

Puréed Foods: A Guide to Quick Meals¹

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Puréed foods may be necessary for certain individuals with chewing or swallowing problems. These problems may be short-term dental issues that make it difficult to chew or long-term conditions that cause swallowing problems known as dysphagia. A puréed food is any food item that has been processed into a smooth and uniform texture and, therefore, does not require chewing. For introductory information on puréed foods, see <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fs168>.

Purées can be made from most foods. Although some purées may be challenging to prepare, it is possible to quickly prepare puréed foods that are both appealing and nutrient-dense. The purpose of this guide is to provide some tips for fast and easy-to-prepare puréed foods.

Canned foods are ideal for puréeing because canning is a heat-intensive process that softens most foods. Canned foods are convenient—no cooking time is required—and economical—they may cost less than fresh and frozen foods. Most nutrients are preserved with canning, and canned foods are “food safe” if handled appropriately after opening. However, some canned foods may be high in sodium due to added salt. Instead, choose those labeled *low sodium* or that have *no added salt*. Also, some canned foods, such as fruit, contain added sugars because they are packed in syrup. Fruits packed in water, fruit juice, or light syrup are better choices.

Canned Vegetables and Fruits

Most canned vegetables are ideal for puréeing. Examples include asparagus, beets, carrots, green beans, peas, spinach, and rutabaga. Certain canned vegetables, such as corn, are difficult to purée to a smooth consistency and thus may not be appropriate for some individuals with dysphagia. With some canned vegetables, such as green peas and green beans, there may be a loss in color with canning. Puréed vegetable blends, such as peas and carrots, may result in an unacceptable color, and the individual flavors may be hard to identify. However, some blends, such as three-bean salad, make tasty and acceptable purées.

Applesauce is a commonly consumed puréed fruit and is available in many flavored varieties, such as cinnamon, blueberry, strawberry, and mango (Figure 1). Other canned fruits are easily puréed. Canned fruits recommended for puréeing include apricots, peaches, pears, and fruit cocktail. Note that some canned fruits have skins that may pose problems for puréeing to a smooth consistency.



Figure 1. Mango applesauce.
Credits: Lincoln Zotarelli, Horticultural Science Department

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Beans, Peas, and Lentils

Canned beans, peas, and lentils, also known as pulses, are ideal for the preparation of puréed foods. Some common canned pulses include black beans, black-eyed peas, kidney beans, pinto beans, fava beans, chickpeas (garbanzo beans), cannellini beans, butter beans, pink beans, and green and red lentils. They are considered a protein food. There are seasoned varieties, such as baked beans or seasoned black beans, that can be puréed, heated, and served (Figure 2). Most other pulses are bland and need added spices and flavors to achieve acceptable purées. See below for a menu example that includes puréed beans.



Figure 2. Puréed canned seasoned black beans.
Credits: Jamila Lepore, Hillsborough County Extension

Mixed Dishes

Many canned foods are combinations of pasta, meats or poultry, and vegetables. These canned foods are easily puréed for quick lunches and dinners. Examples include canned pasta, stews, and bean/meat combinations. Although these foods contribute important nutrients such as protein and fiber, many are high in sodium. Most canned pasta and stews contain 700 to 1000 mg of sodium per 1-cup serving—very high levels given that recommendations are to consume less than 2300 mg of sodium daily (USDHHS and USDA 2020). Unfortunately, few lower sodium versions of canned mixed dishes are currently available.

Preparation of Purées from Canned Foods

Directions for preparing purées from canned fruits, vegetables, and beans:

1. Note the number of servings indicated on the label of the can.

2. Drain the liquid and reserve if some is needed if the purée is too thick.
3. Purée using a food processor until a smooth texture is achieved.
4. Test the consistency with the spoon test. See <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fs204>

For more information on the preparation of puréed foods, see <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fs205>

Planning Well-Balanced and Quick Puréed Meals

A puréed diet follows a similar meal pattern as a regular diet. It is recommended that meals be based on USDA MyPlate guidelines (USDA n.d.). The goal is to include grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy, and a protein food with most meals. See <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fs207>. Adding foods that are normally served as purées to a meal helps to ensure the acceptability of the puréed diet in terms of taste and texture. Examples include smooth yogurt, pudding, mashed potatoes, refried beans, pumpkin, and smooth cream soups. A pâté is a tasty alternative to puréed meat that requires no special preparation, just garnish and serve (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Liver pâté with mustard.
Credits: Lincoln Zotarelli, Horticultural Science Department

Remember to include grains into the puréed menu. As puréed grains are difficult to prepare, consider having a shelf-stable, commercial mix on hand to prepare puréed sandwiches and other grain-based foods (Figure 4). A food processor can be used to grind breakfast cereals. The cereal powder can then be combined with milk to prepare puréed cold breakfast cereal.



Figure 4. Puréed bread with cheese sauce.

Credits: Lincoln Zotarelli, Horticultural Science Department

Layered Puréed Taco

½ cup corn grits (purée consistency)

¼ cup puréed refried beans

¼ cup puréed avocado

2 tablespoons creamy cheese sauce

¼ cup puréed salsa (thickened with tomato paste if needed)

Directions: Prepare each ingredient separately and layer.

References

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). n.d.

“Choose MyPlate.” Accessed January 22, 2020. <http://www.choosemyplate.gov>

U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at [DietaryGuidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov).

Table 1. Puréed meal plans incorporating puréed canned and convenience foods.

Day 1	
Breakfast	Cream of wheat prepared with milk Puréed fruit cocktail Cappuccino flavored yogurt
Lunch	Layered puréed taco Vanilla pudding
Snack	Cinnamon apple sauce
Dinner	Puréed canned chicken Instant mashed potato with gravy Puréed creamed spinach Cheesecake pudding with cherry sauce
Snack	Puréed canned salmon and cream cheese sandwich*
Day 2	
Breakfast	Puréed bran flakes with milk Puréed canned peaches French vanilla yogurt
Lunch	Puréed ham and cheese sandwich Cream of tomato soup prepared with milk and powdered crackers Crustless pumpkin pie with whipped cream
Snack	Puréed pears with caramel sauce
Dinner	Puréed spicy beef ravioli Chocolate mousse with raspberry jelly
Snack	Puréed peanut butter and jelly sandwich*
*Quick tip: An easy way of preparing puréed sandwiches is to use a shelf-stable, commercial puréed bread mix.	