

The 5-5-5 Solution

The technique of Batch Cooking is the signature approach of Cooking for Dysphagia.

Batch Cooking means making more than one serving at a time.

The cooked recipe is modified to the prescribed IDDSI Level (4 to 6), then frozen in individual portions.

To reheat and serve the meal, the backup caregiver simply steams the meal for 15 to 20 minutes, to an internal temperature of 165° F.

The meal is fork and spoon tested for the prescribed IDDSI level. Then the meal is served.

Easy. Simple. Delicious.

My cookbook is dedicated to the prevention of caregiver burnout.

I wrote the book that I wish I had when my mother was diagnosed.

Using my system, a backup caregiver, whether a professional CNA or a family member or friend, can reheat and serve a meal. No cooking is required.

The primary caregiver gets the night off.

As my mother's primary caregiver for 7 years, I know from experience how important this is.

Transforming Your Kitchen

Creating the 5-5-5:

The 5-5-5 solution is an original interpretation of Batch Cooking that I created for The System.

The home cook makes five servings of protein, five servings of carbs and five servings of several vegetables.

These are the Mix and Match components. They are stored in silicone zip bags in the freezer, they lie flat and do not take up a lot of freezer space. They can be eaten in any combination, depending on the mood and the appetite of the person with the swallow disorder.

The 5-5-5 System is flexible. It offers choice. One simply asks the person with the swallow disorder, "What are you in the mood to eat tonight?"

Of course, any entree in "Cooking For Dysphagia" can be batch cooked. But sometimes one is

not in the mood for a full meal. One wants something different.

There is nothing quite like the 5-5-5 Solution. It's a special adaptation.

Equipment:

The tools you need to modify the texture for IDDSI levels 5 and 6 are available on the Simply Thick website and on Amazon. These include mats and funnels, a fork and a spoon. Two chapters in the Cooking for Dysphagia book and the free webinar of the National Foundation of Swallowing Disorder explain how to implement IDDSI in the home healthcare environment.

I've posted a slideshow for standard kitchen equipment and appliances on the page devoted to the 5-5-5 Solution Class.

For protein, I add a quarter to a half a cup of sauce to 4 to 6 ounces of protein. The protein serving size depends on the appetite.

The carb is seasoned. The veggies have a light sauce.

All are stored in silicone zip bags or vacuum-sealed bags.

Other items needed:

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Post-it notes and a sharpie for labeling.

A whiteboard or two for the front of the freezer, to keep track of what's created and what's consumed.

Soupercubes are excellent for small amounts of gravy, sauce and stock. These small amounts should not go to waste after you've spent time shopping and cooking to create them. A few tablespoons are fabulous for flavoring soups and stews and other dishes.

Making and Storing the 5-5-5.

Steam six servings of your favorite protein.

Or cook the protein by any other method that is best for the dysphagia kitchen: Steaming, stir frying, slow cooking, stewing, and a light light grill low and slow so there is no charring to affect the safe swallow.

The Sauce is the Medium of Flavor:

With five different sauces, the five proteins become five different meals.

Or, if the loved one with the swallow disorder is a creature of habit, use the same sauce for all five servings.

Perhaps the person likes barbecue, mild curry, red sauce for pasta, pesto, a faux Alfredo that is light, without the cream and eggs..Finally, an Asian style sauce with soy sauce, garlic and ginger.

Make the protein. Modify the texture to the prescribed IDDSI Level. Use different sauces or the same sauce.

Perform the fork and spoon test to ensure the safe swallow.

Divide the dish into individual silicone sip bags or vacuum-sealed bags..

Label with the date created and the use by date. Use by date is 30 days in the freezer.

(For complete details on implementing your level of IDDSI, complete with charts and illustrations, see the Sheffler chapter in 'Cooking for Dysphagia.")

Stored in zip bags, food takes up less space. It is also visible to the eye.

You make five vegetables and store them in silicone zip bags. These are labeled by the date created and the use by date. For a cup of steamed broccoli, or steamed zucchini, use a teaspoon of lemon juice and a teaspoon of grated Parmesan cheese. More vegetable servings are listed in "Cooking for Dysphagia."

You make five carbs--quinoa, farro, buckwheat, millet, and lentils and beans.

The possibilities also include properly prepared rice.

(I suggest cooking rice in a pressure cooker for 45 minutes to create a congee.

This is a rice porridge that has been used for centuries in Asia to feed the elderly and infants.

I use white or brown basmati rice. The prep must avoid stickiness, which is problematic for the safe swallow. See Karen Scheffler chapter in "Cooking for Dysphagia."

Carbs are stored in silicone zip bags.

These are labeled and dated with the date created and the use by date.

You have created the five proteins. The five carbs. The five veggies with different sauces.

Mark the whiteboard. Items created. Items consumed. You always know what you have on hand.

That is the 5-5-5.

The Well-stocked Pantry:

The sauce can be homemade or store-bought.

Stored in the pantry or in the refrigerator or freezer.

Freshly made or frozen in small amounts in a soupercube, such as leftover extra sauce from a stew or a braise.

Using thickened stock in place of sauce is a great way to flavor food.

If your favorite soup is chicken soup, thicken a protein with chicken stock.

