# Clear Liquid Diet

Following a clear liquid diet? Not sure where to start?

April 11, 2019 By Danielle Penick

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No cancer journey is the same despite many of the parallels in cancer treatments and procedures. Some may not need surgery or radiation and some may not need chemo. However, most cancer survivors at some point will be instructed to follow a clear liquid diet—often before or after a procedure or surgery. This diet can also be prescribed by your doctor if you are experiencing nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or other gastrointestinal issues. If this diet is ordered before a medical procedure then you will want to make sure to follow the guidelines strictly, as your results may come back inaccurate or you may have to reschedule your appointment.

The diet seems simple enough, but there can be some confusion about what this really translates to. A clear liquid is what it sounds like, a liquid that is transparent (can see through it when held up to the light). If something forms into a transparent liquid when at body or room temperature, it is also qualifies. Clear liquids are easy to digest and do not leave any residues in your gastrointestinal tract. If you can't see through it then it isn't considered a clear liquid. Milk, for example, is not see-through and is not part of this diet.

Typically the goal for following a clear liquid diet short term is to help you stay hydrated and to provide essential electrolytes. It also helps your doctor better see things they might be looking for with a colonoscopy for example, or to help your medical care team assess for tolerance of food and readiness for diet advancement. If you are throwing up all of your clear liquids after a surgery for example, then your team knows that your body is not yet ready for other sources of food at this time.

So here's a rundown of what to plan for in the event you lost your handout your doctor gave you or forgot what your registered dietitian told you. Caveat being, you should always follow what your medical care team recommends as this list could vary from what they would like you to do. Always call the office or clinic if you aren't sure to get clarification.

*Clear Liquids*

- Juice (filtered without pulp or seeds)
- Water (sparkling, standard, or flavored)
- Tea (with no cream or milk or milk substitute, but can be sweetened)

- Coffee (with no cream or milk or milk substitute, but can be sweetened)
- Broth (strained, clear, and fat free)
- Ensure Clear or Boost Breeze nutrition supplements
- Sports drinks like Gatorade or Powerade
- Soda
- Honey
- Sugar or liquid sugar
- Lemonade (no pulp)
- Powdered drink mixes like Crystal Lite or Kool-Aid

*Clear liquids with texture*

- Popsicles (with no seeds, pulp, or chunks of fruit, or milk—should melt into a clear liquid)
- Jell-O (this melts into a liquid)
- Italian ice (with no seeds or chunks of fruit)
- Sorbet (with no seeds, chunks of fruit, or milk)
- Ice or ice chips

*Factors to consider*

A clear liquid diet is only meant to be followed temporarily, unless receiving other nutrition support such as tube feedings or TPN (IV nutrition), as this diet cannot provide you with adequate nutrition alone. There are limited sources for clear liquids and they are typically inadequate in fat and protein, and mostly only provide carbohydrates. Carbs are good for providing us with energy, but the carbs we get from clear liquids are simple carbohydrates. This means that they are devoid of fiber, don’t make us feel full, and can increase blood sugar in diabetics. Broth is the exception as it is often low in carbs and a more savory option. If you are diabetic, you should speak with your doctor about what is appropriate for you. Spreading out your liquids throughout the day, consuming some diet or sugar-free beverages, or adjusting your medications may be warranted. You may need to monitor your blood sugars more closely as well.

Try about 3-5 types of clear liquids with each meal to stay adequately hydrated and drink water though out your day (especially when thirsty). Nutrition supplement drinks like Boost Breeze or Ensure Clear can help to provide your body with added vitamins that the drinks are fortified with. As mentioned above, be sure to follow the instructions as laid out by your team. For example, many physicians do not want you to consume any clear liquids that are red prior to some procedures as they can give misleading test results. The goal of this diet is to help limit strain on

your digestive system and to help your doctors see inside your stomach or intestines clearly if needed.

If you are on a clear liquid diet for more than a few days, it’s best to make sure that your medical team is aware and see what next step might be appropriate for you. In most cases your next step will be to advance to a full liquid diet, pureed diet, or soft diet. More on these diets in the future posts to come.

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