

SPECIAL DIET INTRODUCTION

What is a “special” diet?

A ‘special diet’ may require the reduction or complete exclusion of certain foods or an increase in the amount of certain foods/ingredients in the daily diet. Special diets can be loosely grouped into five categories as shown in the diagram below.



Categories of “special” diets

- **Therapeutic Diets**

Prescribed as part of the treatment for a medical condition. These diets can be followed for short periods of time or long term. Examples include the diabetic diet, gluten-free diet and the renal diet.

- **Modified Consistency Diets**

Prescribed for individuals with dysphagia (difficulty in swallowing) or who have problems with their mouth (e.g. denture issues, sore mouth) and require texture modified foods. These diets can be followed for short periods of time or long term. The four modified consistency diets include the ‘Thin Purée Dysphagia Diet’ (Texture B), the ‘Thick Purée Dysphagia Diet’ (Texture C), the ‘Pre-mashed Dysphagia Diet’ (Texture D) and the ‘Fork Mashable Dysphagia Diet’ (Texture E).

- **Test and Investigation Diets**

Generally prescribed for specific tests, not necessarily nutritionally adequate thus should only be followed for a short period of time. An example of a ‘test diet’ would be an elimination diet where a certain food may be eliminated from the diet in order to investigate and diagnose a suspected allergy or intolerance.

- **Religious and Cultural Diets**

Dietary patterns that are followed for religious or cultural reasons. These diets are generally followed for life. Examples include the Halal, Kosher or Afro-Caribbean diet.

- **Personal Diets**

Having a particular dietary pattern or excluding specific foods due to personal reasons. This may be excluding food (s) due to a simple dislike to them or for a personal reason such as those who are vegetarian due to animal rights.

- **What is the responsibility of the catering team?**

Before an individual is placed on a ‘special diet’ they should be seen by a Registered Dietitian (RD). If it is thought that a patient may have swallowing difficulties, they will need to be seen by the Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) who will assess their swallow and recommend an appropriate diet for them. Sometimes the medical team may suggest a special diet for a patient.

The catering team should be informed once a patient has been put on a special diet and if they have any queries they should contact the RD or the SALT before the individual receives special meals. The RD or SALT should give an indication to the catering team of how long the patient will be on the special diet for and communicate any changes to them.