



The Ps and Ss of Dysphagia Cooking & Eating

By Yvonne McClaren

For home-based dysphagia eating, to make the process easier to undertake, easier to maintain and easier to provide motivation and stimulation.

There are two courses of action that can be applied when eating for dysphagia. These can be overlaid atop the IDDSI framework.

One is the four P's - the other the four S's.

Purchasing, preparation, presentation, and practice
Stock, sauce, soup, and smoothies

In my experience, you need to master the first of the four P's, then the four S's and then the last two P's.

This criteria framework can work as a template for the IDDSI framework and provide some context for bewildered people without food or nutrition knowledge.

For home cooks, clients & carers who are trying to eat, prepare food for transition back to real food orally, understanding these P and S processes can provide structure for a daunting task.

Transitioning back to oral eating and building a semblance of "normal" eating is difficult, participating in societal eating, socialising and travel can all prove to be distressing and impractical. I found that understanding and applying the P & S process gave me a mental and physical framework I could apply to not only my general day to day life but also helped with food decision requirements in different settings & environments.

Purchasing.

As a carer, family member, friend or patient cooking for dysphagia is bespoke. I advocate 'patients' stay connected to and with food. That can be through participating in purchasing, that is, physically where possible, going to fresh food markets, grocery stores and viewing, touching, and smelling produce. Eating is a sensory experience and being part of the process is important in your journey back to eating in whatever shape or form that looks like for you.

It can seem counter intuitive, cruel even, but in my experience, it provides motivation to try, practice and experiment. It's too easy to give up, it is too easy to say and think this is my lot and not break out of your comfort zone. By physically presenting yourself at the source it intuitively tunes your mind to think about food and how you might manipulate it to be able to consume it.

Which brings me to ...

Preparation.

People with the syndrome should participate in the preparation of their food. Notwithstanding nausea, even the simple act of chopping fresh basil, cutting up an onion, peeling a carrot or potato keeps you connected to your food. It also provides a much-needed sense of control when all around you are making decisions on your behalf. Never underestimate the power of having control over what feeds your body. It provides a "purpose" to those with dysphagia.

I used my garden to grow herbs and 'greens' for smoothies. Just after cancer treatment is the 'dark' time and being in the garden, in the sunlight, fresh air and soil tilling helped the healing process.



There is another P too - planning. Menu planning, and I found that if I planned a week in advance the meals I might have, it made the purchasing process much easier. It also meant I was not throwing away meals/food (although that happened a lot in the beginning until I worked out what I could swallow easily and what was not right for me)

Make it easy and simple - know what you can handle and for me it was a smoothie for breakfast, soup (with a transition food) for lunch & then a meal with a sauce for dinner. How do you know what you can handle? Experimentation, try, fail, and try again.

Stock, sauce, soup, and smoothies.

The four culinary S's as I call them are and should be at their simplest level how you will live your life. Forever, the immediate future or somewhere in between. They are how you will eat, ingest, and heal.

I can't over emphasise how making your own four "S's" items from scratch at home is so important for calories, nutrients and palatability.

If you learn the basic cooking processes to make stock and soup you are halfway there.

Stock is very underrated I find in this day and age of takeaway and premade foods. A good stock whether made from bones (fish, chicken, beef) or just plant based (vegetable stock) will go a long way to providing not only a quality nutrient dense liquid, but also will provide a flavour profile to all that you use it in. Like a perfume or wine making, there is an art in layering flavours.

Stock can be drunk , sipped , spooned like soup. Often when you are feeling sick or tired it is the antidote. As they say chicken soup for the soul.

Sauces of course and there are five French mother sauces, can also be made using your stock.

If you can manage to make each of the 5 mother sauces, you have expanded your food repertoire exponentially.

They are :

1. Tomato
2. Bechamel
3. Espagnole
4. Velouté
5. Hollandaise

I tend to use tomato, bechamel and the occasional espagnole. I consume hollandaise when eating out. I can make it, but for general everyday living I keep it simple and tomato and béchamel are my main sauces for daily eating.

Soups.

There is nothing not to love about soup. Soup can be thick, thin, smooth, crunchy, hot, cold bland, full of flavour. It's an excellent way to start transition food. It is an excellent accompaniment to thicker food items like quiche, slices, savoury tarts etc. I was told to sip water with food, my preference is to sip soup.

Smoothies are liquid gold. That liquid can be as thick or thin as you like. It is the one meal I know that will not cause anxiety or stress. I have perfected my smoothie for my requirements, that has taken many months but I also pack most of my daily nutrients into it. I do that for breakfast in case I cannot eat for some time, or I do not or will not have access to food. Eating socially is challenging. A smoothie can bridge the gap, they are mostly accessible when out in public.

Presentation.

If you make it look like slop guess what? You will not want to eat it. If you must have an IDDSI level 1-4 then for home purposes put it in a beautiful bowl. Use a special spoon and make it an occasion every time you eat. It is habit forming and you will not feel so isolated. Invest in special crockery / cutlery / material napkin. Make the crockery small, special and make it yours.

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Effort in presentation will pay off in the long run. It is also about attitude and mind set. Make it special and make mealtimes a pleasant experience and not just a time to 'have to ' eat.

Practice.

If there is one thing I have learnt, you must practice eating. All sorts of things don't just take someone else word for it. Try it for yourself. Also try foods you are warned against eating too, I do not just take someone else's word for it, it might be quite different for you.

