

## *The System of Cooking for Dysphagia*

### Calling All Caregivers: A Good Meal is Always on Hand

By Diane Wolff



You are busy. A loved one with a swallowing disorder depends on you. You want the best for the loved one. You don't want to be chained to the kitchen. Here is how to put a meal on the table without cooking all day, every day.

The best tool for the dysphagia kitchen is organization. Using ideas gained from my research into professional kitchens and chef training in facility kitchens, I offer *The System* for transforming your kitchen into a dysphagia kitchen.

## The System of Cooking for Dysphagia Uses Batch Cooking

**Batch Cooking means a once-a-week cooking schedule.**

**This is labor-saving:** You cook once and the loved one eats five times.

- For your cooking day, choose the least busy day of the week.
- Create the menu by asking the loved one for their favorite meals.
- Shop.
- Cook: Make the meals.
- Thicken and test according to [IDDSI.org](http://IDDSI.org) (The [IDDSI Framework](#) & [Testing Methods](#))
- Label and Store in individual servings.
- One serving is served on the day of cooking. One serving goes in the fridge for service within 48 hours. The extra servings go in the freezer.

**Pro Tip: See webinar on testing methods, including thickening, for each IDDSI Level:**

**[Webinar ~ IDDSI IDDSI Food Prep by SimplyThick®](#)**

- **Foods:** IDDSI uses easy tools for testing and modifying foods for all IDDSI Levels. These tools are in your kitchen (e.g., spoon, fork, fingers, chopsticks).
  - The [Simply Thick® Cutting Board for IDDSI Training can be purchased here](#). The cutting board has many testing reminders and makes it simple to chop and mince properly sized food for IDDSI Levels 5 and 6.
- **Liquids:** You can find a 10ml syringe from healthcare facility or purchase the [IDDSI Funnel](#)

## Keep Track

Keep track of meals-on-hand on a whiteboard placed on the freezer door. I use two whiteboards: one for entrees and sides, one for carbs and desserts.

When you know what you have on hand, you always know what you need to cook on your next cooking day.

One cooking day every week is enough to stock the freezer and keep it stocked. This transforms the life of the caregiver.

## The 5-5-5 Meal Prep:

5-5-5 means that in a single cooking session, you make five servings of protein, or five servings of protein plus five carbohydrates or veggies.

Or make five servings of a favorite recipe, such as chili, regular or vegan.

The cooked items are thickened and/or modified to the loved one's IDDSI level, then stored in individual servings.

Use oven and freezer-safe glass containers with lids or silicone zip bags. (The bags lie flat and save storage space. Silicone zip bags replace plastic zip bags.)

Freezer servings are ready to reheat. They do not require cooking.

**For reheating, food may be steamed on the stovetop or in a steaming appliance. Food may also be reheated by boiling method. (See instructions below).**

# Transformation of your Kitchen to a Dysphagia Kitchen

## This is The System:

A balanced delicious meal is always on hand.

**With extra meals stored in the freezer,** a backup caregiver, family member, or professional caregiver, such as a CNA, can reheat the meal and serve it.

*Note: Often professional caregivers, such as CNAs, who come from agencies, are not allowed to do cooking. They may do light cooking, such as reheating and serving.*

**This takes the pressure off the principal caregiver.**

You are out of the kitchen in a flash, with easy cleanup.

## ***MEAL PREP***

Let's break this all down into details.

**First, decide on the menu item. Then shop.**

- Shop the day before. Buy enough for five 4-ounce servings of protein.
- Buy the carb or have a supply on hand in the pantry: whole grains, such as brown rice, basmati rice, quinoa, lentils, buckwheat, and farro are excellent.
- I suggest Bob's Red Mill Organic Potato Flakes for tasty instant mashed potatoes.
- Buy veggies, fresh and frozen.

Remember **The Five-Five-Five Solution**. 5-5-5 means that in a single cooking session, you make five servings of protein, or five servings of protein plus five carbohydrates or veggies.

**Next, get ready for the cooking day: have ingredients and equipment ready.**

Let's talk about essential equipment.

### **Key Tool for the Kitchen = The Steamer**

Why a Steamer?

- The cooking technique of steaming preserves nutrients.
- Steamed protein is moist and tender.
- The steamed texture is perfect for blending to a smooth Pureed, Level 4 texture.

I used standard kitchen equipment for years when cooking for my mother. A stockpot with a colander inside was my stovetop steamer.

Then I discovered **good steaming appliances** are reasonably priced and available in department stores, discount stores and online.

