Diet after Esophagectomy

After surgery on your esophagus you will need to follow a special diet because all or part of the esophagus is removed. The stomach is made into a tube and is pulled up into the chest to replace the part of the esophagus that has been removed. The new tube shaped stomach is then reattached to allow food to move from the mouth to the rest of the digestive tract. After surgery your stomach acts as a passageway for food to travel through rather than storing the food you eat. Because of this, you will need to eat smaller, more frequent meals. Your diet will slowly change as you heal. The diet is to help make you more comfortable as you eat.

Note: Each person tolerates food in a different way. Based on how you are doing after surgery, your doctor may change your diet plan more slowly.

Feeding tube
Calories provide the building blocks you need to heal after surgery. This means good nutrition is very important after surgery. Most patients who have an esophagectomy will have a feeding tube put in at the time of surgery. This is to provide you with extra nutrition until you can go back to your regular diet a few weeks after surgery. This tube is called a jejunostomy tube or J-tube. The tube is inserted through the belly and into a part of your small intestine called the jejunum. By using the J-tube your doctor can provide liquid nutrition (tube feedings) for you after surgery until you are able to eat enough food by mouth.

You will start tube feedings in the hospital early, a few days after surgery. Tube feedings are most often started at a low, continuous rate. If you tolerate the feeds, no severe cramping, nausea, and vomiting, the rate increases to provide more calories. As the rate increases, you will be changed to cycled tube feedings. This means for a period of the day the feedings will be shut off. Cycled feedings most often run from 3 pm to 9 am (18 hours), giving you 6 hours during the day to move around without being attached to the feeding pump. The tube feeding rate may be decreased to a 12 hours cycled feeding (9 pm to 9 am) later on. It depends on the number of calories that you take by mouth. This feeding plan will continue until your doctor believes you will be able to eat enough nutrition to maintain your weight and heal well. Tube feedings are most often continued when you go home after discharge. Depending on your progress, the J-tube will most often be removed in the clinic at the time of your first post-op visit (about 2 weeks).

You should expect some cramping when the tube feedings start. The cramping is most often brief and stops within a few days. There may also be some loose stools. This is due to the change in the shape of your stomach from surgery and from the tube feedings. If you are having a lot of, or uncomfortable, loose stools, we may change the type or rate of your tube feeding to help.
Common Eating Problems after Surgery

Feeling full after eating
- After surgery you will have a smaller stomach. Eat 6 to 8 small meals per day.
- Take small bites and chew your food fully.
- Limit fluids to ½ cup (4 ounces) with meals and to 1 cup (8 ounces) with snacks. This will help with fullness and dumping/diarrhea

Reflux
- Avoid caffeine, carbonated drinks, alcohol, citrus, and tomato products.
- Avoid highly seasoned, spicy, or fried foods.
- Do not drink through a straw, chew gum or chew tobacco. This will decrease the amount of air that you swallow and help with gas.
- Do not eat for at least 2 hours before going to bed.

Discomfort when swallowing
- Eat soft, moist foods because they are easier to digest and swallow.
- Avoid gummy foods such as bananas and doughy breads. If you feel like food is “sticking” in your throat or you have pain behind the breast bone, try sipping a small amount of fluid when eating solid foods. If these symptoms get worse, notify your surgeon.
- A dilation (a procedure that helps open a narrowed esophagus due to scar tissue) may help in treating symptoms of discomfort and difficulty with swallowing.
- Sit straight up when you eat. Gravity can help move food down. Continue to sit up 30 to 60 minutes after you eat. This will help with acid reflux also.

