

Practical Meal Planning

for Patients recovering
from Head and Neck Cancer



A N D R E W G A Y L O R

in collaboration with



Introduction

In 2014 I noticed that the left side of my face wasn't moving normally and my mouth began to droop. Initially I was diagnosed with Bell's Palsy, but the paralysis gradually spread further across my face and after further scans in early 2015 I was diagnosed with a malignant tumour in the parotid gland in my neck which was progressing up the facial nerve towards my brain. I had major surgery and radiotherapy, which left me with a face which drooped on one side, hearing loss, and my left eyelid was paralysed, so I couldn't blink properly or close my eye at night. Even now, I need to tape my left eye closed before I go to bed. A year later I had minor surgery to insert a tiny gold plate inside my left eyelid, which gives it just enough weight to close when I'm sitting or standing. Now I'm the real Golden Eye!

A routine chest scan in 2018 revealed that three small metastases had developed in my lungs; this was completely unexpected and came as a big shock. I had further radiotherapy for these, which was successful, and got none of the severe side effects which I'd experienced with my previous radiotherapy.

In 2019 I had facelift surgery to level up the paralysed side of my face with the healthy side. The difference was incredible – both physically and emotionally. In 24 hours I went from someone who got stared in the street and who avoided being in photos to someone who felt like my old self and was comfortable again with how I looked. I will always remember with gratitude the fantastic work my oncology and surgery teams did for me.

In addition to the paralysis caused by my tumour, my radiotherapy in 2015 had huge and unpleasant side effects, including not being able to open my jaw very wide (trismus), a messed up sense of taste, and severe difficulty in swallowing – all common experiences for patients who've had head or neck cancer. Many of these side effects have gradually reduced over time, but some will be permanent. Overall, though, I'm in a much, much better place than I was six years ago, and am surprised how much things have improved over time – and how very gradual some of that improvement is.

Initially I survived on pots of nutrition drinks – all of which had an unpleasant metallic taste due to my radiotherapy. Gradually I was able to introduce soups, then soft solid foods and so on. Although the dietitians at the hospital gave me helpful information and advice on what to eat, working out what I could eat day by day was a challenge, and getting enough calories, fibre and so on was a real worry.



Six years on, I'm very lucky that my sense of taste has almost fully recovered (not always the case after head and neck cancer) and I can eat a wide range of foods though I have to plan carefully. Having a serious difficulty with eating is very socially isolating, so being able to eat again with other people has been an important psychological boost, although currently disrupted by the Covid pandemic.

During each stage of my recovery I kept a record of what I ate, thinking that it might be useful in the future. I developed recipes for several high nutrition soup recipes, using fresh ingredients; which really helped to keep my calorie intake up. But trying to work out what to eat each meal and each day was a challenge and I realised that it might be helpful to put together a meal planning booklet, drawing on my own experience. Several other patients I've met at University College Hospital, London, where I had my treatment, have also contributed their ideas and suggestions.



Andrew Gaylor
Jan 2022

This booklet is designed to be basic and practical, to help you get through the challenges of your recovery from your cancer and its treatment. It covers a range of eating difficulties and situations, from those who have lost their tongue and/or their teeth and who therefore can't eat any solid food, to those who can eat soft solid food with plenty of liquid, to those who can manage closer to a more normal diet but still have to plan all their meals very carefully. Well meaning friends will often invite us to meet them out for a meal, and not realise what a daunting prospect that can be for us. I remember going into a coffee shop six months or so after my treatment finished, standing in the doorway and realising that there was nothing there I could eat or drink! But things often improve over time, so there are ideas and strategies which may help you in social situations too.

Everyone's experience of cancer is different, and your journey won't be the same as mine, but I hope that some of the recipes and meal planning ideas in this booklet will help you develop your eating as you recover from your cancer and cancer treatment.

In memory of Sheila and Maurice Gaylor

Although this booklet has been available as an e-book for some time, I think that some people would find a printed book easier to use. I recently inherited some money from my parents, who were hugely supportive of me throughout my life, so with some of the money they left me I'm helping to fund the publication of this book as a printed book, which I'm dedicating to their memory.

Andrew Gaylor

This book grew out of my own experience of recovering from head and neck cancer and the experiences of several fellow patients, who have also contributed. You can use it together with the information and advice from your Dietitian. It's not a book of fancy recipes to impress your friends and family but a 'survival kit' to help you get through the early weeks and months of your recovery – and maybe beyond. I hope you find it helpful and I send you my best wishes for your recovery.



Recovering from Head and Neck Cancer

In the early stages of your recovery you may only be able to manage liquid food. Later on you'll probably be able to manage some solid food, but progress may be slow. Everyone's experience is slightly different, so try to find what works for you at the stage you're at and remember that things can change even if progress sometimes seems painfully slow.

Some people continue to experience improvements in their ability to eat and taste food more than two years after their treatment, so be patient and don't give up. Your mouth may even surprise you at times! For example, some people find that although eating bread is difficult, they can manage a few crisps quite well, even though crisps may seem drier.

- You may have to re-think what foods 'go together'. Unusual combinations of food may work for you because one kind of food can help you to eat another.
- A few small dishes may be easier to manage than one large plate of food.

- Be careful about adding salt and pepper to your food, especially in the early stages of your recovery. Your mouth may not tolerate these well.
- Don't give yourself more of one particular food than you feel you'll be able to eat. For example, it's better to give yourself two pieces of banana and to finish them than to try to eat a whole banana and fail.
- Eating a meal may well take you a long time in the early stages of recovery. It usually improves, but gradually.
- If you find eating very tiring (quite likely), try spacing the parts of your meals out a bit – even if that means that your meal takes longer to eat.
- A spoon and fork is often easier to eat with than a knife and fork.
- Sometimes it may feel as though your mouth has 'a mind of its own' and you may struggle with things you'd been able to eat only a day or two before. You are not alone! So try not to worry about it; it may well improve over time.



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Equipment

You'll find a **blender** very useful. A basic blender, such as Kenwood, costs around £30 and is good for mixing up powder drinks etc. A more powerful blender, such as Nutribullet, costs around £80, and will make smoother soups and drinks.

An **electric soup maker** is also useful. You can buy one for around £40 which will make 2 litres of soup from scratch in around 20 minutes. You may want to re-blend it in a more powerful blender once the liquid has cooled down, to make it smoother.

The recommendations in this cookbook is a guideline only. Always speak to your doctor, consultant, dietitian, or cancer nurse about what diet is best for you and your health. Always consider your allergies and intolerances before preparing or consuming a meal from this cookbook.

'No chewing' savoury foods

If you can't chew solid food, eating can be a huge challenge. This can be either a temporary issue or a long term condition, depending on what treatment you had.

Smoothies and **soups** have their own separate sections, which you should find helpful.

Avocado

Can be mashed and eaten by itself, or mashed with some Carnation milk, or added to a smoothie.



Baked beans

tomato sauce, mashed or pureed.



Complan

This powdered nutrition drink is mixed with milk. It's available in many supermarkets and pharmacies. The most popular flavours are strawberry and chocolate.



Horlicks, Ovaltine or hot chocolate

made with full cream milk.



Eggnog

This drink uses raw egg, so check with your dietician whether it's safe for you to eat. Only use eggs with the red 'lion' stamp, as they are certified free of salmonella. Crack a large egg into a blender goblet (be careful to avoid small pieces of shell) and top up to 200ml with milk, then add a level teaspoon of honey, a sprinkle of cinnamon powder, or a splash of sherry. To increase the calorie content, you can add two heaped dessert spoonfuls of weight gain powder such as Serious Mass (try banana or vanilla flavour). Blend and pour into a glass or mug. You can sprinkle the top with a little chocolate powder or grated nutmeg.

Creamy scrambled eggs

Break 2 eggs into a bowl with salt and pepper and a splash of milk and beat thoroughly with a fork. You could add some grated cheese. Heat a knob of butter, oil or spread in a small non-stick saucepan over a low heat until melted, then tip in the egg mixture. Keep stirring the egg gently while it is cooking and remove from the heat when it begins to set but before it has fully set. It will continue to cook after you've stopped heating it, so stop cooking when it is still quite sloppy. This goes well with baked beans, cooked tomatoes, fried mushrooms or tinned spaghetti hoops.



Smoothies

Smoothies are a great way to take in calories, vitamins and minerals. If you can eat solid food, try to include smoothies as an additional part of your meal, rather than as a meal replacement. That way they will increase your calorie intake. Information and ideas about making nutritious smoothies can be found in the next section.



Ready made bottled nutrition drinks

such as Ensure, Fortisip and Meritene. These are available at many supermarkets and pharmacies, and also online. These can provide a handy 'top-up' when you're out, or at home when you're not feeling like eating a normal meal.

Soups

Soups, like smoothies, are likely to be a key part of your diet and can be very nutritious. Standard tinned soups are an awkward size; a full tin of 400g will probably be too much for you, but half a tin isn't very much. Try having half a tin, then a break, then the other half of the tin. It's probably better either to buy cartons of fresh soups and try to have a 300g portion or else to make your own. You'll find a range of recipes in the 'soups' section.

Ready made puréed meals

can be delivered direct to your home by companies such as Wiltshire Farms and Oakhouse Foods. They are attractively presented and you can order as many or as few as you like.





Smoothies

Smoothies are a great way to take in calories, vitamins and minerals. If you can eat solid food, try to include smoothies as an additional part of your meal, rather than as a meal replacement. That way they will increase your calories intake.

Here are some examples of each of the basic ingredients:

Liquids: dairy milk, nut milk, coconut milk, fruit juice, soya milk

Fruits: apple, bananas, berries, figs, orange, pineapple, prunes, strawberries. Fruits are high in vitamins and minerals and some (e.g. bananas) can also be high in protein.

Vegetables: avocados, carrots, spinach, kale. These are high in vitamins and minerals. Surprisingly, they don't change the flavour of your smoothie as much as you'd expect, so they're worth a try even if they don't appeal to you!

Dairy: ice cream, yoghurt. Try to use the high calorie versions.

Nuts: Try brazils, cashews, peanuts (or peanut butter) or walnuts. Nuts are high in healthy fats, but you'll need a high powered blender to blend them in.

Add-ins: coconut cream, honey, oats, nutrition drinks, protein powder. Oats are best soaked in warm milk before adding. You could add half a pot of nutrition drink to a shake to add flavour and calories. Two dessert spoons of nutrition powder will also add calories.