If you are going to use an appliance multiple times per week to prepare great-tasting food, it is worth the investment. Here are some examples:

- Stainless steel multi-tiered steamers for the stovetop
  - Stainless steel is preferable to bamboo, because stainless steel may be washed in soapy water.
  - Bamboo is an organic material and may breed bacteria.
- The Instant Pot has a steam setting.
- Multicookers have steaming inserts.
- A wok, either stovetop or electric, often has a stainless-steel steaming insert.
- Some electric steamers have multiple chambers for steaming several different items at the same time. These have separate timers.

A visit to a *brick and mortar store* will help you determine the price, size, features and capacity that are right for your kitchen.

## **Cook the Protein:**

- Steam five servings of chicken or fish.
- Allow to cool.
- You have the option of pureeing all the servings in one favorite sauce or different sauces.
  - This is why one has a well-stocked pantry. You have the sauce you need.
- **Puree the protein with sauce.**
- Use sauce and/or thickened broth to thicken to the necessary IDDSI level.

After cooking, use [Testing Methods](#) to make sure you have the correct IDDSI level.

## **Suggestions for a Cooking Schedule:**

Schedule a cooking day, ideally your least busy day. Choose a different protein every time. That way, you stock a variety of meals in the freezer.

Cooking tips depending on the protein:

- Fish and chicken: Steaming is best.
- Beef or pork: use an electric pressure cooker or a slow cooker. (See recipes in *Cooking for Dysphagia*.)
  - A tenderloin of pork in the slow cooker, cooked in mild or homemade BBQ sauce or teriyaki sauce is easy. (Soy Voh brand is recommended).
- Shellfish such as clams or mussels: use the steamer. Serve with a thickened garlic parsley seafood broth.
- For vegetarians and vegans:
  - Lentils and quinoa are high in protein.
  - Steam cabbage, spring onion, carrot, bell pepper until tender. Add tofu for the protein, steaming tofu for the last 5 minutes.

Puree until smooth. Run through a mesh sieve and thicken, as needed.

Test with the [IDDSI Spoon Tilt Test, making sure the puree is smooth & moist](#).

Use thickened IDDSI Level 4, Extremely Thick vegetable stock if you are not using a sauce.

**Pro Tip:** For an excellent video showing how to create Extremely Thick stock, go to the [Simply Thick YouTube Channel](#).

## **For The Veggies & Carbohydrates:**

Create five servings, each in a zip bag for the freezer.

Use sauce thickened to a IDDSI Liquidised, Level 3.

### **Steaming method for vegetables:**

- Steam until tender according to steaming tables for the appliance or online.
- Run through a sieve to eliminate seeds, skins and fibers.

- Add to blender or food processor.
- Puree vegetables, adding a thickened sauce, like lemon butter thickened to IDDSI Level 3, adding 1 ounce of sauce to 4 ounces of veggies. (Thickened stock may also be used.)
- Label and freeze in silicone zip bags.

### **Warning on Rice & Congee:**

A pot of brown basmati rice made in a pressure cooker *may* have a good texture for your loved one. You need to make sure it is not dry and crumbly particles. It should be soft, moist, and cohesive without liquid separating from it (making a mixed consistency or dual texture in the mouth). It will need a thick sauce to make it safer.

Often white rice porridge, also known as *congee*, has been a staple comfort food for those who are sick and/or elderly across Asia. **However, be careful** with the texture of this congee! It may increase risks for choking and aspiration, due to its high variability and potential mixed consistency/dual textures (i.e., part liquid – part granulated texture). See this article titled: [Rice Porridge Around the World](#) from the Asian reference group, Chan et al., 2021 Special Features of the IDDSI International Reference Group: See article linked here too:

<https://www.iddsi.org/news/rice-porridge-around-the-world>

### **Mashed Potatoes, Squash or Turnip: Shortcuts**

Product options:

- Bob’s Red Mill Potato Flakes, Organic, made according to package directions are flavorful.
- Bird’s Eye Southland Brand Pureed Butternut Squash or Pureed White Turnip are free of additives and microwaveable.

## ***MORE COOKING OPTIONS***

### **Steaming A Parcel: Veggies & Fish or Chicken**

The *parcel* uses **parchment paper**.

- Create a packet out of parchment paper to steam veggies to fish or chicken.
- Add carrot, zucchini and red pepper matchsticks on top of the fish or chicken. (Other options: asparagus tips, small pieces of cauliflower, or broccoli florets).
- Add a squeeze of lemon or lime. Fine sea salt and white pepper to taste.
- Also possible: A small drizzle of olive oil mixed with a small squeeze of garlic paste.
- Close the packet by folding the edges.
- Lift the packet into the steamer.
- Steam until tender, from five minutes for asparagus to eight minutes for cauliflower.

