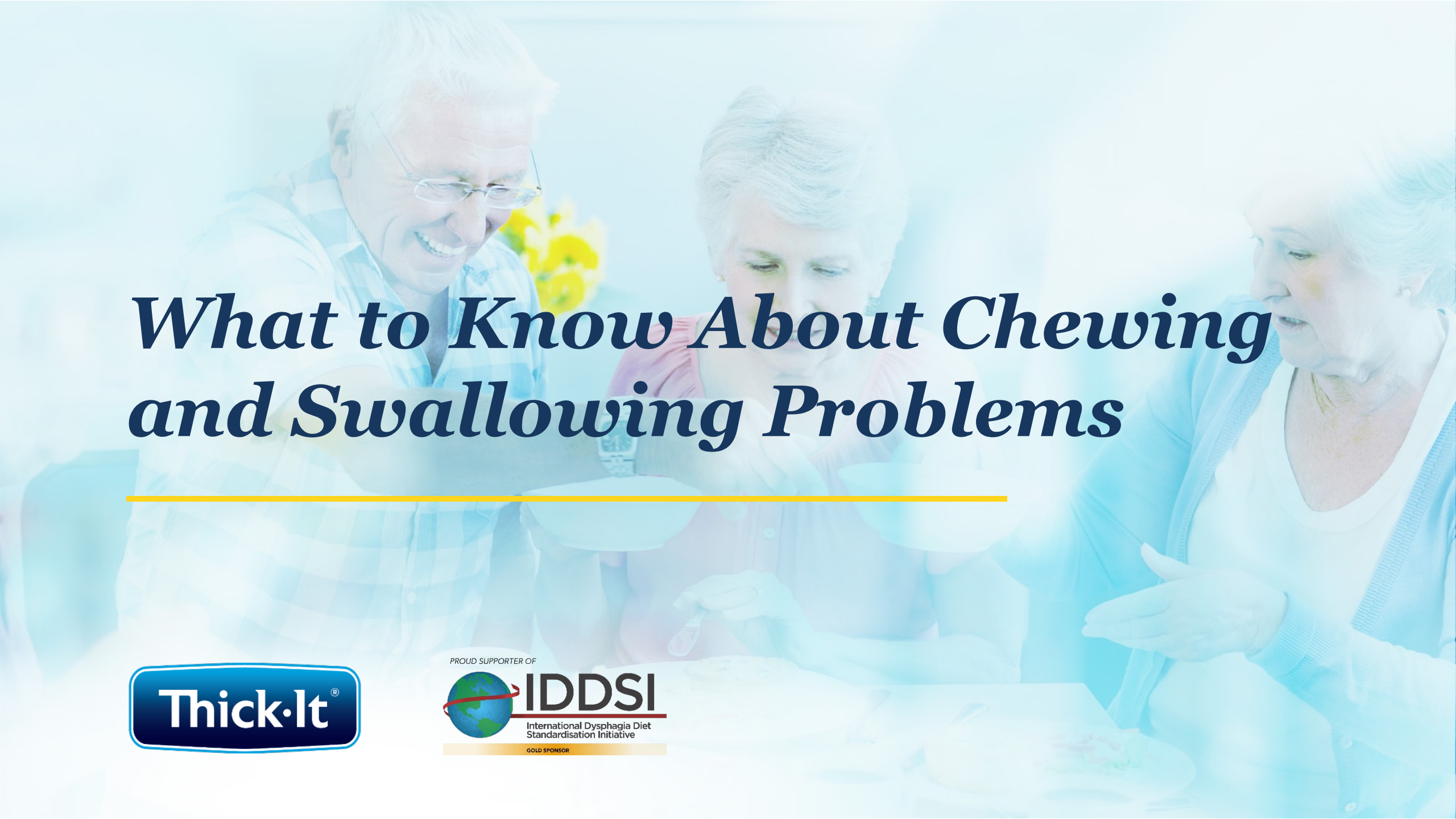

What to Know About Chewing and Swallowing Problems

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PROUD SUPPORTER OF

IDDSI

International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative

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Introduction

What is dysphagia?

- Swallowing is a complex task that requires the brain to coordinate more than 50 pairs of muscles to prepare the food in the mouth and then propel it through the throat and into the stomach.
- Difficulty chewing and swallowing food or drink is called dysphagia and can be a serious problem.

Why its important?

- Not only can dysphagia hinder quality of life, but it can also increase the chance of choking or aspiration (breathing in particles of food or drink into the lungs). Dysphagia can also lead to malnutrition and dehydration since those with dysphagia tend to eat and drink less. Dysphagia should be reported to your doctor because there are some treatments that can help.