Drink your smoothie soon after you make it. If you've made too much, you can keep the extra in the fridge for a few hours and drink it later.



Black Forest Smoothie

- 200ml milk
- 60ml Greek yogurt
- 50g frozen cherries
- 2 tbsp vanilla protein powder
- 1 tbsp cocoa powder
- 1 tbsp peanut butter
- 1 tsp honey or 2 tsp maple syrup

Blend all ingredients except the peanut butter. When combined, add the peanut butter and blend completely. For a thinner consistency add more milk or a scoop of ice cream.

As an alternative to peanut butter you could add a few cashew, brazil or other nuts.

Blueberry Smoothie

- 1/2 a small banana, sliced
- 50g blueberries (fresh or frozen)
- 200ml milk or coconut water (not coconut milk)
- 2 tbsp vanilla protein powder
- 3 brazil nuts
- 1 tsp honey or 2 tsp maple syrup

You could use raspberries (fresh or frozen) instead of blueberries.

Chocolate Peanut Butter Smoothie

- 200ml milk (dairy or nut milk)
- 1/2 an avocado
- 2 tbsp peanut butter
- 1 tbsp cocoa powder (not drinking chocolate powder)
- 1 tbsp vanilla protein powder

Add the peanut butter after the other ingredients have been blended together.

Banana, Brazil Nut, Fig and Oat Smoothie

- 3 tbsp oats
- 200ml warm milk
- 1/2 banana
- 3 semi-dried figs, sliced
- 3 brazil nuts
- 1 tsp honey or 2 tsp maple syrup

Soak the oats in the warm milk for 20 mins, then mix with the other ingredients and blend.



Banana and Strawberry Smoothie

180g plain bio yoghurt
60g milk
5 fresh or frozen strawberries
1 medium banana
2 tbsp peanut butter

Green Smoothie

The green vegetables in this recipe don't dominate the flavour; you'll taste the fruit more.

1/2 a medium avocado
1/2 a medium apple, chopped
30g spinach
30g chopped pineapple
200ml coconut water or fruit juice
50ml plain bio yoghurt

Porridge Smoothie

Most blenders are designed to blend cold liquids. In this recipe you're blending a warm liquid so before actually blending, shake the liquid in the goblet well, then unscrew the top to release the pressure, then repeat. After 20 seconds of blending unscrew the lid briefly to release the pressure, then blend for a further 20 seconds. Repeat as necessary.

REMEMBER: IT'S NOT SAFE TO BLEND HOT LIQUIDS

Cook 2 or 3 tbsp of porridge oats (depending on how thick you want the smoothie to be) in 200ml milk until the mixture thickens. Put 200ml of cold water plus 1tsp of brown sugar or a squirt of maple syrup in the blender goblet and add your cooked porridge. Blend until smooth – probably around 50 seconds.

Try adding 2 chopped dried figs or prunes to the mixture before blending. A small handful of ground almonds, cashews, or brazil nuts will also add calories and fibre.

If you find this smoothie too thick, use less oats.



Soups

Soups are invaluable for patients recovering from treatment for head and neck cancer. They're among the easiest foods to eat/drink and you can pack a lot of nutrition into them, including fibre and protein.

Tinned soups are the easiest to manage, but provide the least nutrition and are relatively expensive for what you get. You could enhance them by adding cream, grated cheese, cooked lentils or frozen balls of spinach. If you can't currently eat bread, try cutting a slice into small squares and putting into your soup. Small cubes of cheese on toast also work well.

Soups in cartons (e.g. Covent Garden Soup Co.) are more nutritious than tinned soups and are often on special offer. They also give you better portion sizes. If they're a bit too lumpy, you can blend them. You can also enhance them, as with tinned soups.

Homemade soup can be the most nutritious, but is more work. Here are some recipes for nutritious homemade soups. The quantities given are all approximate and can be adjusted as you wish. Any of the main ingredients can be omitted, or substituted with alternatives. The variations at the end of each recipe will add more calories, and often more fibre as well.

Each recipe will make around 6 portions. If it seems too much work, you could scale the quantities down to roughly one third and just make two portions at a time.

A spoonful of crème fraiche stirred into your bowl of soup will make it look even more appetising – and add a few more calories!



Asparagus Soup



Ingredients

A 375g bundle of asparagus
 1 large onion
 2 cloves of garlic
 2 sticks of celery
 1/2 a leek
 2 large carrots
 2 large boned and skinned chicken thighs
 A small bowlful of frozen peas
 1 1/2 chicken stock cubes
 1 tablespoon of olive oil or sunflower oil
 1 dessert spoon of Worcester sauce
 Salt and pepper

This recipe uses an electric soup maker.

It will make around 6 portions. If it seems too much work, you could scale the quantities down to roughly one third and just make two portions.

You can also omit almost any of the ingredients to simplify the recipe.

Method

Peel and dice the carrots, onions, celery, leek and garlic and put into your soup maker. Snap the large ends off the asparagus, chop the spears into 1 inch pieces and tip them into the soup maker, together with all of the other ingredients EXCEPT the chicken and the peas. Add water to the 'max' level and start it.

While your soup is cooking, put the chicken thighs and peas into a small saucepan, cover with water and bring to the boil. Simmer for 15 mins. Remove the chicken thighs and save the water they were cooked in. When the chicken thighs have cooled, chop them up finely and tip into the cooked soup mix, along with the peas and the water they were cooked in.

When the soup has fully cooled liquidise in a blender to make it smoother. Use the largest goblet you have and don't overfill it. Experiment with blending times until the soup is the consistency you like. 60 seconds should make a nice, smooth soup. You'll need to do this blending in at least 3 batches.

You can freeze this soup in individual portions of around 320gms. It will make around 6 portions.

Variations

Add half a tinned of drained butter beans to the soup mixture before you blend it.

Add a cupful of cooked lentils to the soup mixture before you blend it. Be careful to rinse and cook them according to the instructions printed on the packet.

Butternut Squash Soup



Ingredients

½ a medium butternut squash
 1 large onion
 1 clove of garlic
 2 sticks of celery
 2 large carrots
 2 large chicken thighs with bone and skin removed
 1½ chicken stock cubes
 1 dessertspoon of Worcester sauce
 1 tablespoon of olive oil or sunflower oil
 A good squirt of tomato purée
 Salt and pepper

This recipe gives a method WITHOUT using an electric soup maker. If you have one, the method for making asparagus soup can be used. It will make around 6 portions. If it seems too much work, you could scale the quantities down to roughly one third and just make two portions. You can also omit almost any of the ingredients to simplify the recipe.

Method

Peel, de-seed and dice the butternut squash. Heat the oil in a large saucepan and add the chopped onion, garlic and celery. Gently fry for around 5 minutes to soften the vegetables.

Add all the other ingredients and bring to the boil. Then reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Remove from the heat and lift out the chicken thighs. When they have cooled a little, chop the thighs up into small pieces and return to the soup mix.

When the soup is cold, liquidise in a blender. You'll need to do this in two or three loads as this recipe should make around 2.5 litres of soup (about 6 portions). Use the largest goblet you have, and don't overfill it. Add more water (or milk) if you want a thinner soup. Blend for around 60 seconds to make a smooth soup.

You can freeze this soup in individual portions of around 320gms.

Variations

Add half a tin of coconut milk, or 3 heaped tablespoons of coconut powder (NOT desiccated coconut), to the soup before blending. If you do, it won't keep for long in the fridge. It would be best to freeze it in individual portions on the day you make it.

Add 120g of cooked sweetcorn to the cooked soup before blending.

Add 150g of cheese before making the soup. If you do this, it won't keep for long in the fridge. If you are freezing it, it's best to do so in individual portions on the day you make it.

Add a carton of chopped tomato with basil. Still add the tomato puree, though.

Parsnip Soup

This recipe uses an electric soup maker. It will make around 6 portions. If it seems too much work, you could scale the quantities down to roughly one third and just make two portions. You can also omit almost any of the ingredients to simplify the recipe.

Ingredients

- 2 large parsnips (about 250g)
- 1 large onion
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 2 sticks of celery
- ½ a leek
- 2 large carrots
- 1 diced medium cooking apple
- 2 large boned and skinned chicken thighs
- 1½ chicken stock cubes
- 1 dessertspoon of Worcester sauce
- 2 tablespoons of olive oil or sunflower oil
- A good squirt of tomato purée
- Salt and pepper

Method

Peel and dice the parsnips and shallow fry them on a high heat in the oil for around 10 mins, until they begin to brown and give off a nice nutty smell. Turn them during cooking, to brown more evenly. When cooked tip them into your soup maker and add all the other ingredients except the chicken thighs. Add water to the 'max' level and start it.

While the soup is cooking, cover the chicken thighs with water in a small saucepan, bring to the boil and simmer for 15 minutes. Remove the chicken thighs and save the water they were cooked in. When the chicken thighs have cooled, chop them up and tip into the cooked soup mix, along with the water they were cooked in.

Liquidise the cold soup in a blender, to make it smoother. Experiment with blending times until the soup is the consistency you like. 60 seconds should make a nice, smooth soup. You'll need to do this blending in at least 3 batches.

This soup can be frozen in individual portions of around 320gms. It will make around 6 portions.

Variations

Add half a tin of drained butter beans to the soup mixture before you blend it.

Add a cupful of cooked lentils to the soup mixture before you blend it. Be careful to rinse and cook them according to the instructions printed on the packet.

Mushroom, Leek and Potato Soup



Ingredients

300g mushrooms
 300g potatoes
 1 large onion
 2 cloves of garlic
 1 stick of celery
 2 leeks
 3 large boned and skinned chicken thighs
 (optional, but gives you more calories)
 1 tablespoonful of olive oil or sunflower oil
 1½ chicken stock cubes
 1 dessert spoonful of Worcester sauce
 Salt and pepper

This recipe uses an electric soup maker. It will make around 6 portions. If it seems too much work, you could scale the quantities down to roughly one third and just make two portions. You can also omit almost any of the ingredients to simplify the recipe.

Method

Clean and quarter the mushrooms then shallow fry in oil or butter. Start on a high heat with the lid off and once the mushrooms begin to brown turn the heat down to low and put the lid on. Turn them during cooking and cook for around 5 minutes until they are juicy and tender. Tip into your soup maker and add all of the other ingredients, peeled and chopped, except the chicken thighs, plus water to the 'max' level.

