Esophageal Stent Diet:

Are there any foods I should avoid?

The stent has been placed to allow you to eat as normally as possible. However, it is possible for the stent to become blocked. The most common reason for stents to block is from food that is swallowed without being sufficiently chewed or from foods that do not break down enough when chewed.

The following foods can be difficult to break down, despite chewing, and so are more likely to cause your stent to become blocked:

- Bread and toast
- Tough gristly meat
- Hard boiled or fried egg
- Fish with bones
- Pithy fruit (e.g., orange, grapefruit, pineapple)
- Stringy vegetables (e.g., green beans, celery)
- Potato skins
- Salad items (e.g., salad leaves and lettuce)
- Raw vegetables
- Chips
- Ice cream or yogurt with chunks of fruit, cereal or nuts

To minimize the risk of blocking the stent, it is important to think about the foods that you are eating. Some foods, when chewed well, will be easier to swallow than others. For example, bread sticks will crumble when chewed but bread will form a sticky lump.

How can I prevent blocking the tent?

- Take your time, relax and eat your meals slowly.
- Meals should be smaller than you are used to and more frequent – aim for five or six small meals rather than three big meals.
- Cut your food into smaller pieces than you would normally eat, take small mouthfuls and chew each mouthful thoroughly.
- Don't be afraid to spit out lumps that can't be chewed.
- Have plenty of sauces, gravy or cream with your meals. It will make your food moist, therefore easier to swallow and pass through your stent.
- Take frequent drinks during and after each meal to help keep your stent clear. Warm or carbonated beverages are recommended, but all fluids are beneficial. For some people, carbonation may worsen symptoms of heartburn or acid reflux.
- Sit upright at meal times and for one to two hours afterwards.
- If you wear dentures, make sure they fit correctly, so you can chew your food well.
- Ask your healthcare team about pills that are hard to swallow.
  - Ask if any of your pills are available in liquid form.
  - Ask your pharmacist if crushing your pills is an option, as some pills may become less effective when crushed.
  - Pills that can be crushed can be added to applesauce or other soft foods.

What if my stent blocks?

If you feel that your stent is blocked follow these basic guidelines:

- Do not panic. The blockage only affects the tube into your stomach, and it will not affect your ability to breathe.
- Stop eating, stand up and take a few sips of a drink.
- If that does not resolve the problem, try a warm or carbonated beverage.
- Walk around.

If the stent blockage has not cleared after one or two hours contact your doctor or nurse.

What can I do if I don't feel hungry?

If you have a poor appetite or have lost some weight, try the following:

- Eat small amounts often, including snacks.
- Choose full cream milk and full fat foods instead of low fat products.
- Add sugar to cereals, puddings and beverages.
- Grated cheese, cream, sour cream, or cream cheese can be added to mashed potatoes, soups and sauces.
- Fortify milk by adding 2-4 tablespoons dried milk powder to 1 pint of milk. Use this for beverages, soups, puddings and sauces.
- Try a protein drink or make your own fruit smoothie or milkshake using ice cream, yogurt and fortified milk.
- If you are lactose intolerant, drink nutritional fruit beverages such as Boost™ Breeze, Ensure Clear™ or NUTRA/Shake™ Fruit Plus Free. To add calories, blend in lactose-free sherbets, sorbets or popsicles.

If you are unable to maintain your weight, a registered dietitian can offer more specific advice and support or recommend some high calorie nutritious recipes or products. If you have not yet met a dietitian, a referral can be made by your doctor or nurse.

Acid Reflux

This may be a problem, particularly if your stent needs to be placed across the opening between the esophagus and stomach. An antacid medication may be helpful (consult your doctor regarding which one). Try not to sleep too flat. Prop yourself up to a 30-45º angle. Try using pillows or a bed wedge. Both can be placed between the mattress and box spring to raise the head of your bed. If you continue to experience problems, contact your healthcare team.

Pain

As the stent expands it can cause some pain in the chest area, which normally subsides after 72 hours. Painkillers should be helpful. However, if the pain persists contact your healthcare team.

Persistent Swallowing Problems

If your ability to swallow does not improve despite following the advice in this booklet, it may be because the stent is not in the correct position or has moved. Contact your healthcare team for advice. You should also seek advice if swallowing food and beverages causes you to cough, or if you experience any breathing difficulties, if you are losing too much weight or become dehydrated.

Meal suggestions

Below are some suggestions of suitable foods and meal ideas for once you have progressed to stage 3 of your diet. This list is intended as a guide, and you may include other food items that you can chew well enough to swallow easily with your stent. Remember to chew all foods well and eat small and frequent meals and snacks.

Breakfast

- Pancakes/waffles softened with butter and syrup
- Oatmeal, or other hot cereal made with whole milk and sugar, honey, or maple syrup
- Soft fruit, for example ripe banana, apple or other fruit sauce or stewed pears
- Thick and creamy yogurt
- Fruit juice
- Scrambled or poached eggs
- Cereal (e.g., Rice or Cocoa Krispies™ or Cheerios™)

Dinner

- Macaroni and cheese
- Tender or ground meat in gravy, for example shepard's pie, corned beef hash, chicken stew
- Boneless fish with butter, tartar sauce or mayonnaise
- Tender or ground meat or vegetable curry with rice
- Buttered noodles
- Shredded or ground turkey or roast beef served with mashed potato with added butter, cream or cheese
- Soft, well cooked vegetables, such as carrots, peas or spinach
- Spaghetti with ground meat sauce

- If you have trouble maintaining your weight:
  - Drink nutritional supplements or homemade milk shakes as snacks / meal replacements.
  - Try adding ice cream, sherbets, sorbets to ready-made supplements such as Nutra-shakes™, Ensure™ or Boost™. If it is too sweet, dilute with whole milk or evaporated milk.
  - If you have pills to take, consider taking them with calorie-containing beverages instead of water.

  - For more ideas, speak to your healthcare team.

Additional Resources

University of Virginia Health Center Medicine Nutrition Support Team www.ginutrition.virginia.edu

Ohio State University Medical Center
https://patienteducation.osumc.edu (search for "high calorie diet"), 614.293.3191

Esophageal Cancer Awareness Association (ECAA)
http://www.ecaware.org/
800.601.0613

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