





# **DANGEROUS MEALTIME PRACTICES:**

## **TEXTURE AND CONSISTENCY GUIDE**




**FOOD TEXTURE** means the size of the pieces of food. The bigger the piece of food, the more it has to be chewed (processed) before swallowing. There are FOUR texture categories. The table below shows a meal of boneless chicken breast, green beans, baby carrots, potatoes, and strawberries with whipped topping prepared to each consistency.


WHOLE		
<p><i>People with no history of problems with chewing or swallowing can safely eat food as it would be served in a restaurant.</i></p>	<p>Food is served as prepared. No changes are needed to texture.</p>	
CHOPPED OR DICED		
<p><i>This texture is sometimes recommended for people who are able to chew pretty well and move foods around the mouth, but have a hard time breaking up big pieces.</i></p>	<p>1/2 - 1/4 inch pieces – No bigger than chopped carrots</p> <p> 1/2 inch</p> <p> 1/4 inch</p>	

## MINCED OR GROUND

*This texture is sometimes recommended for people who are able to chew and move food around the mouth some, but not well.*

1/4 - 1/8 inch pieces (no bigger than grains of rice). Ground food should always be moist. Appropriate liquids should be added to moisten foods that are not naturally moist.

 1/4 inch

 1/8 inch



## PUREED

*This texture is sometimes recommended for people who have a lot of difficulty chewing and moving food around the mouth.*

Pureed foods are smooth with no lumps. Food should not be sticky, gummy, or runny.

Pureed foods are prepared with a blender (NOT A FOOD PROCESSOR). Each food should be prepared separately, and the blender should be cleaned between foods.





**\*If an individual has an order for a texture modification for their food, remember to consult with the ordering physician about how this impacts other oral intake, including medications.**



**FOOD CONSISTENCY** refers to how food feels in the mouth. When preparing food for an individual with a modified diet, you must consider consistency as well as texture. Depending on the consistency, the danger is either that the food is difficult to clear from the mouth or difficult to keep in the mouth until the swallow.

<b>DIFFICULT TO CLEAR FROM THE MOUTH</b>		
<b>STICKY</b>	Foods like peanut butter, rice, potatoes and foods that are high in starch often have a sticky feel in the mouth.	Sticky foods get stuck. This can be a problem for people who have trouble moving food around with their tongue. Another challenge is when people don't have a lot of saliva in their mouth, either naturally or because of medication side effects.
<b>DRY</b>	Breads, crackers, cookies, some meats	Dry foods tend to get wadded up and stuck to the roof of the mouth. This is especially challenging for people who have difficulty moving their tongues and lips effectively, or who have dry mouth.
<b>DIFFICULT TO KEEP IN THE MOUTH UNTIL SWALLOW</b>		
<b>WET OR SLIPPERY</b>	Some fruits (peaches) and vegetables (okra), canned foods	Foods with a wet or slippery consistency can be a challenge for people with a slow or delayed swallow. The airway closes during the swallow. If food slips down the throat before the swallow, the airway might not be closed.
<b>RUNNY</b>	Pureed foods, foods prepared with a lot of liquid such as soups	For people with poor strength in their lips and tongue, runny foods can easily scatter all over the mouth. Runny foods are also a problem for people with slow swallows as they act the same way as wet or slippery foods. Runny foods can also run out of the mouth for people who cannot close their mouth well.

**LIQUID CONSISTENCY** refers to how thick a liquid is. Liquids that have been altered with a thickener can be tested with a spoon or a fork. Different consistencies of liquid flow differently from a spoon or fork. There are **FOUR** liquid consistencies:

<p><b>THIN</b></p>	<p>No alteration needed. This includes most liquids served as they would be in a restaurant. <i>Note: Any food that melts at body temperature (about 98.6° F) is a thin liquid. This includes ice cream, milkshakes, and Jello®.</i> When poured from a glass to a plate, thin liquid runs quickly and spreads to the edges of the plate right away. Thin liquids will wet a utensil (spoon or fork) but will not coat it.</p>	
<p><b>NECTAR</b></p>	<p>Slightly thick liquid, such as tomato juice or fruit smoothies. When poured from a glass to a plate, liquid flows more slowly and does not run to the edge of the plate as quickly. Nectar thick liquids will coat a utensil (spoon or fork) and will flow off easily.</p>	