While your soup is cooking, put the chicken thighs into a small saucepan, cover with water and bring to the boil. Simmer for 15 mins. Remove the chicken thighs and save the water they were cooked in. When the chicken thighs have cooled, chop them up finely and tip into the cooked soup mix along with the water they were cooked in.

When the soup has cooled liquidise in a blender, combined with the chopped chicken meat. Liquidise the cold soup in a blender, to make it smoother. 60 seconds should make a nice, smooth soup. You'll need to do this blending in at least 3 batches.

This soup can be frozen in individual portions of around 320gms.

Variations

Add half a tin of drained butter beans to the soup mixture before you blend it.

Add a cupful of cooked lentils to the soup mixture before you blend it. Be careful to rinse and cook them according to the instructions printed on the packet.



Breakfast

If typical breakfast food and drink is difficult for you to manage, here are some alternatives. Where milk is mentioned, in most cases you can substitute with soya milk or a nut milk.

Soft fruits

Such as blueberries, strawberries or raspberries, though if your taste buds have been affected by your treatment you may find these too acidic for some time. If you can't manage to eat them raw, try microwaving them on low for a few seconds with a little caster sugar. You could also blend them with milk into a tasty smoothie.



Mashed banana

and honey with a splash of milk

Breakfast cereals

may well be too much of a challenge for some time, but the ones which may be easiest to manage are: Cheerios, Crunchy Nut Corn Flakes, and Weetabix. Weetabix is easiest to eat with hot milk.



Bread

with butter/spread and jam, honey or marmalade. Removing the crusts makes it easier to eat, as does having it together with a hot drink. If normal bread is difficult for you, try brioche bread.



Eggnog

This drink uses raw egg, so check with your dietician whether it's safe for you to eat. Only use eggs with the red 'lion' stamp, as they are certified free of salmonella. Crack a large egg into a blender goblet (be careful to avoid small pieces of shell) and top up to 200ml with milk, then add a level teaspoon of honey, a sprinkle of cinnamon powder, or a splash of sherry.

If you want to increase the calorie content, also add two heaped dessert spoonfuls of weight gain powder such as Serious Mass (try banana or vanilla flavour). Blend and pour into a glass or mug. You can sprinkle the top with a little chocolate powder or grated nutmeg.

Banana and chocolate eggnog

Crack an egg into a blender goblet and top up to 150ml with milk. Add one third of a ripe banana, chopped in pieces, and half a bottle of a chocolate flavour nutrition drink or a dessert spoonful of cocoa powder. Blend and pour into a glass or mug.

Semolina

Tinned. Try adding some jam, honey or soft fruit. Again, this can be blended to make a smoothie.

Tapioca

Tinned. Can be eaten as it is or blended into a smoothie.

Scrambled eggs

Break 2 eggs into a bowl with salt and pepper and a splash of milk and beat thoroughly with a fork. You could add some grated cheese. Heat a knob of butter, oil or spread in a small non-stick saucepan over a low heat until melted, then tip in the egg mixture. Keep stirring the egg gently while it is cooking and remove from the heat when it begins to set but before it has fully set. It will continue to cook after you've stopped heating it, so stop cooking when it is still quite sloppy. Goes well with baked beans, cooked tomatoes or tinned spaghetti hoops.

Rice Pudding

Tinned is easiest to eat. You can make it into a smoothie in a blender if you can't manage the lumps.

Yoghurt

and honey, or with soft fruits and sugar or honey. You could blend this to make a smoothie. You could use panna cotta instead of yoghurt.



Soft solid meals

Ready made meals such as **spinach and ricotta cannelloni**, **macaroni cheese**, **moussaka**, **spaghetti carbonara**.

Vegetarian versions are easier to eat than the meat versions. Try eating just half a portion, with soup, to start with.

Minced meals and **soft and bite-sized meals** can be delivered to your home by companies such as Wiltshire Farms. You can order as many or as few as you like.

Coconut Water can help you to swallow your food; it's a better lubricant than plain water.

Avocados are very nutritious, and easy to eat when ripe.

Soft cheese

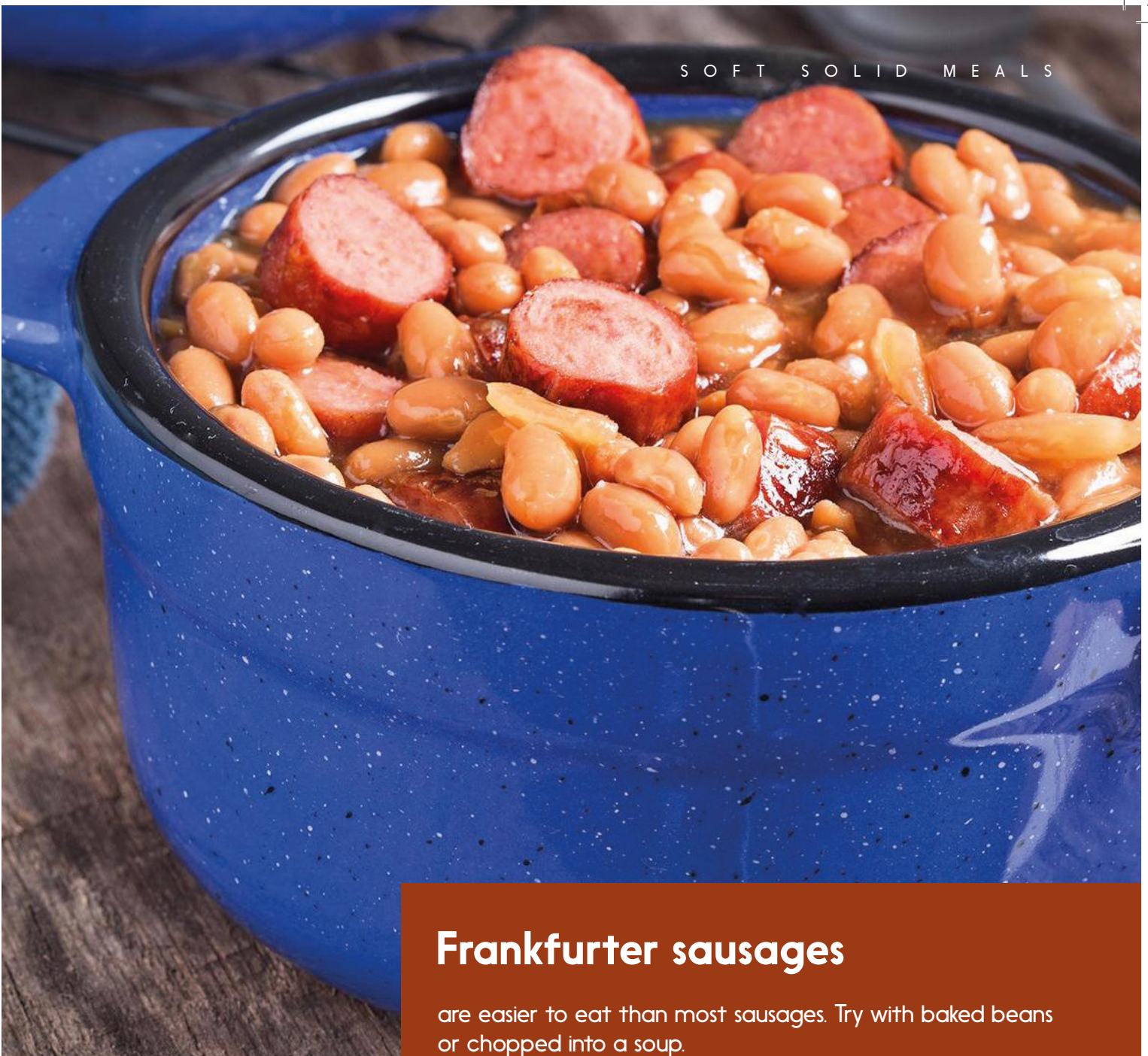
such as Brie or Camembert, or soft blue cheeses such as St. Augur or Cambozola. If you find bread difficult to eat, try brioche bread, or having a chunk of cheese with soup, or spreading creamy cheese on a Tuc biscuit and eating with soup.



Dim Sum

These Chinese small steamed savoury dumplings, buns and rolls have a variety of fillings and are mostly moist and soft. They're available frozen in some supermarkets and at all Oriental supermarkets. Cooking instructions will be on the packet - usually steam for 10-15 mins. Try a few with a portion of soup.





Frankfurter sausages

are easier to eat than most sausages. Try with baked beans or chopped into a soup.

Quiche Lorraine

Quiches vary from brand to brand, so try different ones. Many supermarkets sell a crustless quiche. Try eating with soup and/or baked beans.

