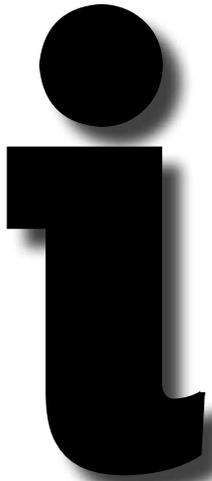


Eating and Drinking for Comfort (page 1 of 2)



If you need your information in another language or medium (audio, large print, etc) please contact Customer Care on 0800 374 208 or send an email to: customercare@salisbury.nhs.uk

You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

If you are unhappy with the advice you have been given by your GP, consultant, or another healthcare professional, you may ask for a second (or further) opinion.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

During someone's last days of life, the enjoyment of eating and drinking can enhance comfort and a sense of well-being. Certain foods and flavours may have strong and happy memories. The aim of these suggestions is to support eating and drinking so that it is as easy and stress-free as possible.

General suggestions

1. Find a comfortable position. Generally it is easier to swallow when sitting upright with the head in the midline, and when well supported.
2. Choose times to eat and drink when relaxed with calm breathing.
3. Go slowly with lots of time between mouthfuls of food or drink, to avoid becoming short of breath while eating and drinking.
4. Try to help the person to give themselves the food or drink, as having control of when you take a mouthful makes the timing of swallowing easier. If the person can't feed themselves, 'hand over hand assistance' is sometimes a helpful technique to try before resorting to feeding someone.
5. Lots of small snacks and drinks throughout the day and night may be easier than larger meals and drinks.
6. Generally smaller mouthfuls are usually easier to control, especially if in a reclined position.
7. Thicker drinks are easier to control in the mouth, and move more slowly giving time if the swallow is slow to trigger. As well as a thickening powder (such as Nutilis Clear) you can make or buy smoothie drinks (such as 'Innocent Smoothies') that are already thick.
8. However it is alright to try small sips of normal drinks - unless any coughing becomes too distressing. Some people who have previously been recommended to take thickened drinks really enjoy tasting a normal cup of tea or coffee. Note that even coffee or hot chocolate made completely from full-fat milk is a little thicker than drinks made with water, so may be slightly easier to swallow.
9. Soft or even pureéd food may be easier and less tiring to eat as it needs little chewing. Ensuring the food is also moist means it can be swallowed easier with less effort.
10. Choose favourite flavours and foods - these may have strong and happy memories attached!

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11. Try different utensils:

- a normal cup is nicer than a spouted cup, unless there is too much spilling, drooling or an inability to control the flow of drink resulting in mouthfuls that are too large in volume
- a teaspoon ensures a small mouthful of food or drink
- a small syringe (as found in children's medicines such as 'Calpol') can also ensure a small (3 ml) mouthful if there is enough lip seal, but only put the syringe just into the mouth so the drink is delivered to the tip of the tongue area or just behind the lips. Press the plunger slowly so that drink does not squirt to the back of the mouth / throat
- straws are easier to suck through if they are shorter (cut one in half with scissors). Some people find they are easier with a wider or narrower hole. Special 'Pat Saunders' straws have a ball bearing mechanism to stop the drink falling back down the straw, so take less effort to drink through (www.nrshealthcare.co.uk or tel 0345 1218111).

12. Regular mouth care will ensure the mouth remains clean and moist and will promote the comfort and enjoyment of eating and drinking. It is important that mouth care is given frequently throughout the day, and also done thoroughly twice a day as part of the washing and care routine. A soft toothbrush is best for cleaning teeth and dentures, as well as gentle cleaning of the tongue, palate and inner cheeks and gums. A sponge stick is less effective at cleaning, but is useful to mop up remnants of food and drink, and to moisten the mouth regularly.

If you have any questions, you are always welcome to contact the Speech & Language Therapy service directly for general advice, or to request a medical referral to the Speech & Language Therapy service from your Consultant or GP.