Fluid Consistencies

Some people with oral eating difficulties need a modified consistency diet to assist with the chewing and or swallowing process (eg generally minced and pureed foods are easier to eat and thicker fluids easier to control).

## Food consistencies

There are five main categories of food consistency or texture: unmodified regular foods (regular food that may be hard, crunchy, chewy or soft), soft foods (eg banana), minced and moist food (eg coarsely minced meats with sauce), and smooth pureed food (blended in a food processor). Refer to the Fact Sheets “Soft Foods”, “Minced/Moist Foods” and “Smooth Pureed Foods”.

Food consistencies can be modified by preparing the food more (mincing, mashing, blending, pureeing), adding more fluid (eg sauces, gravies, cream, milk), cooking for longer, straining to remove lumps, and using thickening agents (eg baby rice, cornflour, commercial thickeners).

Altered food consistencies do not need to be bland. Herbs, spices and seasoning can be added. Sauces or gravies which are used to help combine foods can also add flavour and texture. When altering consistencies of food, individual foods should be kept separate for both flavour and appearance.

## Fluid consistencies

Some people with oral drinking difficulties need thickener to help them drink. Liquids naturally vary in consistency ranging from thin/regular (tea, coffee, fruit juice, water), naturally thick (fruit nectars, cream soups), mildly thick (thin yoghurt or custard, smoothies), and moderately thick (thick yoghurt or custard, homemade jellies, gravy). Refer to the Fact Sheets “Unmodified Regular Fluids”, “Mildly Thick Fluids”, “Moderately Thick Fluids”, “Extremely Thick Fluids” and “Thickeners”.

Thin liquids are often the most difficult to swallow because they require very good oral control to keep them in the mouth and to control how they move back to be swallowed. Water is often the most difficult to control due to its lack of taste, which makes it hard to determine where it is in the mouth to control the flow.

Thicker liquids have more mass, shape and tend to move more slowly compensating for weakened oral skills and sluggish swallow movements. Often they have flavour and some texture too which can assist by providing more sensory input to the mouth for swallowing. Thick fluids though may not be as thirst quenching and are often more filling than thin fluids.

The inability to drink thin fluids, particularly water can be very upsetting to many people with swallowing difficulties. Their mouth may become dry and uncomfortable so there may be a need for regular mouth washing and swabs to keep the mouth clean and moist.