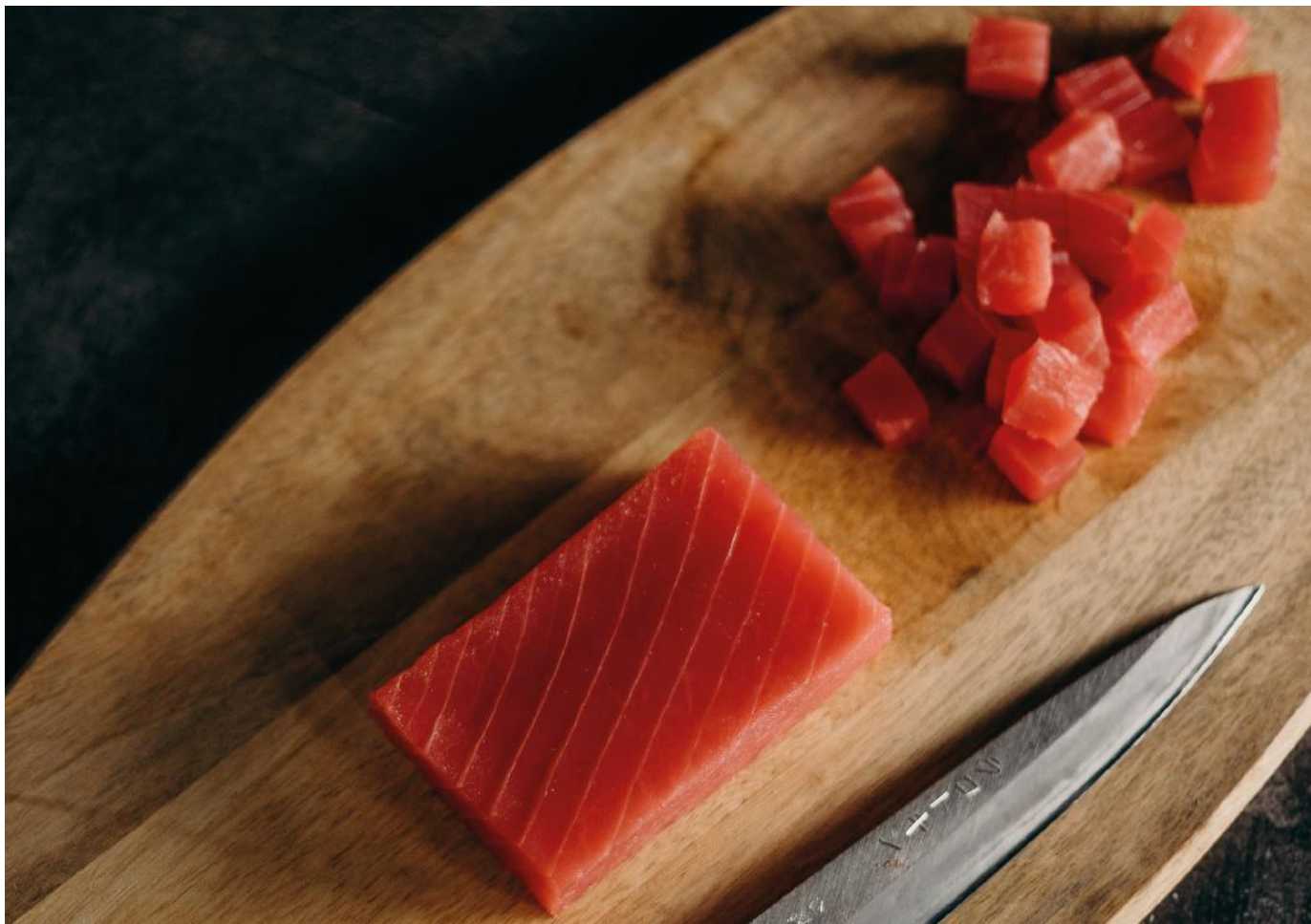
Homemade quiche made with puff pastry may be easier to eat than the ready made, short crust, ones. If the pieces of bacon are hard to eat, go for a vegetarian version.

Smooth Liver Paté

spread on bread or Tuc biscuits goes well with a bowl of soup.

A hard boiled egg

cut into 4 added to a bowl of soup.



Fish

Raw fish is much easier to eat than cooked fish as it stays soft and moist. Think of Japanese sushi. You do need to be careful, though. Fish eaten raw needs to be very fresh. It's also advisable to freeze it on the day you buy it and then defrost it on the day you intend to eat it.

Check with your dietician whether it's safe for you to eat raw fish.

Salmon, trout and tuna are the easiest to eat raw. Cut a small fillet (e.g. half a salmon steak) into thin slice, like sushi, and try eating along with any of the following: avocado, coleslaw, baked beans, soup. You could also try rollmop herrings – if your mouth can tolerate vinegar.

Lasagne

is soft and creamy, thanks to its cheesy sauce. If you find the minced meat in it difficult to manage, try a vegetarian version.

Spaghetti

Spaghetti Bolognese has a tomato-based sauce, which you might find difficult to tolerate in the early stages of your recovery if you've had radiotherapy, but Spaghetti Carbonara has a cheese based sauce.

You may need to add extra milk when you heat it, to make it more moist. Spaghetti in rings is much easier to manage than the long strands.



Savoury meals with more solid food

The meals in this section are suitable if you can chew and if you can swallow some solid foods. Most of them also need more preparation, but they should help you feel that you are beginning to eat more normal food. When you start eating solid food again, you may well not be able to eat a normal size portion. You could start with a half size portion or less, so that you get the satisfaction of finishing what's on your plate. It's important to build up your confidence and feeling of success in eating as your recovery progresses.

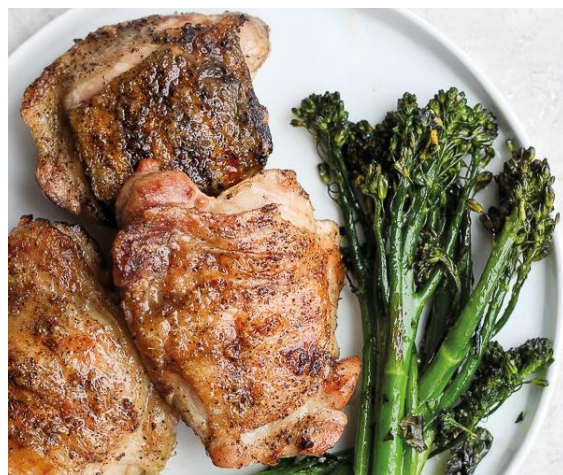
Bacon sandwich

Butter 2 slices of bread (or you could use brioche bread, which is much easier to eat). Fry 2 rashers of bacon and 6 cherry tomatoes, halved, until the bacon is only just cooked and the tomatoes are soft and juicy. Place the bacon and tomatoes on 1 slice, spread mango chutney on the other slice and place on top. Gently press down so that the juice of the tomatoes spreads through the sandwich, then cut off the crusts. This is easiest to eat with a bowl of soup.



Grilled chicken thigh

Marinate a skinned and boned chicken thigh for at least 1 hour in milk, or coconut milk with a splash of soy sauce. (This will make the chicken softer and moister.) Lay the flattened out chicken on a sheet of foil, sprinkle a little oil over it and season with pepper. Heat the grill to 180°C and cook for 3 mins on each side. Check that chicken is cooked through before you eat it, but don't overcook it. It goes well with sweet potato, some green vegetables and gravy.



Lamb Cutlets

2 small cutlets will make 1 portion. Trim off as much fat and skin as you can, so that you're left with 1 piece of meat each side of the T shaped bone. Coat with a little oil and season with salt and pepper. Heat a small frying pan over a medium heat (no need to add more oil) and fry the cutlets for only 90 secs each side. Then wrap the cutlets up tightly in a piece of foil and leave to stand for 2 mins to relax the meat. Serve with vegetables and mashed potato or mashed sweet potato, gravy and redcurrant jelly.

Lasagne

Ready made lasagne meals vary a lot between supermarkets, so read the customer reviews before choosing one which you think will best suit you. Several companies make vegetarian versions, which are lower in calories but also lower in saturated fat.

Moussaka

The creamy sauce in a moussaka makes eating it easier to eat, but be aware that as well as being high in calories (good!) it's high in saturated fat (not so good!). If a whole portion looks daunting, try half a portion.

Noodles

are often easier to eat than other starchy food such as potatoes. You can buy them in dried form in most supermarkets, and they come in many different varieties such as egg noodles, rice noodles, buckwheat noodles. They're quick to cook and can be used in place of potatoes, as long as you have plenty of sauce or gravy.

Chicken stew with coconut milk

Chop a mixture of vegetables such as celery, carrots, garlic, onions, peppers. Place in a saucepan and add half a tin of coconut milk and the same amount of water. Season with salt and pepper, a chicken stock cube and a splash of Worcester sauce. You could also add a tablespoon of powdered peanut butter if you like the taste. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 10 mins. Chop 2 chicken thighs into small pieces, add to the saucepan and cook for a further 15 mins. Mix a teaspoon of flour or cornflour in a little cold water and stir into the stew to thicken it. This will make 2 portions.

Grilled half duck breast

Marinate half a duck breast per person for 2 hours in milk or coconut milk with a splash of soy sauce. Coat with a little oil and season with salt and pepper. Heat your grill to 180°C and grill the breast for 2½ minutes (no more) on each side. Remove from the grill, wrap it up tightly in a piece of foil and let it stand for a couple of minutes, to relax it. A teaspoon of redcurrant jelly will help you to eat it.

Cheese on toast

Toast a slice of bread, butter it and cover with slices of cheese. Return to the grill until the cheese has melted. However, as cheese cools, it hardens, so it needs to be eaten straightaway. A proper 'Welsh Rarebit' is easier to eat, but is more work to prepare:

Melt a generous knob of butter or spread in a small saucepan. Turn the heat down and add a dessertspoon of self raising flour and mix thoroughly with a spoon. Slowly add small amounts of milk and keep stirring until it forms a soft, springy ball. Grate 60g of strong cheese and add to the saucepan, mixing well. You can also add a level teaspoon of French mustard, or creamed horseradish, if your mouth can tolerate it. Spread over a slice of toast, add a few halved cherry tomatoes if you like, and grill until the top begins to brown. Once it's cooked, tomato sauce or mango chutney spread over it makes it moister to eat.