For more information on dysphagia and its causes, see the Thick-It® brand's blog: Understanding the Causes of Dysphagia.

Source: "Dysphagia." National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, March 6, 2017. https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/dysphagia#:~:text=Swallowing%20is%20a%20complex%20process,making%20it%20ready%20for%20swallowing.

Ueshima J, Momosaki R, ShimizPtsu A, et al. Nutritional Assessment in Adult Patients with Dysphagia: A Scoping Review. Nutrients. 2021;13(3):778. Published 2021 Feb 27. doi:10.3390/nu13030778 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7997289/ [Accessed January 11, 2023].

Dysphagia

Common Symptoms of Dysphagia

Swallowing problems can be mild to severe. Signs and symptoms of dysphagia may include:

- Pain when swallowing
- Food or liquid leaking from the mouth or getting stuck in the mouth
- Choking when eating
- Coughing during or right after eating
- Wet- or gurgle-sounding voice during or after eating or drinking
- Sensation of food getting stuck in the throat or chest, or behind the breastbone
- Bringing food back up (regurgitation)
- Recurring pneumonia or chest congestion after eating
- Unintentional weight loss.
- Reduced enjoyment of eating or drinking

Reference: Azer, S, Kshirsagar, R. Dysphagia. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2022 Jan-. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559174/ [Accessed January 11, 2023].

Building Your Expert Team

Physician

If you or a loved one is experiencing swallowing difficulties, the first step is to make an appointment with your doctor. They will be able to evaluate your symptoms and give you a recommendation on the next steps. If your doctor deems it appropriate, they will provide you with a doctor's order for a speech-language pathologist (SLP).

Speech Language Pathology (SLP)

The speech-language pathologist is a trained dysphagia expert and will provide an individualized plan to address chewing and swallowing problems. The SLP may provide swallowing rehabilitation strategies and will recommend modifications in the texture of food and drinks when appropriate. To learn more about how an SLP can help, see Introducing the SLP: An Essential Role in Managing Dysphagia.

Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN)

The dietitian is a nutrition expert who will assess the unique nutritional needs of the individual with dysphagia and provide a comprehensive plan of care. The dietitian will offer guidance on which foods to eat and liquids to drink to maintain proper nutrition and hydration, along with how to modify them to the appropriate texture.

Features of a Dysphagia Diet

1. Many people with dysphagia must modify their diet to specific food textures and drink thicknesses to make it safer and easier to swallow.

2. The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI), of which the Thick-It® brand is a gold sponsor, is an evidence-based framework that provides standard language and definitions to describe texture modified foods and thickened liquids.

3. The IDDSI framework consists of eight levels (0-7), where drinks are measured from Levels 0-4 (Thin to Extremely Thick) and foods are measured from Levels 3-7 (Liquidized to Regular).

4. The goal of a texture modified diet is to provide a safe, nutrient-rich mealtime experience for patients using foods and drinks that are easy to swallow, look appealing, and taste good.

5. Because every person with dysphagia has specific needs, texture modified diets should be individualized. A physician will prescribe which IDDSI levels of food and drink texture is most appropriate and safe for them.

