



West Hertfordshire  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Trust



A guide to...

# Returning to a Normal Diet

*Patient information*

Watford General Hospital

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 198** or email [westherts.pals@nhs.net](mailto:westherts.pals@nhs.net)



Language



Large  
Print



Braille



Audio

## Returning to a normal diet

Following surgery or a period of being 'nil by mouth', the doctors managing your care may request you to re-introduce food and fluids in a staged approach, gradually building to your normal diet.

Below is some guidance on what foods and fluids can be consumed at each stage of progression. The surgical team will advise you which stage you should be on, and when you can progress to the next stage – you may not need to go through all of the stages depending on the type of surgery you have had.

Most patients return to their normal diet within days or weeks of having their surgery; however, this varies between individuals.

It may be advised that after certain operations or procedures you follow a low fibre diet for a short period of time afterwards. Please consult your dietitian if you require further information regarding this.

### Clear fluids

A clear fluid diet is often the first stage of oral intake to try. There must be no lumps / pieces / pulp / milk in the fluid. Examples of items allowed on a clear fluid diet are:

<b>Soups with NO bits or pieces</b> Clear soup / consommé Beef / chicken / vegetable	<b>Squash</b> Any flavour
<b>Savoury Drinks</b> Marmite – diluted in hot water Bovril – diluted in hot water	<b>Tea / coffee / hot drinks</b> Black coffee – no milk / cream Herbal teas / fruit teas Light black tea – no milk / cream
<b>Fruit juices with NO bits or pulp</b> Any flavour	<b>Desserts</b> Plain jelly – no fruit pieces Ice lollies – clear – no milk

There is one oral nutritional supplement available in hospital that falls under the category of a clear fluid: Ensure Plus Juice. If you feel you need nutrition support and this could be of any help, please discuss it with the ward dietitian.

## Free fluids

This diet is the next step up from a clear fluid diet, as you progress onto a full oral diet. Free fluids means that you can take any item that is a smooth liquid, with no lumps or pieces, or anything that quickly melts in the mouth into liquid form.

The follow items are allowed on a free fluids diet:

<b>Soups with NO pieces</b> All smooth / pureed soups	<b>Fruit juices with NO bits or pulp</b> Any flavour
<b>Tea / coffee / hot drinks</b> tea / coffee/ hot chocolate / Ovaltine / latte / mocha / cappuccino	<b>Desserts</b> Ice cream / smooth yoghurt / custard / jelly (smooth)
<b>Milk</b> Milk / milkshakes (smooth) / smoothies (no pieces)	<b>Nutritional Supplements</b> Nutritional drinks available in hospital (Ensures), please discuss with ward dietitian for advice

## Light diet

You may be asked to follow a light diet which will usually last a few days. A light diet is a low fibre and low-fat diet. This is a temporary measure in order to avoid discomfort as you return to your normal diet, as fibre and fat are more difficult to digest.

## Menu ideas

### Breakfast

Cornflakes / Rice Krispies  
Smooth, plain yoghurt  
White bread and butter / seedless jam / honey  
Cooked breakfast – eggs and white bread  
Banana

### Lunch or supper

Fish or chicken – poached or grilled – no skin and bones  
Plain Omelette / cheese omelette  
White bread sandwich – no salad  
White pasta with light tomato sauce / grated cheese  
White rice

### Potatoes, rice, pasta

White rice / pasta  
Mashed potatoes / potatoes with no skin

## **Vegetables**

Well cooked, soft peeled root vegetables e.g. carrots, parsnips, swede, turnips

Peeled white or sweet potatoes (boiled, mashed, fried or roasted)

Well-cooked broccoli and cauliflower (no tough stalks)

Peeled and de-seeded tomato, cucumber, cooked peppers

Mashed carrot and swede

## **Desserts**

Mousse / jelly / ice cream / yoghurt

Custard

Cheese and crackers

## **Drinks**

Coffee / tea / juice / semi skimmed milk

## **Fruits**

Tinned fruit

Banana / melon / pineapple

Small amounts of fruit with the skin and seeds removed e.g. peeled apples, pears, peaches, plums, nectarines, apricots

Puréed, stewed or cooked fruit, (without skins, pips or stones)

## **Soft Diet**

Your doctor may recommend a soft diet after following a light diet or instead of it, prior to returning to a normal diet. It consists of foods that are physically soft, with the goal of reducing or eliminating the need to chew the food.

### **Tips for making your foods soft:**

- Add plenty of sauce to your plate (cheese sauce, tomato sauce, gravy, etc).
- Add cream, butter or cheese to your meals
- Choose canned vegetables or cook them well
- Opt for tinned / cooked / peeled / seedless fruits
- Avoid whole grain bread / pasta / rice – choose white options
- Add custard or ice cream to your desserts. Avoid desserts containing pastry or crumble
- Take your time to chew foods properly, to a mashed potato consistency before swallowing

## Returning to a normal diet

Once your doctor tells you that you can return to having a normal diet, gradually introduce **small portions** of foods containing fibre (fruit and vegetables, whole grain options, pulses, etc) and do it **one at a time** so if you get any symptoms (such as bloating, discomfort, excessive wind, etc) you can identify which food caused it. In case of discomfort, leave that food for another week or two and try it again later.

Re-introduce all the other foods gradually and assess your tolerance to it. Again, if a certain food causes any issues, try it again one to two weeks later.

### How to contact us:

Nutrition and Dietetic Department  
Sycamore House  
West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals Trust  
Watford General Hospital  
Vicarage Road  
Watford  
Hertfordshire WD18 0HB

**Telephone No:** 01923 436236  
**Email:** westherts.dietitians@nhs.net

Author	Marta Sanz Martinez
Department	Nutrition and Dietetics
Ratified / Review Date	Dec 2022 / Dec 2025
Ref no:	34/2075/V1

