

DIET THERAPY REVIEWER

PART 1 — TERMS, DEFINITIONS & KEY CONCEPTS

A. Basic Terminology

Diet Therapy: modification of a person's usual food intake to help prevent, manage, or treat a disease or medical condition.

Nutrition Therapy: the broader concept of improving health by adjusting the quantity, quality, and method of nutrient intake.

Therapeutic Diet: a diet that has been modified from a person's usual diet to meet specific medical or nutritional needs.

Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT): individualized nutrition care used to help manage a disease or medical condition.

Diet Prescription: the specific diet ordered or recommended for a patient according to the patient's medical and nutritional needs.

Regular or Normal Diet: a normal, balanced diet without a specific therapeutic restriction, provided the patient has no condition requiring dietary modification.

Indication: the reason a particular diet is recommended (e.g., the indication for a low-sodium diet may be hypertension; the indication for a clear liquid diet may be preparation for a procedure).

A diet may involve modifying: calories, protein, carbohydrates, fats and fiber, sodium, potassium, phosphorus, fluids, texture and consistency, and meal timing.

B. Basic Concepts & Principles of Diet Therapy

A therapeutic diet must be individualized.

1. **Assess the Patient First:** Assess medical and nutritional condition; consider diagnosis, weight, labs, medications, and food preferences.
2. **Meet Nutritional Needs:** Provide adequate calories and essential nutrients; prevent one dietary restriction from causing another nutritional problem.
3. **Modify Only What Needs to Be Modified:** Avoid unnecessary restrictions; adjust only the nutrients or components requiring modification.
4. **Consider the Patient's Condition:** Match diet consistency to physical ability to chew and swallow, and to gastrointestinal needs.
5. **Consider Culture & Food Preferences:** Respect culture, religion, and food preferences; adapt familiar foods to support diet adherence.
6. **Make the Diet Practical & Acceptable:** Ensure food is appetizing, affordable, and accessible; consider preparation, portions, and patient acceptance.
7. **Monitor & Evaluate:** Monitor weight, blood glucose, blood pressure, and laboratory values; assess food intake, symptoms, and nutritional status; adjust the diet as the patient's condition changes.

C. General Diets

Regular Diet: a normal diet with no specific therapeutic restrictions — normal consistency, balanced food choices, adequate calories/nutrients, variety of foods.

High-Fiber Diet: a diet emphasizing foods naturally rich in dietary fiber.

Food Sources:

- Whole grains, fruits and vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds

Benefits:

- Supports normal bowel function
- Adds bulk to stool
- May help with fullness, cholesterol, and blood glucose management

Therapeutic Diet (as a category): a modified diet prescribed to meet a specific medical or nutritional need.

Examples: low-sodium diet, diabetic meal plan, renal diet, low-fiber diet, high-protein diet, low-calorie diet, low-purine diet.

D. Vegetarian Diet

Vegetarian Diet: a diet emphasizing plant foods and excluding some or all animal foods.

Types:

- **Lacto-vegetarian:** Plant foods + dairy
- **Ovo-vegetarian:** Plant foods + eggs
- **Lacto-ovo vegetarian:** Plant foods + eggs and dairy
- **Vegan:** Excludes all animal-derived foods

Important Nutrients to Watch:

Protein, vitamin B12, iron, calcium, vitamin D, zinc, and omega-3 fatty acids.

E. Diets Modified in Consistency

Purpose: modify the texture or consistency of food according to the patient's chewing ability, swallowing ability, gastrointestinal condition, and medical needs.

Types (in order of progression): 1. Clear Liquid 2. Full Liquid 3. Soft/Bland Diet 4. Residue-Restricted & Low-Fiber Diet 5. High-Fiber Diet (as tolerated)

Clear Liquid Diet: a diet containing foods and beverages that are transparent or become clear at room temperature.

- Examples: water, clear broth, clear fruit juice without pulp, tea without milk, gelatin
- Indications: before certain procedures, around certain surgeries, temporary GI recovery, selected nausea/vomiting situations
- Limitation: generally not nutritionally complete for long-term use

Full Liquid Diet: a diet containing foods that are liquid or become liquid at room temperature.