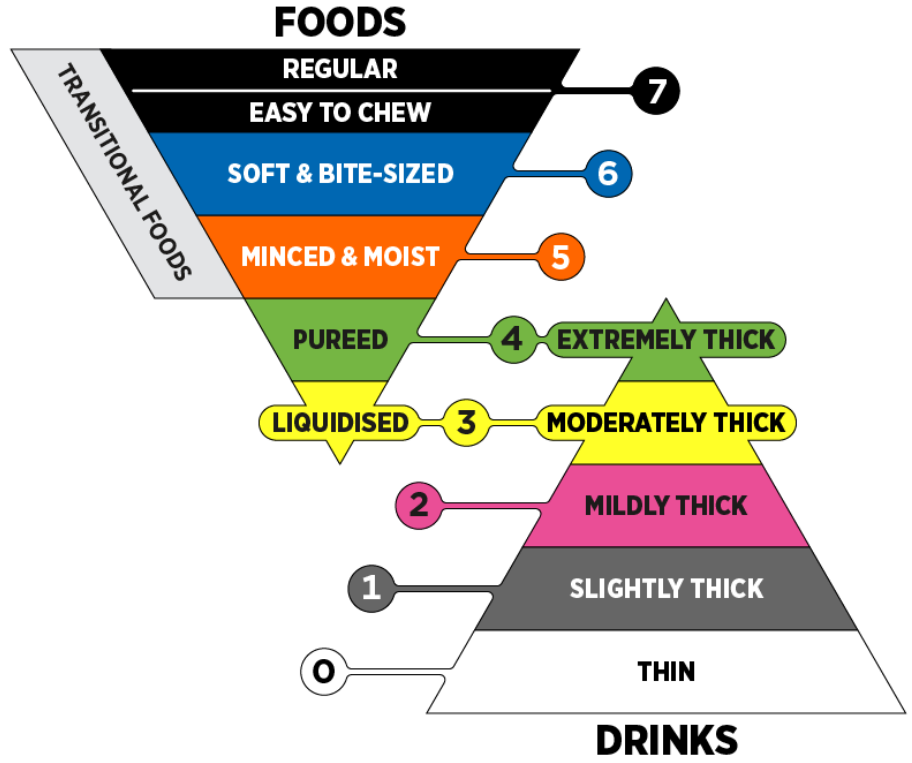
Understanding IDDSI

Understanding IDDSI

For an overview of IDDSI, download the Understanding IDDSI Guide from the Thick-It® brand of dysphagia nutrition solutions.

The guide introduces the eight IDDSI levels with details on how each level applies to people with varying degrees of swallowing or chewing difficulty. You'll also find instructions on the IDDSI Testing Methods for identifying a food or drink's IDDSI level.

IDDSI resources and information are available at http://www.iddsi.org/



© The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative 2019 @ https://iddsi.org/framework/ Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Sharealike 4.0 License https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode. Derivative works extending beyond language translation are NOT PERMITTED.

Nutrition, Hydration and Dining

Maintaining Proper Nutrition and Hydration

1. Prepare meals that look and taste appealing to increase consumption and prevent malnutrition.
2. Serve meals that have a balance of items from different food groups to ensure that nutritional needs are being met.
3. Do not skip foods, like meat, that are hard to chew/swallow yet provide important nutrition. Instead, modify these foods to the appropriate safe texture.
4. Use the Thick-It® brand's free recipe library for flavorful and nutritious IDDSI-compliant recipes created by the Thick-It® brand and a team of registered dietitians.
5. Offer meals when the person with dysphagia is most alert and attentive. Some might eat better if they are given smaller dishes throughout the day, which can be less daunting than three large meals.
6. Obtain an adequate amount of fluids from a combination of water, other beverages, and food to prevent dehydration.

Reference: Ueshima J, Momosaki R, ShimizPtsu A, et al. Nutritional Assessment in Adult Patients with Dysphagia: A Scoping Review. Nutrients. 2021;13(3):778. Published 2021 Feb 27. doi:10.3390/nu13030778 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7997289/ [Accessed January 11, 2023].

Steps to Take for Safe and Pleasant Dining

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Mealtime can be stressful for both people with swallowing difficulties (dysphagia) and their caregivers. Follow these steps to promote a safe and pleasant meal experience.

BEFORE THE MEAL

- Create a calm and inviting eating environment
- Come to the meal well rested
- Prepare the meal according to prescribed levels for food and drink textures

DURING THE MEAL

- Sit upright in a sturdy chair with feet comfortably on the floor. If eating in bed is necessary, sit up in an elevated position.
- If feeding assistance is required, care provider should be seated and not stand above.
- Encourage pleasant socialization
- Eat slowly

AFTER THE MEAL

- Record the amount of food and drink consumed to monitor nutrition and hydration
- Sit upright for at least 30 minutes
- Offer variety of snacks and beverages at the appropriate texture throughout the day to maintain nutrition and hydration

Download the free Thick-It® Brand Guide to Safer Swallowing for tips for before, during, and after meals.

Other Considerations

Other Considerations

For persons with dysphagia, oral care holds great importance.

A clean mouth can have a tremendous impact on health outcomes for persons with dysphagia.

Because saliva is a thin liquid, it is important to recognize that it can be easily aspirated (this is the term we use when material enters the windpipe or trachea, allowing it a direct pathway to the lungs).

All people, even those without swallowing problems, aspirate small amounts of saliva every day. However, if a person has plaque and food particles stuck between their teeth, this material can mix with saliva and enter the airway.

In cases where a person has an impaired immune system, this can lead to a lung infection. But with a clean mouth, plaque and food particles will not be present to mix with saliva that may enter the airway.

Adequate oral care can be the difference between preventing pneumonia and being hospitalized with a lung infection.