Dumping
Dumping syndrome occurs when the food in the stomach empties too quickly into the small intestine. Dumping can cause diarrhea, cramps, nausea, dizziness, bloating, and light headedness.
- Limit fluids to ½ cup (4 ounces) with meals and to 1 cup (8 ounces) with snacks. This will help with fullness and dumping.
- If you eat sweets limit them to the end of the meal. Sweets are digested more quickly than other foods. Eating sweets first can lead to low blood sugar.
- Avoid very cold or very hot foods

What types of diets will I have?
Each person tolerates food in different ways and heals at a different rate. Your doctor will change your diet based on your progress.
The 3 diets that you will be on:
1. Esophageal Clear Liquid Diet
2. Esophageal Full Liquid Diet
3. Esophageal Soft Diet
1. **Esophageal Clear Liquid Diet.**
   After your surgery your first diet will be Esophageal Clear Liquid. To be a clear liquid, you must be able to see through it. (No pulp or cloudiness)

   **A Clear Liquid Diet:**
   - Clear juice (apple, cranberry, no citrus)
   - Clear broth (chicken, beef and vegetable)
   - Gelatin (such as Jell-O®)
   - Tea (decaffeinated to avoid reflux)

   Carbonated beverages are **not** allowed because it may cause gas.

2. **Esophageal Full Liquid Diet**
   Along with the liquids in a clear liquid diet you may also have:
   - Yogurt (without pieces of fruit or seeds)
   - Cream of wheat or cream of rice hot cereal
   - Ice cream
   - Milk
   - Pudding
   - Strained soups (not tomato or broccoli)
   - Liquid nutritional supplements like Ensure®, Carnation Instant Breakfast®, or Boost®.

   **Note:** With dairy products you may, at first, have intolerance to lactose (not able to digest milk sugar). Add small amounts of milk to your diet to see if you can tolerate dairy or try lactose free milk-Lactaid®.

   **How to tell if a food item falls under a Full Liquid Diet**
   If you can imagine the food item going through a kitchen strainer, then it would be considered a full liquid food item.