- Examples: milk, yogurt, strained cream soups, pudding and custard, milkshakes, liquid nutritional supplements
- Indications: inability to tolerate solid food, certain stages of postoperative recovery, selected chewing/swallowing difficulties, transition between clear liquids and solid foods

Soft Bland Diet & Bland Diet: diets consisting of soft, easily digestible foods.

Soft Blend Diet:

- Soft = easy to chew and digest; Bland = mild and avoids irritating ingredients
- Examples: soft rice, porridge, eggs, tender fish, bananas

Bland Diet:

- Foods that are generally soft, mild, and not highly irritating; may be recommended temporarily for GI symptoms

Residue-Restricted & Low-Fiber Diet: aims to reduce undigested material remaining in the gastrointestinal tract.

- Foods limited: whole grains, nuts, seeds, raw vegetables, fruit skins, and some legumes

Low-Fiber Diet: reduces dietary fiber and stool bulk.

- Examples: white rice, refined bread, peeled potatoes, well-cooked vegetables, tender meats
- Indications: selected GI conditions, flare-ups, or intestinal procedures when medically indicated

F. Diets Modified in Composition

Purpose: diets modified according to the amount or type of specific nutrients.

Types: 1. Low-Calorie 2. High-Calorie 3. High-Protein 4. Heart-Healthy/Low-Cholesterol 5. Low-Sodium 6. Low-Purine

Low-Calorie Diet: provides fewer calories than usual intake or energy requirements.

- Strategies: portion control, vegetables, lean protein, limiting energy-dense foods and sugary beverages
- Indication: weight management when clinically appropriate

High-Calorie Diet: provides increased energy to meet requirements or restore body weight.

- Indications: underweight, unintended weight loss, poor appetite, recovery from illness, or malnutrition

High-Protein Diet: a diet providing more protein than a standard diet when medically appropriate.

Functions of Protein:

- Tissue repair, wound healing, muscle maintenance, immune function, growth and development
- Food Sources: eggs, fish, chicken, lean meat, milk, tofu, legumes
- Indications: selected wounds, burns, postoperative conditions, and malnutrition

Caution: not appropriate for every patient, including some patients with chronic kidney disease.

Heart-Healthy Diet: a dietary pattern emphasizing heart-healthy foods and replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats.

- Recommended: fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fish and lean proteins, beans/nuts/seeds, unsaturated oils
- Limit: saturated fats, highly processed foods, excessive added sugars, and trans fats
- Indications: dyslipidemia, cardiovascular disease risk, and elevated LDL cholesterol

Low-Sodium Diet: a diet that limits sodium intake.

- Foods commonly limited: processed meats, canned soups, instant noodles, salty snacks/chips, soy sauce and fish sauce, pickled/heavily salted foods
- Better Choices: fresh foods, fruits, vegetables, fresh meat or fish, herbs, spices, and calamansi

General Target: no more than 2,300 mg sodium/day; lower targets may be prescribed.

Low-Purine Diet: a diet that reduces foods particularly high in purines.

- Foods commonly limited: organ meats (liver and kidney), certain red meats in excessive amounts, some seafood, meat extracts

- Foods that may be emphasized: fruits and vegetables, whole grains when appropriate, low-fat dairy, appropriate protein sources
- Indications: gout, hyperuricemia, and uric acid-related conditions

G. Special Therapeutic Diets

Diabetic Diet

Diabetic Diet: individualized nutrition therapy for people with diabetes.

- Meal plan considers: blood glucose goals, medications/insulin use, physical activity and body weight, food preferences and lifestyle, other medical conditions, kidney function
- Goals: manage blood glucose, support adequate nutrition, manage blood pressure and lipids, reduce cardiovascular risk

Carbohydrate Management:

Carbohydrates have a major effect on blood glucose.