Nuts

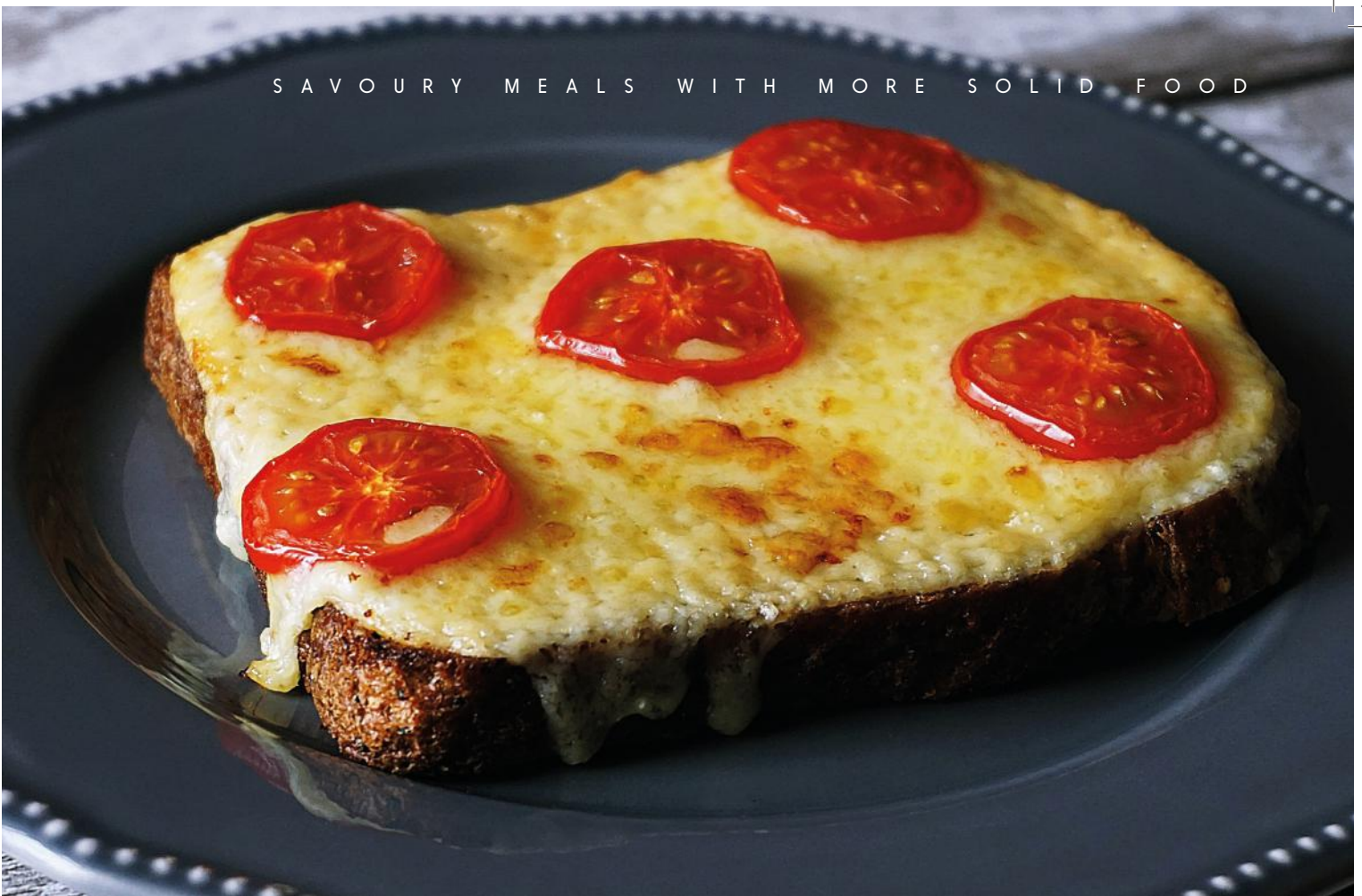
Nuts are nutritious, but can be very dry to eat. Cashews, pecans and brazils are likely to be the easiest to manage. Try eating them with some soup. Raw cashews are less dry than roasted and softer to eat. You can also add ground almonds to smoothies for added nutrition. Although nuts may seem quite expensive, you don't need many in a portion. You may be able to manage a **peanut butter sandwich** – maybe with mango chutney, sliced cucumber, honey or jam. Eat it together with a bowl of soup as by itself it's quite dry. Try just half a sandwich to begin with. Ground almonds are a valuable addition to a wide range of foods, including porridge, smoothies, stews. Peanut butter is also available in powder form, which has a much lower fat content, although quite sweet. You could try adding it to a smoothie or a stew. You could also add a handful of raw cashew nuts to a porridge smoothie.

Peanut butter sandwich. Peanut butter is very nutritious, but can be very dry to eat. Try adding sliced cucumber or honey and eating with a bowl of soup. If you still find the peanut butter too dry, you can add a little vegetable oil (e.g. olive oil) to the jar and mix it in; this will make it softer and more moist.

Pizza

Buy a thin crust pizza if your jaw doesn't open very wide as a result of radiotherapy. The easiest pizzas to eat are probably vegetarian ones, such as spinach and ricotta. Pizzas with meat can be much harder to swallow. You can add to extra toppings such as sliced and mushrooms (fry them lightly before adding them), halved cherry tomatoes, extra grated cheese, olives, anchovies, or pineapple chunks.





Lamb Casserole

This recipe makes 2 portions. Heat a dessertspoonful of oil in a frying pan on medium high heat then add two lamb fillets and fry for 1 minute. Turn them and fry for a further minute. If necessary, repeat to brown the fillets all over. Transfer the fillets to a large casserole dish.

Chop 1 onion and fry in the same frying pan until beginning to brown, then transfer to the casserole dish. Chop 1 stick of celery and half a red pepper and add. Heat 400 ml water and add 2 teaspoons of lamb gravy powder to thicken, then pour into the casserole. Add a generous shake of Worcester sauce and some dried mixed herbs.

Bake in a pre-heated oven at 160° then add 2 chopped carrots and cook for a further 30 mins.

When cool, remove the lamb fillets and slice them into bite-size pieces. Serve with mashed potato.



Tomato, aubergine and chickpea bake



Ingredients

2 aubergines cut into 1cm thick slices
 1 tin of cooked chickpeas
 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
 1 large onion, thinly sliced
 1 tin chopped tomatoes (Italian tomatoes are best for this)
 1 large courgette cut into round slices
 1/2 a red pepper, cut into strips
 200g mushrooms, halved
 6 medium tomatoes, sliced
 120g grated cheddar cheese
 Vegetable oil or olive oil
 Salt and pepper
 Dried herbs

This is one of my favourite recipes! It's a bit time consuming to prepare, but it can be prepared in advance, and once it's in the oven you can relax and forget about it.

Serves 4. You can easily halve the quantities to make 2 portions.

Method

Arrange the aubergine slices on a large baking tray and brush with oil. Turn them over and brush the other sides with oil. Bake in the oven at 180° for 30 mins, turning them over after 15 mins.

Fry the red pepper slices, onions and garlic in a little oil over a medium heat till soft (c.5 mins) 4 then add the tinned tomatoes, salt and pepper and simmer gently for 10 mins.

Meanwhile heat 1 tab oil in a saucepan over a high heat. Reduce to medium heat and add the mushrooms. Move them around the pan to cook all sides (1 min) then put a lid on and reduce the heat to min for 2 mins. Tip the mushrooms into a dish and use the saucepan to simmer the courgette in a little salted water for 3 mins.

Arrange the aubergine slices on the bottom of a large ovenproof dish and sprinkle the chickpeas evenly over the top. Spread the courgette and mushroom mixture over these, and then the red pepper, tomato and onion mixture. Press down to distribute evenly. Finally, arrange the slices of tomato on the top, sprinkle with the grated cheese and then with some dried herbs and ground pepper.

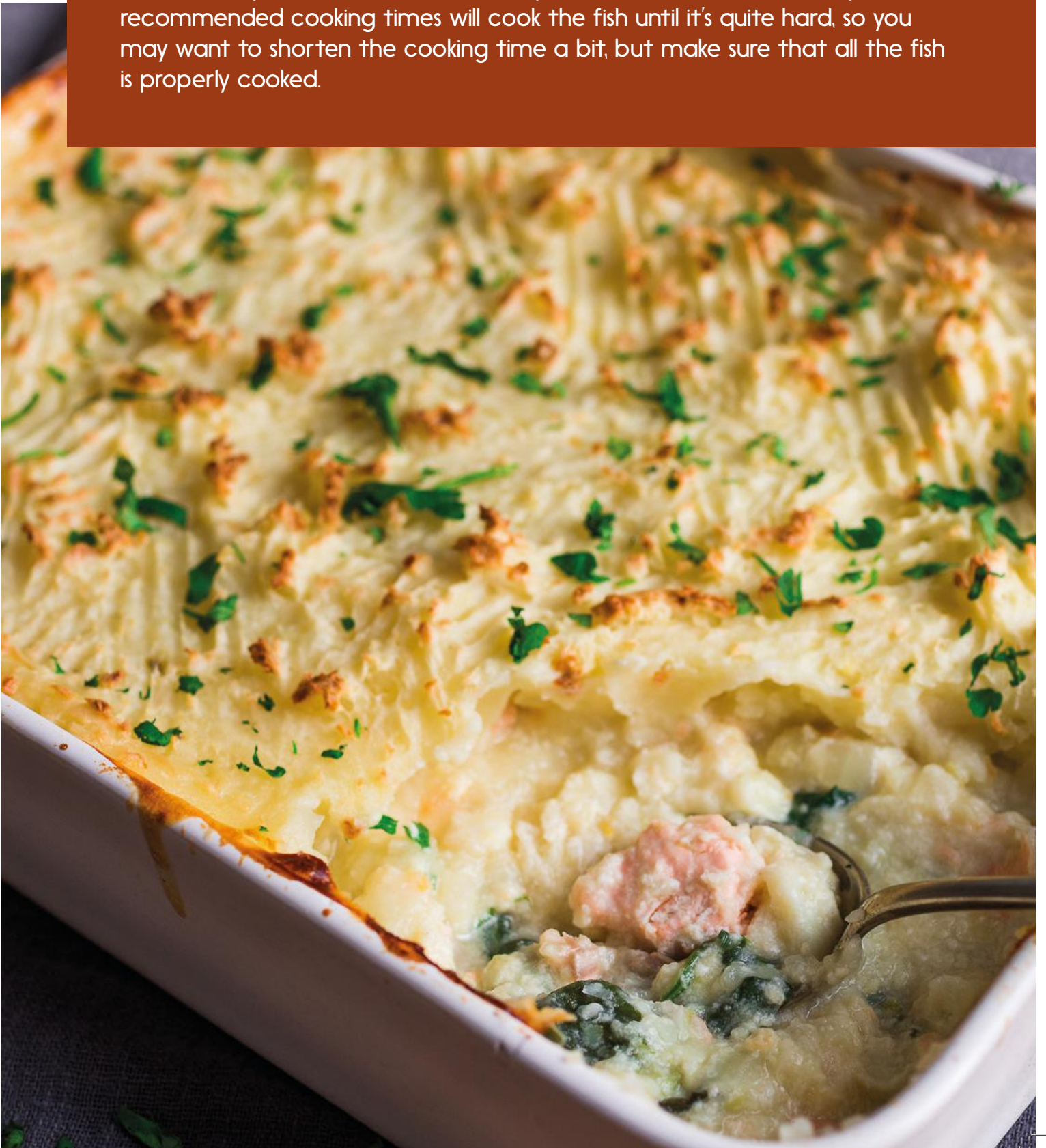
Bake in the oven at 180° for 30 mins.

Serve with rice, a baked jacket potato or a baked sweet potato.



Fish Pie

Cooked fish can be quite difficult to swallow for people who've had cancer in/around their mouth, but the creamy sauce helps. For me, the premium ready made fish pies are easier to eat than the cheaper ones. I find that Sainsburys Taste the Difference Fish Pie is very good. Prawns can get quite hard and dry when cooked; some fish pies don't include them. Many of the recommended cooking times will cook the fish until it's quite hard, so you may want to shorten the cooking time a bit, but make sure that all the fish is properly cooked.



