

Often, certain diet textures are prescribed to help a child with special needs eat more safely and easily. This handout will help distinguish between some of the different diet textures provided and will provide some guidance on how to prepare these foods.

PUREED DIET

Defined as smooth, easy to swallow foods. A pureed food would feel like a smooth sauce.

Examples include applesauce, yogurt, pudding and cream of wheat.

HOW TO PREPARE PUREED FOODS:

1. Use chopped table foods
2. Cook until soft
3. Mash food
4. Push through strainer
5. Thin with liquid and use blender (see below for some ideas to add some flavor to foods)

**** Children sometimes find thicker, pureed foods easier to swallow-in this case, thickeners can be added to increase the thickness of pureed food (see below for some suggestions on thickeners.)****

GROUND FOOD DIET

Defined as small, soft pieces that can be eaten with little to no chewing.

Examples include scrambled eggs, mashed potatoes, cottage cheese and tender ground meats with gravies added.

HOW TO PREPARE GROUND FOODS:

1. Use chopped table foods
2. Cook until soft
3. Push them through grinder or strainer
4. Add flavor with sauces, broth and soups
5. A food processor or blender can also be used

CHOPPED DIET

Defined as foods that are cut into pieces ½ inch or smaller. This diet is often used when the child can move food from side to side in their mouth.

Examples include casseroles, soft cheese cubes, chicken or egg salad, chopped pastas or salads, grated carrots and soft, small pieces of fruit (like soft cooked apples).

HOW TO PREPARE CHOPPED FOODS:

1. Chop food into small pieces
2. Cook until soft
3. Food processor can also be used

IDEAS FOR THICKENING FOOD AND LIQUIDS

A little creativity can go a long way when preparing a special texture diet. Below are some ideas that add flavor and some also add extra calories and protein.

Thickening Liquids: yogurt, fruits and vegetables (puree and add to liquid), dried infant cereal, soft tofu and instant drink mixes

Thickening Foods: Infant rice cereal, potato flakes, wheat germ, breadcrumbs and crackers, sour cream, custards, mashed fruits (like banana), peanut butter. Adding larger amounts of these will achieve a thickened puree consistency.

Note

There are also many commercial thickeners on the market that can be used to achieve certain textures. Try adding food and liquids instead and keep the commercial products for when you are in a hurry or traveling-it will make the meal more enjoyable! Examples of some thickeners on the market are Diafoods Thick-it®, Thicken Up®, Thick and Easy®, or Nutrathick® (while each thickener vary some, most contain about 16-18 calories per Tablespoon.)

MORE HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

- Adding broth, gravies, soups and juices can help add flavor to modified texture diets.
- Milkshakes can be made at varying degrees of thickness and provide an excellent calcium source!
- Examples of foods that do not tend to puree very well are bacon, corn, eggs, steak, hot dogs with skin, seafood with bones and tough, stringy fruits and vegetables.
- Be certain that your child is sitting in an appropriate position-this can really affect their ease and enjoyment with the meal.
- Try to avoid using baby food unless an “emergency” arises. They tend to not be as flavorful and often do not contain the calories, vitamins and fiber that regular table foods provide
- Children without special needs do not eat their meat, vegetables, bread and milk all “mushed” together! Children with special needs should not have to eat their meals this way either! Blend or mash foods separately and make all foods look appealing on the plate.
- If your child does not like the appearance or smell of a puree diet, place the puree food/liquid in a cup with a lid and let the child use a straw (if able to do this from a safety standpoint.)
- Families should work closely with their health professionals when moving their child to a more advanced diet texture.

For more information, contact your local pediatric nutritionist or the author of this handout, Sharon Wallace, RD, CSP, CNSD at sharonwallace@nc.rr.com .

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References:

Klein, M.D., and Delaney T.A. (1994). *Feeding and Nutrition for the Child with Special Health Care Needs: Handouts for Parents*. Therapy Skill Builders/The Psychological Corporation, San Antonio, TX.

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