Puree and Test with the [IDDSI Spoon Tilt Test, making sure the puree is smooth & moist.](#)

Serve. Or Store, Label, Mark on the board.

## **Sous-Vide Method:**

Sous-Vide means **Immersion Cooking**. This is another way to cook in the dysphagia kitchen:

- Place fish or chicken in a silicone zip bag with the air forced out.
- Immerse in a water bath.
- Set the temperature and the timer.
- Let it cook.
- Proceed with food labeling and storage, as with The System.

Veggies may be cooked in the same way.

## **Don't Forget the Sauce!**

*The secret of the dysphagia kitchen:*

*The sauce is the medium of flavor.*

Change the sauces for variety. If you have five sauces, you have five dishes.

See IDDSI's frequently asked question on sauces/gravies [here](#). They are an essential ingredient to make easy to swallow foods that slide through the mouth and throat better!

Sauce ideas for single servings of veggies:

- Broccoli tastes delicious with a sprinkle of olive oil, a sprinkle of lemon juice, and a shower of finely grated parmesan cheese that will melt.
- Asparagus may be seasoned the same way.
- Carrots are delicious pureed with butter, veggie broth and ginger juice or ginger paste from the produce section.

## ***ARE YOU READY TO EAT?***

### **Create Individual Servings:**

- Store servings in glass containers with lids or silicone zip bags.
- Mark the Date with Date Created and Use By Date
- **Freeze extra servings.**
- **Mark them on the whiteboard.**

### **Mix and Match Meals for Ease & Choice**

- The Mix and Match system offers variety.
- I suggest a shelf in the freezer that contains proteins, carbs and veggies.
- The person with the swallow disorder picks and chooses the combinations according to what they're in the mood for.
  - This gives the person with this swallow disorder **control** over the menu.

- Sometimes a person is just not in the mood for an entree such as pot roast. They may not be hungry enough for a full meal. They might want a lighter meal. They may want a different veggie.
- To add to this variety and for a complete list of sauces to stock your pantry, see the handouts: *The Well-Stocked Pantry & The Master Sauce Guide*.

### For Reheating:

The components of the meal may be heated from a frozen or thawed state. You have options:

- Thaw for two hours in the fridge. OR
- Steam frozen item for 20-30 minutes, to an internal temperature of 165°F. OR
- Steam thawed item for 10 to 15 minutes to an internal temperature of 165°F.

Place in serving dishes, preferably those with bright colors and interesting shapes, to appeal to the eye. **You now have a meal without cooking.**

You did a lot of testing as you were cooking, but testing the food and drinks *at the time of serving* them is also important.

### More on Testing from IDDSI & USIRG:

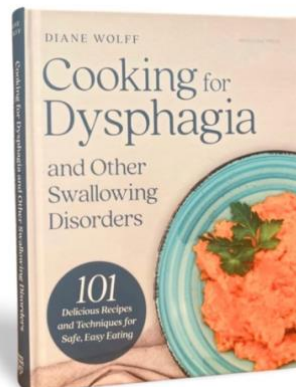
Please see IDDSI’s extensive documentation on all the [Testing Methods](#) (click [here for English](#) version). The [United States IDDSI Reference Group](#) has created quick and easy 101 and 201 trainings on IDDSI and these IDDSI Testing Methods for caregivers:

IDDSI 101 for Food Service Workers & Caregivers (intro to IDDSI by USIRG)	YouTube video: <a href="https://youtu.be/9tRoJ31Mz30?si=vqLowet9uIHziEC6">https://youtu.be/9tRoJ31Mz30?si=vqLowet9uIHziEC6</a>
IDDSI 201 for Food Service Workers & Caregivers (Testing Methods by USIRG)	YouTube video: <a href="https://youtu.be/7C0lZOhMULw?si=s12Cf11KV1nPtNw">https://youtu.be/7C0lZOhMULw?si=s12Cf11KV1nPtNw</a>
Here is that SimplyThick video again: Webinar ~ IDDSI Food Prep by SimplyThick®	YouTube video: <a href="https://youtu.be/szow6iKO37c?si=zOqxGvC5KKAYtly2">https://youtu.be/szow6iKO37c?si=zOqxGvC5KKAYtly2</a>

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<https://mcpres.mavoclinic.org/product/cooking-for-dysphagia-and-other-swallowing-disorders/>



# **Your Notes:**