- Better choices: vegetables, whole grains when appropriate, legumes, whole fruits, high-fiber foods
- Limit: foods high in added sugars and highly refined carbohydrates

Renal Diet

Renal Diet: a nutrition plan designed for people with kidney disease.

- Diet depends on: stage of kidney disease, laboratory results, dialysis status, urine output and blood pressure, potassium and phosphorus levels, protein needs and fluid status

Important Principle: there is no single renal diet for every patient.

Important Components:

- **Sodium:** May need restriction to help manage fluid retention and blood pressure
- **Protein:** Intake depends on kidney condition and treatment; dialysis may increase protein needs
- **Potassium:** Restriction depends on blood potassium level and clinical condition
- **Phosphorus:** May need limitation when phosphorus accumulates
- **Fluids:** Restriction may be needed for some patients with advanced kidney disease or kidney failure

Sample Renal Hospital Meal:

- Appropriately portioned rice, suitable portion of fresh chicken or fish, selected vegetables based on potassium needs, appropriate fruit based on labs, prescribed amount of fluid

Reminder: the actual renal meal must be individualized according to kidney function and laboratory values.

Hypertensive Diet (DASH Diet)

Hypertensive Diet / DASH Diet: Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension — a diet designed to help manage high blood pressure.

- Emphasizes: fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans and nuts, low-fat or fat-free dairy, fish and poultry, lean protein and healthy fats
- Limits: sodium, saturated fat, highly processed foods, sugary foods and beverages

Sodium & Hypertension:

- Sodium can cause the body to retain water
- Higher sodium intake may contribute to increased blood pressure in some people

Common DASH Sodium Levels:

- 2,300 mg/day (standard) or 1,500 mg/day for appropriate individuals

Flavor Alternatives (to salt):

Garlic, onion, ginger, herbs, pepper, lemon, or calamansi.

Sample Hypertensive Hospital Meal:

- Breakfast: oatmeal, banana, low-fat milk, boiled egg, no added salt
- Lunch: rice, grilled fish, steamed vegetables, fruit, water
- Dinner: rice, skinless chicken, mixed vegetables, fruit, water

H. Summary Comparison Table

Diet	Main Focus
Regular	Balanced food without specific therapeutic restrictions
High-Fiber	Increase dietary fiber
Vegetarian	Emphasize plant foods
Clear Liquid	Transparent liquids
Full Liquid	Liquids or foods liquid at room temperature
Low-Fiber	Reduce fiber and stool bulk
Low-Sodium	Limit sodium intake
Diabetic	Individualized carbohydrate and nutrition management
Renal	Adjust nutrients based on kidney function
Hypertensive	DASH pattern and sodium reduction

I. Important Clinical Reminders

- Diet therapy is individualized.
- A therapeutic diet should provide adequate nutrition.
- Restrictions must be purposeful and medically appropriate.
- Patient response must be monitored.
- Diet therapy should be coordinated with the healthcare team.
- Food preferences and culture matter.

J. Conclusion

Food is more than a source of energy. It can become an important part of a patient's treatment plan. A good therapeutic diet considers the patient's:

- Medical condition
- Nutritional needs
- Laboratory results
- Medications
- Preferences and culture
- Lifestyle and treatment goals

The best therapeutic diet is one that safely meets nutritional needs while supporting treatment goals.

PART 2 — SITUATIONAL PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. A patient just had abdominal surgery yesterday and cannot yet tolerate solid food, but bowel sounds have returned. Which diet is most appropriate to start with?

- A. Regular Diet
- B. Clear Liquid Diet
- C. Full Liquid Diet
- D. High-Fiber Diet

Answer: B. Clear Liquid Diet

Explanation: Clear liquids are used right after surgery or during temporary GI recovery because they are easy to tolerate, require minimal digestion, and are given before progressing to full liquids and then solid food.

2. A patient with hypertension tells the nurse he loves instant noodles, canned soups, and processed meats. What is the priority dietary teaching?

