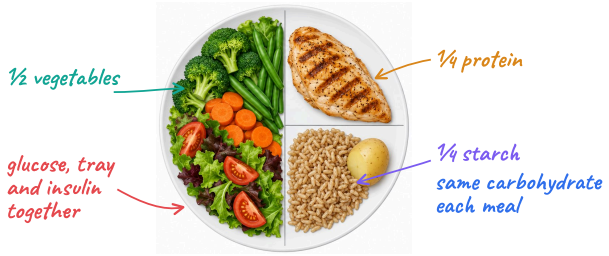
ER BASICS · ONE-PAGER

Therapeutic Diets

Liquid and IDDSI texture diets, sodium, renal and carbohydrate diets, special diets, drug–food interactions, nutrient-rich foods and NPO

20 sources + more detail
erbasics.com/sheets/therapeutic-diets.html
checked Oct 2026

THE PLATE Consistent carbohydrate



1 Liquid and texture diets

Exam study summary, not a bedside tool. A diet is an order: check the tray against the order, allergies and swallow plan.

IDDSI drinks: 0 thin, 1 slightly, 2 mildly, 3 moderately, 4 extremely thick (old US labels nectar, honey, pudding ≈ 2, 3, 4).

DIET	INCLUDES	KEY POINT
Clear liquid	Water, broth, apple or grape juice, gelatin, popsicles, tea or coffee without milk	No milk or pulp; red dyes off before colonoscopy; ≤3–4 days
Full liquid	Clear liquids plus cream, pudding, strained cream soups, ice cream, supplements	Bridge to solids; little fiber
Pureed (IDDSI 4)	Smooth, no lumps, holds shape on a spoon	No chewing
Minced & moist (5)	Soft lumps ≤4 mm (child 2 mm)	Minimal chewing
Soft & bite-sized (6)	Tender pieces ≤1.5 cm (child 8 mm)	Chewing needed

2 Swallowing and NPO

- Stroke or new swallow problem: NPO, oral meds included, until a swallow screen is passed
- Meals: fully upright, chin tuck, small bites on the stronger side, check for pocketing, stay upright after
- Only the ordered thickness; straws only if speech therapy allows
- Elective fasting (ASA): clear liquids 2 h, breast milk 4 h, formula or light meal 6 h, fatty food or meat 8 h
- NPO until the gag reflex returns after endoscopy or bronchoscopy

⚠ **SAFETY** Coughing, a wet voice or pocketing at a meal: stop feeding, sit the client up, suction if needed, report. Aspiration can be silent.

3 Sodium, fluid, kidney, carbohydrate

DIET	TEACH
Low sodium, DASH	Under 2,300 mg a day (1,500 lowers BP more); vegetables, fruit, whole grains, low-fat dairy; 'low sodium' label = ≤140 mg per serving
Heart failure	Avoid excess sodium; fluid limit per order (often 1.5–2 L if severe); daily weight, report >2 kg in 3 days
Fluid restriction	Count everything liquid at room temperature, ice chips included; spread over the day; mouth care
CKD 3–5, no dialysis	Protein 0.55–0.6 g/kg (0.6–0.8 with diabetes); sodium <2.3 g
Dialysis	Protein 1.0–1.2 g/kg; limit potassium, phosphorus, sodium, fluid; binders with meals
Consistent carbohydrate	Same carbohydrate each meal; plate ½ vegetables, ¼ protein, ¼ starch; glucose, tray and insulin together

4 Special diets

DIET	LIMIT	CHOOSE
Low residue (flare)	Whole grains, nuts, seeds, raw produce, skins, beans	White bread, peeled cooked vegetables, tender meat
High fiber	Refined grains	Bran, beans, fruit, vegetables; add fluids
Low purine (gout)	Organ meats, red meat, anchovies, sardines, shellfish, beer, sugary drinks	Low-fat dairy, vegetables, water
Gluten-free (celiac)	Wheat, barley, rye, malt, most beer	Rice, corn, potato, quinoa; oats labeled gluten-free
Lactose-free	Milk, ice cream; hidden whey	Lactose-free milk, hard cheese, yogurt, lactase
PKU (lifelong)	Meat, dairy, nuts, tofu, aspartame	Low-phenylalanine formula and foods
High protein, calorie	Filling up on low-calorie drinks	Small frequent meals, supplements
Neutropenia	Raw meat, eggs, sprouts; unpasteurized milk, juice; cold deli meat	Fully cooked food, washed produce

5 Drug–food interactions

DRUG	FOOD	TEACH
MAOIs	Tyramine: aged cheese, dry sausage, beer, wine, sauerkraut, soy sauce	Hypertensive crisis; avoid for 2 weeks after stopping
Warfarin	Vitamin K: kale, spinach, collards, broccoli	Steady intake, not zero
ACEi, ARB, spironolactone	Salt substitutes (potassium chloride)	Hyperkalemia
Loop, thiazide diuretics	Potassium-rich foods	Eat more; check K

💡 **EXAM TIP** NCLEX tests the tray item that breaks the diet (pickles on low sodium, aged cheddar with an MAOI, banana on dialysis), the safe clear liquid, and which statement needs more teaching.

6 Foods high in

NUTRIENT	RICHEST SOURCES	EXAM LINK
Potassium	Dried apricots, lentils, squash, prunes, raisins, potato, beans, orange juice, banana, tomato	Limit in kidney failure
Sodium	Deli meat, pizza, canned soup, salty snacks, cheese, restaurant food	HTN, HF, kidney disease
Calcium	Yogurt, cheese, milk, sardines or salmon with bones, fortified juice, tofu	Spinach calcium absorbs poorly
Iron	Fortified cereal, lean meat, seafood, white beans, lentils, spinach	Vitamin C helps; calcium hinders
Folate	Liver, spinach, black-eyed peas, fortified grains, asparagus	400 mcg folic acid if pregnancy possible
Vitamin B12	Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, milk, fortified cereal	None in plants: vegans; gastrectomy, metformin

MORE Diets as orders, and the liquid progression

A therapeutic diet is a prescription. The nurse checks the tray against the order, allergies and swallow plan, helps the client eat, records intake and teaches. The 2026 NCLEX-RN test plan lists evaluating nutritional status and intake and output under Basic Care and Comfort. Items rarely ask for a nutrient number; they ask which food breaks the diet, which statement shows understanding, or what to do first.

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