

Clear liquid diet

By Mayo Clinic staff

Definition

A clear liquid diet consists of clear liquids, such as water, broth and plain gelatin, that are easily digested and leave no undigested residue in your intestinal tract. Your doctor may prescribe a clear liquid diet before certain medical procedures or if you have certain digestive problems. Because a clear liquid diet can't provide you with adequate calories and nutrients, it shouldn't be used for more than a few days.

Purpose

A clear liquid diet is often used before tests, procedures or surgeries that require no food in your stomach or intestines, such as before colonoscopy. It may also be recommended as a short-term diet if you have certain digestive problems, such as nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, or after certain types of surgery.

Diet details

A clear liquid diet helps maintain adequate hydration, provides some important electrolytes, such as sodium and potassium, and gives some energy at a time when a full diet isn't possible or recommended.

The following foods are allowed in a clear liquid diet:

- Plain water
- Fruit juices without pulp, such as apple juice, grape juice or cranberry juice
- Strained lemonade or fruit punch
- Broth (bouillon or consommé)
- Clear sodas or sports drinks
- Plain gelatin
- Honey
- Ice pops without bits of fruit or fruit pulp

- Tea or coffee with no cream

Any foods not on the above list should be avoided. Also, for certain tests, such as colon exams, your doctor may ask you to avoid liquids with red coloring.

A typical menu on the clear liquid diet may look like this.

Breakfast:

One glass fruit juice

One glass water

One cup broth

One bowl gelatin

Snack:

One cup coffee or tea (without cream)

One bowl gelatin

Lunch:

One glass fruit juice

One glass water

One cup broth

One bowl gelatin

Snack:

One ice pop (without fruit pulp)

One cup coffee or tea (without cream) or soft drink

Dinner:

One cup juice or water

One cup broth

One bowl gelatin

One cup coffee or tea

Results

Though the clear liquid diet may not be very exciting, it does fulfill its purpose. It's designed to keep your stomach and intestines clear, limit strain to your digestive system, or keep your body hydrated as you recover from a medical procedure or become ready for your regular diet.

Risks

Because a clear liquid diet can't provide you with adequate calories and nutrients, it shouldn't be used for more than a few days. Only use the clear liquid diet until your body can comfortably digest other foods and beverages.

If your doctor prescribes a clear liquid diet before a medical test, be sure to follow the diet instructions exactly. If you don't follow the diet, you risk an inaccurate test and may have to reschedule the procedure for another time.