- A. Increase potassium-rich foods
- B. Limit sodium-rich processed foods and use herbs/spices instead
- C. Increase protein intake
- D. Avoid all liquids

Answer: B. Limit sodium-rich processed foods and use herbs/spices instead

Explanation: Instant noodles, canned soups, and processed meats are all high in sodium, which the low-sodium/DASH diet restricts because sodium promotes water retention and can raise blood pressure. Garlic, onion, ginger, herbs, pepper, lemon, or calamansi are recommended flavor alternatives to salt.

3. A patient with chronic kidney disease on dialysis has laboratory results showing elevated potassium. Which statement about the renal diet is TRUE for this patient?

- A. All renal patients follow the same fixed diet.
- B. Potassium restriction should be based on the patient's blood potassium level and clinical condition.
- C. Protein should always be completely eliminated.
- D. Fluids are never restricted in renal disease.

Answer: B. Potassium restriction should be based on the patient's blood potassium level and clinical condition.

Explanation: There is no single renal diet for every patient — sodium, protein, potassium, phosphorus, and fluid needs are individualized according to kidney function, dialysis status, and laboratory results. Since this patient's potassium is elevated, potassium would likely need restriction.

4. A patient with diabetes asks which food choice would have the best effect on blood glucose. Which should the nurse recommend?

- A. White bread and soda
- B. Refined pastries
- C. Whole grains, legumes, and high-fiber vegetables
- D. Candy and fruit juice with added sugar

Answer: C. Whole grains, legumes, and high-fiber vegetables

Explanation: Carbohydrates have the greatest effect on blood glucose. Better choices for a diabetic diet include vegetables, whole grains, legumes, whole fruits, and high-fiber foods, while foods high in added sugar and highly refined carbohydrates should be limited.

5. A postoperative patient has been tolerating clear liquids well and the physician now wants to advance the diet slightly while the patient still cannot chew solid food. Which diet should be ordered next?

- A. Full Liquid Diet
- B. Low-Purine Diet
- C. Regular Diet
- D. High-Protein Diet

Answer: A. Full Liquid Diet

Explanation: The full liquid diet is used as a transition between clear liquids and solid foods, and is appropriate for patients with continued difficulty tolerating solid food or with chewing/swallowing difficulty. It includes milk, yogurt, strained soups, pudding, and nutritional supplements.

6. A patient recovering from a burn injury needs tissue repair and wound healing support. Which type of therapeutic diet would best meet this need?

- A. Low-Calorie Diet
- B. High-Protein Diet
- C. Clear Liquid Diet
- D. Low-Purine Diet

Answer: B. High-Protein Diet

Explanation: Protein supports tissue repair, wound healing, muscle maintenance, and immune function. A high-protein diet is indicated for selected wounds, burns, postoperative conditions, and malnutrition — though the nurse should also check that the patient does not have a condition (like some chronic kidney disease cases) where high protein is a caution.

7. A patient with gout has been advised to avoid organ meats such as liver and kidney. Which diet is this patient most likely following?

- A. Low-Purine Diet
- B. High-Calorie Diet
- C. Heart-Healthy Diet
- D. Full Liquid Diet

Answer: A. Low-Purine Diet

Explanation: A low-purine diet reduces foods particularly high in purines, such as organ meats, certain red meats in excess, some seafood, and meat extracts. It is indicated for gout, hyperuricemia, and uric acid-related conditions.

8. A patient has unintended weight loss and poor appetite after a prolonged illness. Which diet would best help restore body weight?

- A. Low-Calorie Diet
- B. High-Calorie Diet
- C. Low-Sodium Diet
- D. Low-Fiber Diet

Answer: B. High-Calorie Diet

Explanation: A high-calorie diet provides increased energy to meet requirements or restore body weight, and is indicated for underweight patients, unintended weight loss, poor appetite, recovery from illness, or malnutrition.

9. A patient recently diagnosed with dyslipidemia and elevated LDL cholesterol asks what foods to eat more of. What is the best response?

- A. Fried foods and butter
- B. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and unsaturated oils
- C. Processed meats and pastries
- D. High-sugar beverages

Answer: B. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and unsaturated oils

Explanation: The heart-healthy diet emphasizes fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fish and lean proteins, beans/nuts/seeds, and unsaturated oils, while limiting saturated fats, highly processed foods, added sugars, and trans fats — appropriate for dyslipidemia and cardiovascular risk.