Fish

can be surprisingly dry to eat if you have saliva problems. It may be soft, but that doesn't mean it will be moist! The easiest to eat are **plaice fillets** and **lemon sole fillets**, followed by **skate wings (also called ray wings)**, **sea bream** and **sea bass**. Cod, haddock and salmon are often very difficult to eat.

To grill: Place the fish on a sheet of aluminium foil, add a splash of cooking oil, maybe a few slices of tomato (if you can eat it), plus salt & pepper or a splash of soy sauce. Cover the foil tightly over the fish and cook under a medium grill for 4 mins. Open the foil to check if the fish is cooked, and grill for another minute or two if any of it looks uncooked. If the fish is thick you may need to turn it over but don't over-cook it, or it will get dry. This can be eaten with mashed potato and ratatouille (see recipe below).

To shallow fry: Coat your fillet with a thin batter mix or lightly sprinkle with dried herbs and lightly coat each side with seasoned flour, then shallow fry. For thin fish such as plaice or lemon sole fillets, fry for 1½ mins each side on a medium heat, then pat dry. For thicker fish fillets, cook for a little longer, but only for as long as the fish takes to just cook. This method seems to keep the fish more moist than steaming. Eat as soon as possible after cooking; as the fish cools, it hardens. The clock ticks from the moment it leaves the frying pan! Try eating with soft mashed potato (or mashed sweet potato, which is more moist) and ratatouille. Several supermarkets sell lightly floured lemon sole, which you can shallow fry as described, and are easier to eat than most fish.

Salmon

can be quite hard and dry when cooked, but here is a tasty salmon sandwich recipe.

Simmer half a salmon fillet gently for 2-3 mins until only just cooked. Allow to cool, then mash with any combination of mayonnaise, mango chutney and creamed horseradish. This will make enough for a generous filling for a sandwich. You could add some sliced cucumber for extra moisture. If a normal sandwich is too dry for you, try an open sandwich or use brioche bread, or a few TUC biscuits.

Whitebait

can be bought ready floured and seasoned, then fried and eaten whole. Because whitebait are small, they are quick to cook and it's also easy for you to give yourself a portion you can finish. To help you swallow them, try with a bowl of soup.



Raw fish

Think of this as similar to Japanese sushi. Raw fish is much easier to eat than cooked fish as it stays soft and moist, but you do need to be careful. Fish eaten raw needs to be very fresh. It's also advisable to freeze it on the day you buy it and then defrost it on the day you intend to eat it.

Check with your dietician whether they advise that it's safe for you to eat raw fish.

Salmon, trout and tuna are the easiest to eat raw. Cut a small fillet (e.g. half a salmon steak) into thin slice, like sushi, and try eating along with any of the following: avocado, coleslaw, baked beans, soup. You could also try rollmop herrings – provided that your mouth can tolerate vinegar.

Prawns

Coldwater prawns have more flavour than the farmed tropical prawns. They're easier eat when mixed with mayonnaise or avocado or added to a soup.



Ready meals

There's a wide range of ready meals available in all supermarkets. If you're not feeling up to going out to get them, you could have them delivered, and frozen ready meals are produced and delivered to your home by companies such as Wiltshire Farms and Oakhouse Foods. You can order as many or as few as you like. If freezer space is an issue, meals supplied by Parsleybox don't need to be stored in a freezer – you can store them in a cupboard.

Sausages

Sausages can be very dry to eat, especially if they are coarsely minced. Look for ones which are a smoother blend of sausage meat, and not too large. The better quality ones, with bigger chunks of meat in them, tend to be more difficult to eat. Try sausages with Bramley apples in them – they're moister. Skinless sausages are also available. Have plenty of gravy with them and try them with baked beans.

Shepherd's Pie and Cottage Pie

('Shepherds' are made with lamb, and 'Cottage' with beef). These aren't always as easy to eat as you might expect, though the gravy in the mince does help with swallowing. You may need to extra gravy. The pies vary quite a lot between supermarkets, so try different brands. The Waitrose version seems to be milder and softer than many of the others. Tesco's frozen Calorie Controlled Cottage Pie has a topping of mashed carrots, sweet potato and butternut squash, which is much easier to eat than a standard potato topping. Vegetarian versions are available, which are easier to eat if you are finding meat difficult.



Sauces, chutneys and jams

can help a lot with eating solid food. These include gravy, white or cheese sauce, lingonberry jam (available from Ikea), redcurrant jelly or mango chutney. A glass of milk or coconut water will probably make a better 'lubricant' with your meal than plain water; milk will also reduce the stinging effect in your mouth of spicy food such as curry. Avoid drinking alcohol with your meals; it will dry your mouth and also make your mouth more sensitive to any strong flavours, including spices.

Tip for gravy: Make more gravy than you think you'll need and put the extra gravy in a mug. Have the mug and a teaspoon beside your plate as you eat and you can 'top up' the food in your mouth with a teaspoon of gravy when you need to. A teaspoon should fit into your mouth nicely.

Vegetables in cheese sauce

Peel and halve an onion and cook in water on a medium heat for 10 minutes. Add chunks of potato, carrot, celery and parsnip and cook for a further 10 mins. Add stringless beans cut into 1 inch pieces, and chunks of courgette and cook for a further 10 minutes. Either buy a ready-made cheese sauce or make your own (recipe below). If you make your own, it's a good idea to make it earlier in the day as it can be quite tiring to make the sauce and cook the vegetables at the same time.



Recipe for 2 portions of cheese sauce

Use half and save the other half for another meal. It freezes well.

A large knob of butter or spread

30g plain or self raising flour

100ml milk

150g grated cheese (strong cheddar works well)

1 tsp of creamed horseradish or French mustard, if you can tolerate these

Melt the butter/spread in a medium saucepan. Add the flour and stir into the melted fat. Add a small amount of milk and continue to stir until the flour forms a soft ball. Add the rest of the milk, a small amount at a time and stirring continuously (a balloon whisk is best) until you get a thick sauce. Don't add the milk too quickly and keep stirring to make the sauce smooth. Add the cheese to the sauce, stirring all the time. Adjust the thickness of the sauce by adding more milk if necessary. When it cools, it will turn solid; don't worry, it will return to a sauce when re-heated.

Vegetables

You may well find that vegetables become your go-to food, even if they weren't before! They generally don't dry your mouth like meat often does, and are therefore generally much easier to chew and swallow. And, as everyone knows, they're very good for you!

Asparagus

Asparagus is expensive, but it makes a tasty treat. Snap off (don't cut) the thick end at the point where it 'gives' and steam for 5-10 minutes, depending on how soft you need it to be. Can also be microwaved for 90 secs on high in a little water.



Aubergine

Grilled aubergine is soft, moist and creamy if cooked right. Halve it lengthways, leaving the skin on, and place cut side down on a grill pan. Place under a medium grill. The skin will blister and burn, but this doesn't matter as it should be peeled off after grilling. Grill until the inside is soft and moist. Can be eaten hot or cold, drizzled with olive oil.

An alternative way to cook it is to bake it in the oven. Cut into thick slices, sprinkle with salt and leave for 15 mins. Wipe off the liquid the salt has produced with a paper towel and sprinkle olive oil on both sides of each aubergine slice. Season and bake for 7 mins each side at 200°C. Sprinkle the slices with grated cheese and bake for 10-15 mins.

Cabbage

The easiest cabbage to eat is the pointy cabbage. 2 large leaves will make 1 portion. Wash the leaves and slice thinly. Microwave: place in a microwave dish with a little water. Cook on full power for 90 seconds. Rest for a minute or so then microwave for a further 90 secs. Saucepan: boil in salted water for 5 minutes.



Baked beans

in tomato sauce. These go with almost anything! The sauce is a great lubricant which helps with eating other food. Sugar-free versions are widely available.

Beetroot

hot or cold. Beetroot without vinegar served hot is tasty and moist.

Brussels Sprouts

Cut in half and boil in salted water for ten minutes or until the insides are soft and moist.

Coleslaw

The premium ones are less vinegary. Avoid the thick cut ones – they are very chewy!

Courgettes

Can be microwaved (90 seconds for 1 portion), steamed or boiled. They are also tasty baked in the oven and topped with cheese:

Slice two courgettes diagonally and lay in an ovenproof dish. Drizzle with oil, season with salt and pepper and bake for 30 mins at 180°.

Remove from the oven and sprinkle grated cheese over the top and bake for a further 10-15 minutes.

Mushrooms

Cook on a medium high heat in hot butter/oil for about 2 mins until they start to brown. Turn the down to low, put a lid on the pan and simmer for 3 more mins. This will draw out the juices and make the mushrooms soft and moist. You can also add a splash of water when you put the lid on, to make the mushrooms more moist.

Potatoes

Chopping into smaller pieces than normal and boil for 10-15 mins or so until really soft. Drain off the water, add a generous knob of butter or spread and a good splash of milk, and beat until the potato becomes a soft, smooth cream. (Be careful what implement you use for this if your saucepan is non stick.) Roasted potatoes are easier to eat than chips.





Ratatouille

Chop half an onion, half a stick of celery and two mushrooms and gently fry in a little oil until they soften. Add a few chunks of chopped courgette and 2 or 3 mini tomatoes, a cupful of water, salt & pepper and half a chicken stock cube and simmer for 5 mins or so.

Make sure that you have plenty of liquid left at the end, as it will help you to eat whatever you have with it. If you need to, add a bit more water and re-heat before serving. You can also thicken it with either some chicken gravy powder or half a teaspoon of cornflour mixed into a tablespoon of cold water. A slightly thickened liquid helps with eating other food more than thin, watery liquid, so it's worth thickening. If you make a double quantity, you can save half for the next day.

Stringless beans

Chop into 1 inch pieces and put in a microwave dish with a little water. Season with a little salt. Microwave on high for 1 min 30 secs and leave to stand for a minute or two. Microwave for a further 1 min 30 sec. Leave to stand for 2-3 mins.

Sweet potato

Peel and cut into small pieces. Boil in some salted water for 15 mins. Drain, add a knob of butter and a splash of milk and whisk thoroughly until soft and smooth. Add more milk if you need it softer and more moist. Alternatively, microwave the pieces in a little water for 6 mins, rest for 2 mins and then mash or whisk with salt, pepper, a knob of butter and a splash of milk.

