



Food Texture Categories

A parent-friendly guide to food textures, examples, and the oral skills they may require

Why texture matters

Foods can feel and move very differently in the mouth. A child's ability to manage a texture depends on development, chewing skills, sensory responses, positioning, medical history, and swallowing safety. Texture categories are guides - not a required ladder or a test a child must pass.

1. DESCRIPTION OF EACH TEXTURE CATEGORY

Puree Solids	Smooth, uniform foods that require no biting or chewing and are thick enough to hold their shape on a spoon.
Hard Munchables	Firm, resistive items used for supervised biting, oral exploration, and mapping - not for swallowing.
Meltable Solids	Dry foods that soften and dissolve readily when mixed with saliva.
Soft Cubes	Soft, shape-holding pieces that break apart with gentle pressure.
Soft Mechanicals	Soft foods that do not simply dissolve and require active chewing.
Mixed Textures	Foods containing more than one texture at the same time, often liquid plus solid.
Hard Mechanicals: Crunchy & Shattering	Firm foods that fracture into several small pieces when bitten.
Hard Mechanicals: Tough & Chewy	Dense foods that require sustained jaw strength and repeated grinding.

Food Examples by Texture

Examples are for identification only. A food's texture changes with brand, ripeness, cooking method, size, shape, and temperature.

2. EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT FOODS FOR EACH TEXTURE CATEGORY

Puree Solids

- Smooth applesauce
- Plain or vanilla Greek yogurt without chunks
- Completely smooth mashed potatoes
- Sweet potato puree
- Butternut squash puree
- Smooth mashed banana
- Smooth mango puree
- Silky avocado puree
- Smooth hummus
- Strained pea puree
- Smooth pumpkin puree
- Blended silken tofu
- Smooth refried beans
- Lump-free cream of wheat
- Smooth baby oatmeal
- Pureed prunes or pears
- Smooth carrot puree
- Pureed chicken or turkey with broth
- Pudding or custard
- Whipped smooth ricotta

Hard Munchables

THERAPIST-DIRECTED EXPLORATION ONLY: Hard munchables are not for swallowing. Stop using an item as soon as your child can bite, scrape, or break off a piece. Many examples are choking hazards for young children.

- Raw carrot sticks
- Celery sticks
- Jicama sticks
- Raw bell pepper strips
- Thick dehydrated fruit strips
- Beef jerky
- Dried mango slices
- Licorice twists
- Very hard toasted frozen waffle
- Pretzel rods
- Frozen bagel halves
- Thick breadsticks
- Peeled raw broccoli stalks
- Raw cucumber spears with skin
- Popsicle stick coated with frozen puree

Food Examples by Texture

Meltable Solids

- Baby puffs
- Baby rice rusks
- Graham crackers
- Ritz crackers
- Saltines
- Cheese puffs
- Pirate's Booty
- Veggie straws
- Kix cereal
- Cheerios
- Melba toast
- Freeze-dried fruit
- Nilla Wafers
- Plain wafers
- Thin rice-cake pieces

Soft Cubes

- Avocado cubes
- Ripe banana pieces
- Very soft boiled potato
- Very soft sweet potato
- Firm tofu cubes
- Soft cheese cubes
- Ripe kiwi pieces
- Ripe mango chunks
- Seedless watermelon cubes
- Steamed butternut squash
- Mushy steamed carrot rounds
- Soft meatball pieces
- Diced canned peach
- Diced canned pear
- Hard-boiled egg pieces

Food Examples by Texture

Soft Mechanicals

- Cooked penne or rotini
- Pancakes
- Seed-free muffins
- Soft crustless bread
- Soft interior of fish sticks
- Soft interior of chicken nuggets
- Scrambled eggs
- Soft oven-baked fries
- Soft-baked cookies
- Ground meat or meatloaf
- Plain macaroni
- Soft cheese quesadilla
- Canned green beans
- Baked fish cakes
- French toast
- Steamed dumplings
- Tender meatballs
- Soft-baked veggie tots

Mixed Textures

- Macaroni and cheese
- Yogurt with fruit chunks
- Cereal with milk
- Chunky soup
- Salsa with chips
- Pizza
- Lasagna
- Cottage cheese
- Spaghetti with meat sauce
- Chili
- Pot pie
- Stew
- Sandwich with filling
- Oatmeal with fruit pieces
- Smoothie with seeds or fruit bits

Food Examples by Texture

Hard Mechanicals: Crunchy & Shattering

SAFETY NOTE: Chips, pretzels, and popcorn are listed by the CDC as choking hazards for infants and young children. Offer only when age-, skill-, and safety-appropriate.

- Thin pretzel sticks
- Goldfish crackers
- Cheez-It crackers
- Potato chips
- Tortilla chips
- Dry corn flakes or crisp rice cereal
- Thin crispy breadsticks
- Popcorn - only when developmentally appropriate; CDC lists it as a choking hazard for young children

Hard Mechanicals: Tough & Chewy

SAFETY NOTE: Tough meat, meat sticks, dried fruit, and gummy/chewy foods can be choking hazards for young children. Gummy vitamins are medication and should never be used as chewing practice.