   **Examples of Full Liquid Diet:**

   **Breakfast**
   - Apple juice (4 ounces)
   - Cream of wheat cereal made with milk or Lactaid®

   **Snack**
   - Carnation Instant Breakfast® Drink (4 ounces)

   **Dinner**
   - Creamed soup (strained) not tomato or broccoli
   - Vanilla pudding

   **Lunch**
   - Creamed soup (strained), not tomato or broccoli
   - Cranberry juice

   **Snack**
   - Sherbet
3. **Esophageal Soft Diet**
This diet should consist of bland, soft foods. We suggest cutting up tough meats into tiny pieces and adding sauces or gravies to foods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Group</th>
<th>Food to choose</th>
<th>Foods to avoid</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breads/Grains</td>
<td>French toast</td>
<td>Soft breads, rolls, bagels, bread, bread products that contain nuts, seeds, fresh or dried fruit or are highly seasoned such as garlic. Sweet rolls, coffee cake, and doughnuts</td>
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<td>Crackers</td>
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<td>Toasted bread</td>
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<td>Cereals</td>
<td>Unsweetened dry cereal</td>
<td>Coarse cereals such as Grape Nuts® and granola</td>
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<td>Cooked cereals</td>
<td>Any cereals with fresh or dried fruit, seeds, or nuts</td>
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<td>Drinks</td>
<td>Regular milk as tolerated</td>
<td>Chocolate milk</td>
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<td>De-caffeinated tea</td>
<td>Soda (carbonated drinks)</td>
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<td>Powdered drink mixes</td>
<td>Alcoholic beverages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Non-citrus juices such as apple, cranberry, grape, and blends</td>
<td>Citrus juices such as orange juice, grapefruit juice, lemon and lime</td>
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<td>Drinks that contain herbal ingredients such as St John’s Wort or ginseng</td>
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<td>Caffeine containing drinks: coffee, tea, decaf coffee</td>
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<td>Meat and Alternatives</td>
<td>Finely ground lean beef, lamb, pork, veal, fish, and poultry (not fried)</td>
<td>Tough meat with gristle</td>
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<td>Eggs prepared any way except fried</td>
<td>Highly seasoned, smoked, or fatty meats/fish/poultry such as hot dogs, lunch meats/cold cuts, sausage, bacon, spareribs, goose, duck, beef brisket.</td>
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<td>Cottage and ricotta cheese</td>
<td>Chili and other spicy foods</td>
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<td>Mild cheeses such as American, Brick, baby Swiss, or Mozzarella</td>
<td>Strong flavored cheeses such as sharp cheddar and cheese that contains peppers or other seasonings.</td>
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<td>Plain or flavored yogurt</td>
<td>Crunchy peanut butter</td>
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<td>Tofu and soy products</td>
<td>Yogurt that contains nuts or seeds.</td>
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<td>Smooth peanut butter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Casseroles prepared with allowed ingredients</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **Potato and Starches** | Peeled white or sweet potatoes  
White Rice and barley  
Pasta such as enriched noodles, spaghetti, and macaroni. | Fried potatoes, potato skins  
Fried, brown, or wild rice  
Popcorn |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Fruits** | Canned fruit  
Cooked fruit (no skins)  
Fruit juice, except citrus | Fresh or dried fruit  
Citrus fruits and juices (orange, grapefruit, lemon, lime) |
| **Vegetables** | Cooked vegetables without seeds or skins, such as asparagus tips, baby peas, carrots, green beans, and winter squash. | Raw vegetables  
Tomatoes, tomato juice, tomato sauce or puree  
Gas-producing vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, corn, cucumbers, green peppers, onion, radishes, sauerkraut, and turnips.  
Dried beans, peas, and lentils. |
| **Soups** | Mildly flavored meat stock  
Creamed soups made with allowed ingredients | Highly seasoned soups and tomato-based soups. |
| **Desserts** | Plain cakes, cookies, puddings, custard, ice cream, ice milk, frozen yogurt, and sherbet.  
Gelatins, popsicles | Desserts that contain chocolate, coconut, nuts, seeds, fresh or dried fruit, peppermint, or spearmint. |
| **Sweets** | Eat in moderation and with a meal.  
**Note:** If dumping occurs, you may need to avoid these.  
Sugar, syrup, honey, jelly, and seedless jam.  
Unfilled hard candies and plain candies made with allowed ingredients.  
Molasses  
Plain cake, cookies, pudding, custard, ice cream, ice milk, frozen yogurt, sherbet, fruit ice, and popsicles. | Jam and marmalade, preserves made with seeds or fruit.  
Chocolate sweets/candy  
Desserts containing chocolate, nuts, coconut, seeds, peppermint, or spearmint.  
Dried or fresh fruit. |
Example Meal Plan for Esophageal Soft Diet:

**Breakfast**
- Canned fruit
- Cold/hot cereal (½ cup)
- 1 slice toast
- Margarine (1 tsp)
- Milk (1/2 cup)

**Midmorning snack**
- Blended yogurt (1/2 cup)

**Lunch**
- Meatloaf
- Mashed potatoes (1/2 cup)
- Low fat gravy
- Canned peaches (1/2 cup)
- Milk (1/2 cup)

**Afternoon snack**
- Turkey (2 ounces)
- 4-6 saltine crackers
- Fruit juice (1/2 cup)

**Dinner**
- Roast chicken (ground) 3 ounces
- Baked potato (small)
- Margarine (2-3 tsp)
- Cooked carrots (1/2 cup)
- Canned pears (½ cup)
- Milk (1/2 cup)

**Bedtime snack**
- Cottage cheese (1/2 cup)
- Canned peaches (1/2 cup)
- Fruit juice (1/2 cup)

**Returning to “Normal Diet”**
There are no set rules as to when you will be able to return to eating the foods you ate prior to your surgery. Each person’s situation is unique. In most cases, once the doctor says that you may go back to your normal diet, you will want to add one new food item each day and see how you tolerate the food before adding another food.
Teach Back:

What is the most important thing you learned from this handout?

What changes will you make in your diet/lifestyle, based on what you learned today?

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below. You can also visit our website at www.uwhealth.org/nutrition

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children’s Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at: (608) 890-5500.

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at: (608) 287-2770
Calorie Count Sheet

Please record the foods and amount you are eating when you get home. Bring this back with you when you return for clinic visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of food</th>
<th>Amount of food</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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