Sweet potato fries are delicious and more moist on the inside than potato fries. The fries will shrink a lot as they cook, so cook more than you think you will eat!

Peel a medium size sweet potato and cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch sticks.

Place in a bowl of cold water and leave for an hour, then rinse and dry off.

Thinly coat the chips in cornflour by tossing them with the flour in a large bowl.

Season with pepper, but not salt at this stage. Add 1 tap of cooking oil and mix thoroughly.

Pre-heat your oven to 220°. Line a baking tray with aluminium foil and lightly coat with oil. Lay out your chips thinly in a single layer.

Bake for 15 mins, then turn the chips over and cook for a further 10-15 mins. Remove from the oven and sprinkle with salt before serving.

Spinach

Can be microwaved or steamed in a saucepan. Soft and moist.

Tomatoes

Halve a tomato, sprinkling with a little sugar and a little salt, then grill. Alternatively, halve and bake in the oven, topped with cheese (30 mins at 180°)

Salads

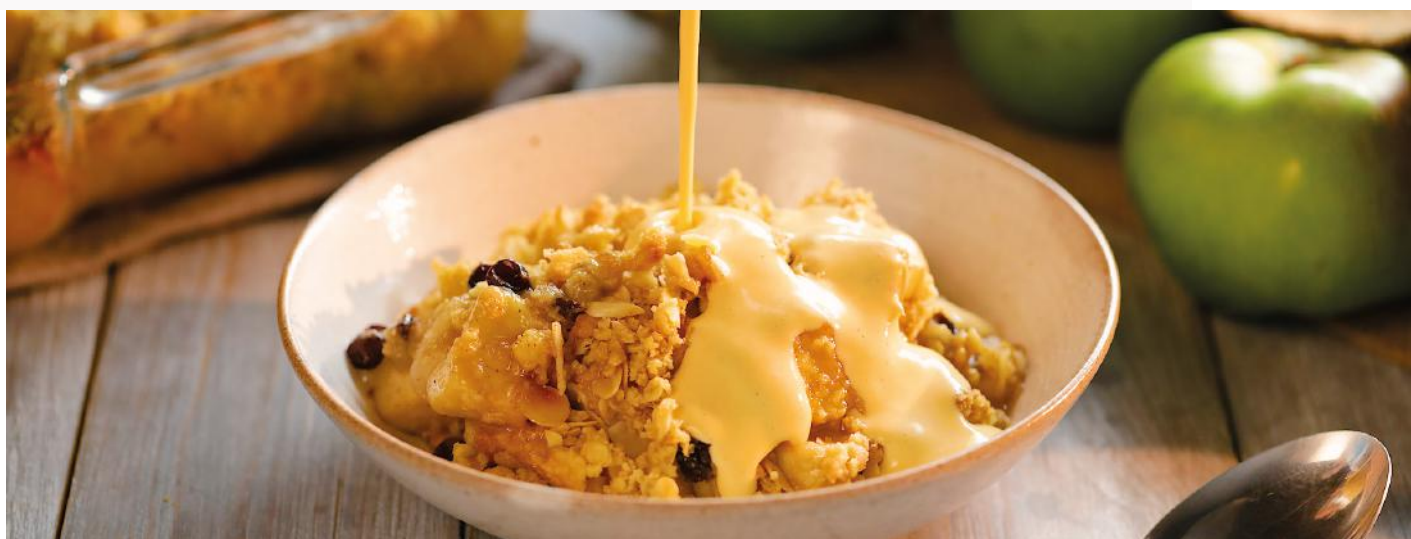
Many salad ingredients can be a real challenge to eat. These may be easier to manage:

- Beetroot (not in vinegar)
- Chicory, rather than lettuce
- Cucumber – peel and slice it
- Houmous
- Taramasalata
- Tomatoes – dip in boiling water and then the skin should peel off easily
- Tzatziki
- Pasta salad. Home-made is better as you can make it softer. Try with finely chopped spring onions and tuna, prawns, or mashed boiled eggs and mayonnaise.



Desserts

Most of these desserts go well with eat with custard, cream, crème fraiche or ice cream.



Fried bananas and custard

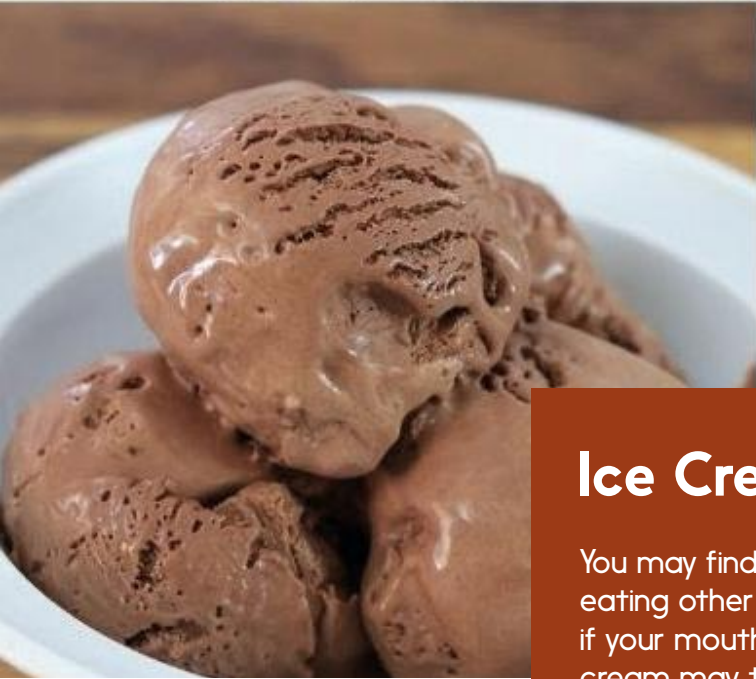
Chop a banana into 4 pieces, then cut each piece in half lengthwise. Fry the banana pieces in a little butter, spread or oil. Once browned on both sides turn the heat off and add some maple syrup to the pan to warm up. Add the banana slices to a bowl of warm custard.



Fruit fools

These are less sharp than many yoghurts, but they still use quite acidic fruits, which may be a problem for you. Two flavours which can be more manageable are gooseberry and apricot.





Ice Cream

You may find ice cream easy to eat and that it helps with eating other foods and moistens your mouth. However, if your mouth has been affected by your treatment, ice cream may taste peculiar and be difficult to swallow.

Jelly

Make with water following the instructions on the packet, or dissolve the jelly in 280ml boiling water and when cool and beginning to set add 280ml of full cream milk. This will be more nutritious.

To make a simple mousse whisk a tin of chilled evaporated milk until it thickens (it takes a long time!) and fold into a semi-set jelly made with 280ml water. You can add small pieces of soft fruit such as tinned peaches or fresh pears, but don't add pineapple or orange – they may prevent the jelly from setting.

Mousse is available in a number of different flavours, including chocolate, strawberry, caramel. Most are easy to eat because they're so moist.

Banana Loaf Cake

and custard. Banana loaf cake is a soft, moist sponge readily available in most supermarkets. Cut a 1 inch slice, lay it in a dessert bowl and surround it with custard. Microwave on medium for 1 minute and 20 seconds. Other flavours of loaf cake are available, including lemon drizzle and ginger, and they make a soft, easy to eat pudding.

Crème caramel

You can buy ready made ones, or you can make your own, which will be more nutritious. It slips down easily, and goes nicely with fruit such as raspberries.

For the caramel sauce heat 90g sugar and 3 tablespoons of water in a saucepan so that the sugar dissolves in the water. Continue to heat on high until the syrup begins to turn brown and caramelise. When it's mid brown and you can smell caramel (not too dark, or it will become bitter) turn off the heat and add 3 teaspoons of boiling water. Quickly pour into the base of an ovenproof dish and allow to cool.

For the custard:

3 large eggs

30g castor sugar

240ml milk

1 tsp vanilla essence

Beat the eggs and sugar until fully mixed and then add the milk and vanilla essence. Grease the sides of the dish and pour the custard mixture over the caramel when it has set and cooled a little (about 15 mins after pouring the caramel into the dish). Stand in a ovenproof tray of water so that the water comes halfway up the side of the dish and bake in the oven at 160°C for 50 minutes.

Allow to cool overnight. The following day place a flat plate carefully over the top of the dish and turn the dish and plate upside down so that the custard drops onto the plate and the caramel sauce runs over the top. Makes 4-5 portions.

Pineapple upside down pudding

with custard. This is available ready made but here is a recipe for you to cook your own.



For the topping:

50g softened butter or spread

50g soft brown sugar

1 tin pineapple rings in syrup, drained (save the syrup) or half a fresh pineapple, peeled, cored, and cut into slices

Beat the butter and sugar together and spread over the base of a round cake tin. Arrange the pineapple on top.

For the sponge:

100g butter or spread

1 teaspoon baking powder

2 eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla essence

100g caster sugar

100g self raising flour

Beat all of the ingredients together. Add 2 tablespoons of the pineapple syrup, or 2 tablespoons of milk, and beat to a soft consistency.

Spread over the pineapple and bake at 160°C for 40 mins. Leave to stand for 5 minutes then tip onto a plate so that the pineapple pieces are sitting on top of the sponge. Serve with custard or ice cream.

Apple crumble

Ready made or homemade. Homemade works out cheaper and will give you more fruit. This recipe makes enough for two full crumbles. Use half and freeze the rest for use at a later date. Each crumble will make 4-5 portions:

160g plain flour
40g porridge oats or desiccated coconut
130g soft brown sugar
130g cooking spread, or similar

Place all the ingredients in a large bowl and mix roughly using your fingertips. You want to achieve a rough crumbly mixture, not a smooth powder. Peel, core and chop a large Bramley apple into bit size chunks and place in an ovenproof dish together with a generous handful of sultanas, and sprinkle with 30g of granulated white sugar. Spread half of the crumble mix (230g) over the fruit and bake at 180°C for 40 mins.

Banana pancakes

Making your own batter is easy and cheap, but you can buy ready made batter. For the batter:

120g plain flour
1 egg
240ml milk
a pinch of salt
1 dessertspoonful of cooking oil

Mix all of the ingredients in a blender. Leave to stand for 30 mins. Heat a large frying pan on a medium heat with a little oil/butter or spread. Slowly pour in some of the batter and quickly tip the pan to spread the batter over the base of the pan. Don't let the pancake get too thick.