## LIQUID CONSISTENCY (CONTINUED)

<p>HONEY</p>	<p>Liquids that are thickened to honey consistency pool slowly when poured from a glass to a plate and are very slow to reach the edge. Honey thickened liquids will coat a utensil (spoon or fork) and drip from the utensil slowly, in large drops.</p>	
<p>PUDDING OR SPOON-THICK</p>	<p>Liquids that are pudding thick need to be served with a spoon. They are too thick to drink directly from a glass. When a glass of pudding thickened liquids is tipped over a plate, the liquid will fall from the glass rather than pour out and will not spread at all. Liquids at this consistency will stay on a utensil (spoon or fork).</p>	

*\*Sometimes, a doctor or dietitian will use the term 'viscosity,' the scientific word for the thickness of a liquid. It means the same thing as consistency.*

## THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT THICKENERS

✓	Thickeners should only be used when there is a prescription.
✓	The amount of thickener required depends on the type and temperature of the liquid. Refer to the thickener container for specific instructions.
✓	Starch-based thickeners and xanthan gum-based thickeners work slightly differently. Pay attention to which type you are using and make sure it matches the prescription.
✓	Use measuring cups and spoons to make sure that you are preparing liquids appropriately.
✓	Liquids containing a fiber supplement (such as Miralax®, Metamucil®, Benefiber® or generic alternatives) should not be thickened. If the individual you support requires a fiber supplement to be added to liquids, talk with the primary medical provider about alternatives, such as sprinkling over food.
✓	Thickening usually takes several minutes. Refer to the thickener container to ensure that you allow enough time for the liquid to reach the appropriate consistency.
✓	Thickeners contain calories. If you are supporting someone with a calorie-restricted diet, be sure to include the calories from the thickener in your calculations.
✓	Thickeners should be used for ANY liquid the individual consumes, including medications.
✓	Pay attention to liquid foods, such as soup or milk added to cereal. Those need to be thickened as well.



## COMMON MEALTIME PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

PROBLEM	FIXABLE?	HOW TO FIX IT
Food is the wrong texture – pieces are too big	Yes	Reduce the size of the pieces until they match the consistency required.
Food is the wrong texture – too fine	No	Do not serve food that is processed to a texture that is different from the physician’s order. If an individual can safely eat minced foods, do not puree, even if others sharing the meal require a different texture.
Liquid consistency is too thin.	Yes	Add thickener according to the package instructions and wait the appropriate amount of time.
Liquid consistency is too thick.	No	A liquid that has been processed beyond the texture an individual can safely consume must be discarded.
Food is too sticky.	Yes	Add liquid to loosen the food up. Remember the sweet to sweet, savory to savory guideline. For example, if you need to loosen up a sticky fruit dessert, add fruit juice. If you need to loosen up a sticky potato dish, add gravy or broth.
Food is too dry.	Yes	Add condiments, gravies, or fats (butter or cream). Think of what you would add to that dish if you were eating it.
Food is too wet.	Yes	Add crackers, bread, or cookies broken up to absorb the excess liquid. Some foods can be patted dry with a regular, white paper towel. Just make sure there is no print on the paper towel.
Food is too runny.	Yes	Runny foods that are cooked can be cooked a little bit longer to evaporate some of the additional liquids. Add bread, cracker or cookie crumbs.
Food or liquid is too hot.	Yes	Stir foods, spread them out, wait for them to cool. Place in the refrigerator. DO NOT blow on foods you are serving to others to cool them.
Food or liquid is too cool.	Yes	Heat briefly in the microwave – 10-12 second intervals. Fats and sugary foods heat faster. Remember to stir foods or liquids that have been microwaved, as they are likely to have hot spots.

If you would like to know more about keeping the individuals you support safe during mealtime, please refer to the following DBHDD policy on this subject: Prevention of Choking and Aspiration for Individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Living in the Community, 02-801 available at <http://gadhbdd.policystat.com>

Materials for the Dangerous Mealtime Practices training were prepared as part of the Improving Health Outcomes Initiative. These materials were prepared with reference to similar trainings available through the New York State Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities, Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, and the National Dysphagia Diet (American Dietetic Association, 2002).