For details on when mouth care is important for those with dysphagia, as well as tips for maximizing your mouth care, see:

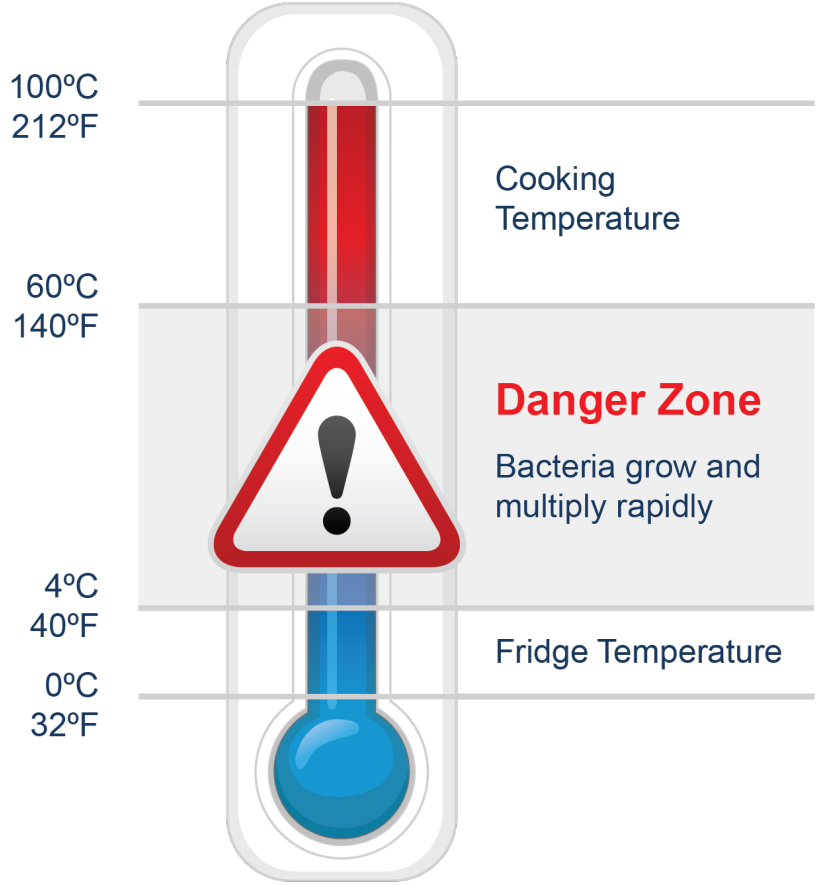
The Undeniable Importance of Oral Hygiene for Those with Dysphagia

Other Considerations

Food Safety - Keeping foods safe from food borne illnesses

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an estimated 48 million people get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die from consuming contaminated food every year. Fortunately, proper food hygiene and preparation can prevent almost all foodborne illnesses

For more information, read Food Safety Tips to Prevent Foodborne Illness.



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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Handwashing: A Healthy Habit in the Kitchen. Published July 18, 2022. CDC. https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/handwashing-kitchen.html [Accessed August 19, 2022]

Other Considerations

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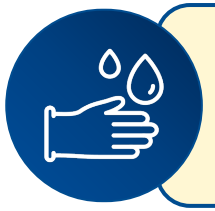
Food Safety - Keeping foods safe from food borne illnesses

Here are some important tips:



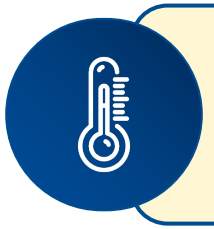
Wash your hands using soap and warm water for 20 seconds before beginning food preparation, and between preparation steps.

Keep preparation surfaces clean using hot soapy water.

Use clean and sanitized tools such as food processors, knives and cutting boards.

Avoid cross-contamination. To prevent germs from spreading from one food to another, keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs away from other foods. These should remain separate from all ready-to-eat foods in storage. Make sure to use a separate cutting board when preparing raw foods.

Cook foods properly. Check your final cook temperature of your foods with a food-safe thermometer by checking the center-most, thickest part of the food.



Reheat foods to 165ºF after modifying the consistency to kill pathogens.

US Department of Health & Human Services, Food & Drug Administration. Food Code. Published 2017. https://www.fda.gov/media/110822/download [Accessed October 14, 2022].
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Handwashing: A Healthy Habit in the Kitchen. Published July 18, 2022. CDC. https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/handwashing-kitchen.html [Accessed August 19, 2022]

Where to Find Support

Your Healthcare Team

Always seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have about a medical condition, treatment, or the use of Thick-It® products. The information contained herein is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment in any manner.

Thick-It.com

Education is central to the Thick-It® brand's mission. Those with dysphagia and caregivers can find additional resources and learn more about our products specifically developed for people with dysphagia at ThickIt.com.

Thank You

We're proud to provide a variety of resources to help you confidently manage dysphagia. Visit our website to learn more.

ThickIt.com

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Disclaimer: These are NOT official IDDSI resources, educational materials or education programs. They are NOT meant to replace materials and resources on www.IDDSI.org. For the most current information and resources, please refer to www.IDDSI.org