Place around 10 thin slices of banana over the pancake and press them down into the batter, taking care not to burn your fingers! Cook for 1-2 mins. Turn over carefully and cook on the other side. Eat with some runny honey or maple syrup, and custard or ice cream.



Cakes

You may not be able to eat cake for some time after your treatment, but as your mouth recovers you might be able to manage some moist cakes, with plenty of drink to wash them down. Among the easiest to manage are: cheesecake, Sainsbury's Bakewell Slices, sticky banana loaf cake, M&S Country Cake, chocolate eclairs, profiteroles and swiss roll (try M&S Strawberry Jam and Cream).

Cheesecake

It may be some time after your treatment before you can eat it, but the topping of cheesecake is quite moist, so you may be able to manage that, even if you can't eat the biscuit base. And it's high in calories which, for us, is good!

Custard

Custard helps so many things go down! Cartons of ready made custard are readily available, and most supermarkets sell a low fat version, if you are watching your fat intake. If your mouth can't tolerate much fruit, try a fruit smoothie made with custard. Simmer some fresh fruit with sugar and a little water. Then add to some custard and blend to a smoothie.



Trifle

Ready made trifles are easiest, but a homemade one is tastier! Make a raspberry or strawberry jelly according to the instructions on the packet and leave in a jug. Cut a jam swiss roll into around 8 slices. Arrange 5 in the bottom of a glass bowl. If you like, you can sprinkle a dessert spoonful of sherry on each slice.

Arrange some diced fruit – fresh or tinned – around the swiss roll slices. Put the remaining slices of cake on top and sprinkle them with sherry if you like. Add a little more chopped fruit. The total amount of fruit should be around a small cereal bowlful. Don't use fresh orange or pineapple, as they will prevent the jelly from setting.

When the jelly is just beginning to set pour it over the cake and fruit and leave to set in the fridge. Make around 700ml of fairly thick custard. If you use a carton of custard you'll need to thicken it a little by heating it up and stirring in a heaped teaspoonful of cornflour dissolved in a little cold water. When the jelly is set and the custard is cool but not set, pour the custard over the jelly and return to the fridge.

When set, decorate with whipped cream – and glace cherries, if you like!

Rice pudding or tapioca

(tinned). These have a creamy consistency which makes them easy to swallow. You either love or hate tapioca! One tin will make two 200g portions.

Individual sponge puddings

are widely available and are easy to eat with custard. They are very sweet, though; ones which include fruit tend to taste a bit less sweet.

A slice of moist **sponge cake**, such as **Jamaican ginger cake**, **Banana cake** or a **Bakewell slice**, with custard. Put a slice of the cake with custard in a bowl and microwave on medium for around 1 min.

Almond and Apple Sponge Pudding

As this recipe uses ground almonds in place of self raising flour, it's more expensive to make, but the almond sponge topping is moister to eat than a normal sponge.

Method

Cream the fat and sugar until pale and fluffy. Blend in the almonds, eggs and almond essence. Spread the apple chunks over the base of an overproof dish and sprinkle with 50g sugar. Spread the topping mixture over the apples and sprinkle a handful of flaked almonds over the top if you wish. Bake in the oven at 180°for around 45 mins or until the top is golden brown. Can be eaten hot or cold, with custard, cream or crème fraiche.

Ingredients

- 450g cooking apples, peeled and cut into chunks
- 50g castor sugar
- For the topping:
- 120g ground almonds
- 120g baking spread or margarine
- 120g castor sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon of almond essence
- Flaked almonds

Variations

Add 3 or 4 whole cloves to the apple, or a generous handful of raspberries – raspberries and apple go very well together. Use ripe (but not too soft) conference pears instead of apples.

Tiramisu

If your mouth can cope with the flavours, this is easy to eat.



Fruit

If your sense of taste has been affected by radiotherapy, you may be surprised how acidic even sweet fruits may taste for some time. This often gradually improves, so it's worth trying out different fruits from time to time to find which ones you can eat comfortably.

Apples

These are easiest to eat peeled and sliced. They can be quite sharp and fibrous, though, and it may be a long time before you can eat them. You may find stewed cooking apples easier to manage first.



Cooking apples (Bramley)

Peel and chop a medium sized Bramley apple into large chunks. Add 200ml water and 30gm granulated sugar (more if you need it) and simmer gently for around 10 mins, or until they are soft. You could add 2 or 3 cloves, a handful of sultanas or a few chopped dates when you cook them. Serve with custard, cream or ice cream.

Bananas

(either eaten as it is or sliced and with custard). They are also tasty when cooked – see section on Desserts.

Blueberries

You will probably find these too acidic for a long time if you've had radiotherapy, but you may eventually be able to enjoy them again, so don't give up. For some people this can take a few years – not a few weeks! Try blending a handful of blueberries in a smoothie.



Grapes

Grapes can taste surprisingly acidic – even when they taste sweet to someone else. A way to outwit your taste buds can be to eat them straight after eating some cheese – a soft blue cheese such as St.Augur or Cambazola works well for this. The skins are much more difficult to eat than the flesh so, if you are a patient person, you could try peeling a few!

Oranges

You will probably find these too acidic for a long time if you've had radiotherapy, but you may eventually be able to enjoy them again, so don't give up. For some people this can take a few years – not a few weeks!

Mangoes

Ripen on a sunny windowsill for about a week, or speed up the ripening by putting it in your airing cupboard for a few days. The skin should begin to wrinkle and the flesh should feel slightly soft when it's ready to eat.

Papaya

Ripen small ones as for mango; they are not 'ripe and ready to eat' when sold! Look out for halved, ripe large papaya in ethnic shops; they are often ripe, and very tasty.

Melon

Ripen as for mangoes.

Pears

Wait until they're really ripe. Eat them raw or gently simmer with a little sugar and water and then eat with custard, cream or ice cream. Tinned pears are quite hard, so it's better to buy fresh ones and to wait for them to ripen.



An 'Early Stage' Daily Meal Plan

In the early stages of your recovery, eating is probably a very slow and exhausting process. Even soup may take you a very long time to drink. Don't worry - that isn't unusual.

Try dividing your meals into several small ones rather than a few larger ones. Start with small portion sizes which you can manage.

Having a drink of milk or coconut water with your meal may also help; these are a more effective lubricant than a glass of water.

Breakfast	Porridge smoothie or rice pudding or tapioca
Mid morning	eggnog
Lunch	soup followed by Complan
Mid afternoon	a nutrition drink such as Aymes or Fortisip
Early evening	soup with a small portion of a soft savoury side dish followed by an eggnog
Mid evening	a soft, moist dessert with custard followed by fresh fruit (try pear, mango or very ripe melon to start with)

A 'Transition Stage' Daily Meal Plan

Breakfast

porridge smoothie with figs, or rice
pudding or tapioca or a breakfast cereal

followed by eggnog, or bread and honey
with mashed banana

Lunch

soup with a savoury dish, or a very moist
savoury dish by itself

followed by Complan

followed by a banana or a fruit fool

Evening meal

a 'main' savoury main dish

followed by a dessert

followed by fresh fruit



Eating Out

Eating out can be very daunting if your sense of taste and ability to eat have been significantly affected by your treatment. It helps if your family and friends understand this and don't make you feel worse by inviting you out for a meal when you can't manage it. It may be a good idea to discuss this with them in advance, so that they understand what you currently can and can't eat and drink, and how long it may take you to eat a meal.

Most cafes and restaurants publish their menus online. It's a good idea to check them in advance, if you can, to see what on their menu you feel you may be able to eat – even if it's just soup.

Most restaurants seem to be sympathetic to customers with a specific difficulty in eating when it's explained to them. If you feel comfortable about doing it, you could explain to your server that you have a medical difficulty in swallowing food (or even that you're recovering from cancer) and that you would appreciate their help in working out what food on their menu may be suitable for you. Most restaurants will be happy to provide extra sauce/gravy/custard etc. if you ask. Often, explaining why you need it will get the server on your side!

If eating is difficult for you, or you can only manage a small amount of food if you eat out, you could take with you a banana, a bottled nutrition drink or a thermos flask of soup, and 'top up' with that after you have left the café or restaurant.

Here are some ideas and suggestions for different types of restaurant:



Chinese

Quite a lot of Chinese dishes can be manageable, including Dim Sum, noodles in thick sauce with seafood, soups, spring rolls filled with vegetables, steamed fish. Rice is often difficult to eat, but is a bit easier if eaten in a soup of with thick sauce.

European

If you're having a starter, you could order soup and ask for it to be served at the same time as your main course, to help you eat the main course. Meat cooked rare will be less difficult to eat than medium or well cooked. Vegetarian options are often more manageable. Don't feel bad about explaining that you have some difficulty with eating and asking for extra gravy/sauce/custard. Staff are usually happy to oblige..

Greek

Moussaka, meatballs in sauce.

Indian

Many head and neck patients find spicy food difficult to tolerate. Avoid drinking any alcohol with your meal – even beer; it will increase the burning effect of the chillies in your mouth! A glass of milk or a bowl of yoghurt taken with a curry will reduce the burning effect in your mouth. Dhal based dishes will probably be easier to eat than meat or chicken dishes. If you've chosen a meat curry, ask for plenty of sauce (and explain why!).

Italian

Pasta in various sauces is often manageable. Vegetable based dishes may be easier to manage than meat or fish. Thin crust pizza is easier to manage than thick crust; make sure you have plenty of soft, moist topping, and remember that meat (including chicken) will probably make it more difficult to swallow, so consider a vegetarian option. Ask for extra sauce if needed.

Japanese

Several types of Japanese food may be possible, including a wide range of noodle soups, sushi, tempura prawns and vegetables. A beer or soft drink works well with Japanese food.

Thai

Thai food is known for its spiciness, but not all Thai food is spicy. Try noodle soup with sen mee (glass noodles), which are easier to eat than rice noodles. You could have vegetables and fish or meat balls in it, as Thai meat balls are smaller, softer and smoother than Western meat balls. Be careful not to order tom yum, which is a very spicy Thai soup! Rad Na is a noodle dish (try 'sen yai' – flat ribbon noodles) with vegetables and seafood in thick sauce. If you long for a Thai curry, try Massaman curry, which is milder than other Thai curries, and very tasty. Drinking milk, or iced Thai tea with milk, with your meal will reduce the sting of chilli in your mouth.

Practical Meal Planning

for Patients recovering
from Head and Neck Cancer

in collaboration with



Compiled by Andrew Gaylor with additional information supplied
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