

Soft and Mechanical Soft Diet

Purpose

The soft diet serves as a transition from liquids to a regular diet for individuals who are recovering from surgery or a long illness. It can help to ease difficulty in chewing and/or swallowing due to dental problems or extreme weakness, and it is sometimes recommended to relieve mild intestinal or stomach discomfort. The soft diet can be especially helpful to patients who are undergoing treatments like chemotherapy, or radiation to the head, neck or abdominal areas, which may cause digestive problems or make the mouth and throat very sore.

The soft diet limits or eliminates foods that are hard to chew and swallow, such as raw fruits and vegetables, chewy breads, and tough meats. In some cases, high-fiber foods like whole-grain breads and cereals and “gas-forming” vegetables like broccoli or cauliflower may be restricted to ease digestion. Fried, greasy foods and highly-seasoned or spicy foods may also be limited for this reason.

Foods may be softened by cooking or mashing. Canned or soft-cooked fruits and vegetables may be used in place of raw or dried varieties. Refined breads and cereals are usually recommended over coarse, whole-grain types. Moist, tender meats, fish, and poultry are permitted; it is not necessary to grind them unless desired. Eating small, frequent meals can help to reduce gas or bloating.

The mechanical soft diet is a close cousin of the soft diet. It gets its name from the fact that household tools and machines, like a blender, meat grinder, or knife, are used to make foods easier to chew and swallow.

In contrast to the soft diet, the mechanical soft diet does not restrict fat, fiber, spices, or seasonings. Only the texture and consistency of foods are changed. Fruits and vegetables may be soft-cooked or pureed. Meats, fish, and poultry can be cooked, ground, and moistened with sauce or gravy to make chewing and swallowing more comfortable. Breads and crackers may be limited at first, as they can be dry and difficult to swallow. Milk and other dairy products like pudding, custard, and smooth yogurt may not need to be changed at all!

The mechanical soft diet is appropriate for patients who are recovering from head, neck, or mouth surgery, who have dysphasia (difficulty swallowing), narrowing of the esophagus (food tube), or who are too ill or weak to chew. The diet also benefits those who have poorly fitting dentures, no teeth, or other dental problems.