10. A patient who follows a diet that includes plant foods and eggs, but no dairy and no meat, would best be classified under which type of vegetarian diet?

- A. Lacto-vegetarian
- B. Ovo-vegetarian
- C. Lacto-ovo vegetarian
- D. Vegan

Answer: B. Ovo-vegetarian

Explanation: An ovo-vegetarian diet includes plant foods plus eggs (no dairy). Lacto-vegetarian includes plant foods plus dairy; lacto-ovo includes both dairy and eggs; vegan excludes all animal-derived foods.

11. A patient has difficulty chewing and swallowing but can tolerate soft, mild foods. Which diet principle applies, and which diet is most appropriate?

- A. Modify only what needs modifying — order a Soft Bland Diet
- B. Restrict all nutrients — order a Clear Liquid Diet
- C. Ignore the swallowing issue — order a Regular Diet
- D. Restrict sodium only

Answer: A. Modify only what needs modifying — order a Soft Bland Diet

Explanation: One basic principle of diet therapy is to modify only what needs to be modified and to match diet consistency to the patient's physical ability to chew and swallow. A Soft Bland Diet provides soft, easily digestible, mild foods appropriate for this need.

12. A nurse is planning a therapeutic diet for a newly admitted patient. According to the basic principles of diet therapy, what should be assessed FIRST?

- A. The hospital menu for the week
- B. The patient's medical and nutritional condition, including diagnosis, weight, labs, medications, and food preferences
- C. The dietitian's personal preference
- D. The most cost-effective diet

Answer: B. The patient's medical and nutritional condition, including diagnosis, weight, labs, medications, and food preferences

Explanation: The first principle of diet therapy is to assess the patient first — this includes assessing the medical and nutritional condition, considering diagnosis, weight, labs, medications, and food preferences, then individualizing the diet accordingly.

13. A patient on a low-sodium diet complains that food tastes bland. Which teaching is most appropriate?

- A. Add table salt to taste
- B. Use flavor alternatives such as garlic, onion, ginger, herbs, pepper, lemon, or calamansi
- C. Switch to canned soups for more flavor
- D. Eat only processed snacks

Answer: B. Use flavor alternatives such as garlic, onion, ginger, herbs, pepper, lemon, or calamansi

Explanation: Since sodium intake must be limited (target generally no more than 2,300 mg/day, sometimes 1,500 mg/day), patients are taught to use flavor alternatives like garlic, onion, ginger, herbs, pepper, lemon, or calamansi instead of salt, and to choose fresh foods over processed/canned ones.

14. Which of the following best describes the difference between Nutrition Therapy and Therapeutic Diet?

- A. They are exactly the same term.

- B. Nutrition Therapy is the broader concept of adjusting nutrient intake, while a Therapeutic Diet is a diet modified from a person's usual diet to meet specific medical/nutritional needs.
- C. Therapeutic Diet only applies to children.
- D. Nutrition Therapy is only used before surgery.

Answer: B. Nutrition Therapy is the broader concept of adjusting nutrient intake, while a Therapeutic Diet is a diet modified from a person's usual diet to meet specific medical/nutritional needs.

Explanation: Nutrition Therapy is the broader concept of improving health by adjusting the quantity, quality, and method of nutrient intake, while a Therapeutic Diet specifically refers to a diet modified from the person's usual diet to meet a medical or nutritional need.

15. A patient's renal diet order includes a restriction on phosphorus. Based on the reviewer, when is phosphorus restriction most likely needed?

- A. When phosphorus levels are low
- B. When phosphorus accumulates in the body
- C. Only for patients on a vegetarian diet
- D. Never, phosphorus is not related to renal diets

Answer: B. When phosphorus accumulates in the body

Explanation: Phosphorus may need limitation when it accumulates in the body, which is common in kidney disease as the kidneys lose their ability to excrete phosphorus effectively.