If you are on a plant-based diet, you will like onions, carrots and celery flavoring vegetable stock. This is the perfect place to add the four tablespoons of pureed spinach, the half cup of garbanzo beans, the half cup of broccoli that were stored in small Soupercubes rather than being thrown out.

Click here to see the Simply Thick video for [thickened stock](#).

The Beauty of Mix and Match

The loved one with the swallow disorder can pick and choose menu items.

The person can have a protein and a vegetable on the night when they are not very hungry and do not want to eat a full entree.

They can eat two vegetables and a carb on a night when they're not in the mood for protein.

You do not want the person with the swallow disorder to lose interest in food or lose appetite.

My colleague, Heidi Pines, a licensed clinical social worker who worked in geriatric long-term care at Aetna Insurance for 20 years, said the single most constant complaint that she heard from seniors at every type of healthcare facility, from the budget to the luxury level, was about boring tasteless food.

The 5-5-5 means an end to patient boredom.

The nation as a whole has become more aware of the importance of senior nutrition since Covid. The new attitude of healthcare professionals toward senior patients is called dignity in dining. It's called patient-centered care.

The IDDSI Framework Is global and applies to every cuisine in the world. Consult the massive amount of material online at [IDDSI.org](https://www.iddsi.org) for material on specific cuisines.

REHEATING THE MEAL:

So the meals are created. How does the primary caregiver get a night off?

The backup caregiver reheats the meal in a steamer, either stove top or electric.

The steaming time is 15 to 20 minutes.

After steaming, the caregiver tests the internal temperature with an instant-read thermometer. The food must reach a temperature of 165°F. (180°F for breakfast).

The backup caregiver performs a simple test with a fork and spoon test, to make sure the sickness conforms to the prescribed IDDSI level. This is for the safety of the swallow.

The meal is then served.

I like to pay special attention to the beautiful plate. Food should look like food.

Please see the Andrew Cullum chapter on piping. He is famous for training chefs in healthcare facilities to create beautiful plates. He likes food to look like food. In "Cooking for Dysphagia," He tells how to snip the corner off the silicone zip bag and use the bag to pipe shapes on the plate.

Since we eat with our eyes, the presentation of food makes a difference.

Flavor and variety improve the mood. My good friend, the practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine, says that atmosphere is part of the meal. One ingests the food but one also ingests the atmosphere. That too is part of the meal.

The 5-5-5 supplies the flavor and variety. You supply the atmosphere.

This may be as simple as a favorite red rose brought in from the garden or smelling a bunch of basil. Showing the vegetables before they are cooked. The smell of the cooking wafting through the house.

Why Is the sauce so important?

This is a matter of food chemistry. I interviewed a brilliant young food chemist, with whom I did a webinar on the holiday meal for the National Foundation of Swallow Disorders.

When you puree a protein, you increase the surface area by a factor of thousands. You cannot put enough spices in a puree to make it taste good without affecting the safety of the swallow.

Use a sauce and the diner tastes the liquid. That is the secret of the sauce.

One more innovation:

In the book *Cooking for Dysphagia*, I explain the creation of the parcel. This is a way of making

a dish by wrapping a four-ounce serving of protein in parchment paper with a tablespoon of sauce. One can use a vegetable peeler and peel thin strips of veggies to add on top of the protein. The parcel is steamed for five minutes. The protein and veggies are cooked. The parcel is opened and the contents are texture modified to the IDDSI Level. This is a terrific way to make one meal on request. The parchment paper is laid out in a circle and the edges are crimped shut. The stem is retained in the parcel. This is easy and fast. Perfect for a night when the caregiver is too tired to cook.

How to Handle a Complaint

If Grandpa complains that he can't have chicken and waffles because the chicken is not fried, then one has to inform Grandpa that fried chicken is not safe for the swallow. The fried particles catch in the throat.

One tells Grandpa that it is better to have a tweaked version of the dish than not to have the dish at all.

The Mix and Match system is a way to escape boredom. The diner can choose whatever meal appeals at the moment. Two side dishes. Two vegetables. A vegetable and a carb. A piece of protein and some mashed potatoes and gravy.

Nothing is more fundamental than food. This is a way of retaining one of the great pleasures in life, the pleasure of great-tasting food.

Just because the form of the food changes doesn't mean that the food lacks flavor.

I call it the Delish Factor.

Deliciousness matters.

"Cooking for Dysphagia" uses the [Healthy Eating Plate](#) of the Harvard Chan School of Public Health. Dr. Walter Willett, formerly head of nutrition, contributed the foreword to the book.

Please see the two chapters in "Cooking for Dysphagia" on implementing the IDDSI framework in a home healthcare environment. These chapters include extensive scholarship. They are unique and were contributed by two eminent SLPs, Theresa Richard and Karen Sheffler.

I include a handout of pantry contents in the course materials. This is a general list. Please feel free to edit with your own favorites. I also include a handout called the "Master Sauce Guide."

"Cooking for Dysphagia" may be ordered from [Amazon](#) or Barnes & Noble or wherever books are sold.

For setting up the home healthcare environment and protocol for meals for the safe swallow, see the Theresa Richard chapter in *Cooking for Dysphagia*.

For a [free webinar](#), please go to the website of the National Foundation of Swallowing Disorders.

“Transforming Your Kitchen” with Diane Wolff & Karen Sheffler

Disclosure: I do not have sponsorships from any commercial manufacturers.

For questions:

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