- Firm steak strips
- Pork chop pieces
- Firm chicken breast chunks
- Small jerky strips
- Pepperoni or meat-stick pieces
- Dense fruit leather
- Dried apple or pineapple rings
- Raisins or dried cranberries

Oral Skills Used Across Textures

Eating is more than jaw strength. Safe feeding also depends on breathing, posture, attention, sensation, timing, and swallowing coordination. Skills vary by child and should be evaluated during real feeding tasks.

3. ORAL-MOTOR SKILLS NEEDED FOR EACH TEXTURE CATEGORY

Puree Solids	Oral-motor skills that may support this texture
Upper-lip spoon clearance	Using the upper lip to remove food from a spoon rather than scraping the spoon on the teeth or gums.
Lip closure	Bringing the lips together to help keep the puree in the mouth after the spoon is removed.
Tongue control	Moving and containing the puree along the center of the tongue for an organized swallow.
Swallow coordination	Coordinating tongue movement, breathing, and airway protection. This cannot be judged from appearance alone and may require a feeding/swallowing evaluation.
Oral clearing	Using the tongue and repeated swallows as needed to clear puree from the mouth.

Hard Munchables	Oral-motor skills that may support this texture
Tongue movement toward touch	The tongue may move toward an item placed at the side of the mouth, supporting oral mapping.
Sensory tolerance	Supervised exploration can help a child learn where an item is in the mouth. It should not be used to intentionally 'push back' the gag reflex.
Sustained bite	Holding a firm item between gums or teeth and applying steady pressure without breaking off a piece.

Oral Skills Used Across Textures

Meltable Solids	Oral-motor skills that may support this texture
Up-and-down munching	A basic vertical jaw movement used to compress the food.
Saliva management and bolus formation	Mixing food with saliva until it becomes soft and cohesive before swallowing.
Emerging tongue lateralization	Beginning to move food from the center toward the side of the mouth.

Soft Cubes	Oral-motor skills that may support this texture
Graded jaw control	Adjusting bite pressure to break down a soft piece.
Active tongue lateralization	Moving a piece from the center to the side gums or teeth for chewing.
Oral clearing	Using the tongue to clear food from the palate, gums, and cheeks.

Soft Mechanicals	Oral-motor skills that may support this texture
Emerging rotary chew	Diagonal or circular jaw movement begins to replace only up-and-down munching.
Lip closure	Keeping lips closed enough to manage food and saliva.
Cheek tension	Keeping food positioned over chewing surfaces and reducing pocketing in the cheeks.

Oral Skills Used Across Textures

Mixed Textures	Oral-motor skills that may support this texture
Coordinated, separate movements	Managing tongue, lip, and jaw movements while solids and liquids move differently.
Sensory discrimination	Recognizing and responding to more than one texture in the mouth.
Bolus control	Keeping solid pieces organized while safely managing the liquid or sauce portion.

Hard Mechanicals	Oral-motor skills that may support this texture
Full rotary chew	A smooth circular grinding motion rather than only vertical or diagonal movement.
Advanced tongue lateralization	Sweeping across the mouth to gather pieces and form a cohesive bolus.
Graded jaw power	Changing bite force to match the food's resistance.
Strong cheek tension	Holding food on the chewing surfaces and reducing scattering or pocketing.
Mature sensory response	Tolerating varied input while recognizing and responding to pieces throughout the mouth.

Quick Parent Reference

Texture	What happens in the mouth	Common skill emphasis
Puree solid	Holds on a spoon; no chewing needed	Spoon clearance, lip closure, tongue control, coordinated swallow
Hard munchable	Resists pressure; should remain intact	Biting, mapping, sustained pressure
Meltable solid	Softens quickly with saliva	Munching, saliva mixing, early lateralization
Soft cube	Breaks with gentle pressure	Graded bite, active lateralization, clearing
Soft mechanical	Needs chewing to break down	Emerging rotary chew, lip closure, cheek tension
Mixed texture	Solid and liquid move differently	Dissociation, sensory discrimination, bolus control
Crunchy/shattering	Breaks into scattered pieces	Rotary chew, gathering pieces, graded force
Tough/chewy	Requires repeated grinding	Sustained rotary chew, jaw power, tongue control

FEEDING & SWALLOWING SAFETY

Pause and seek guidance if your child frequently coughs, chokes, has wet/gurgly breathing or voice, has color changes, shows significant distress, pockets food, has repeated respiratory illness, or is not growing as expected. Supervise eating, seat your child upright, and modify food size/shape/texture for the child's age and demonstrated skills.

Trusted Safety Resources

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association: Pediatric Feeding and Swallowing - www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/pediatric-feeding-and-swallowing/
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Choking Hazards - www.cdc.gov/infant-toddler-nutrition/foods-and-drinks/choking-hazards.html

This is general information, not specific recommendations. If you have any questions or concerns regarding feeding or swallowing, please consult with a feeding therapist or your child's pediatrician.