

The I-Can't-Chew Cookbook: Delicious Soft Diet Recipes for People with Chewing Swallowing and Dry Mouth Disorders

J. Randy Wilson

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This unusual cookbook offers more than two hundred appealing “soft food” recipes with ingredients that are finely chopped, softened, or soaked. The recipes are sensibly organized by category: drinks and soups to desserts.

The high number of people affected by loss of chewing functions (cancer of the mouth, for instance, is discovered in 60,000 Americans each year), is evidence of the need for health-maintaining recipes that meet various tastes and time constraints. The recipes here range from a quick three-ingredient Pea Soup Supreme to entrées like Chestnut Soup or Lobster and Mushroom Casserole, which sound like gourmet dishes, although they are easy to prepare and very chewable.

The variety of recipes is admirable, and there are choices for new ideas (Catfish Soup and Orange Lamb Patties) and revived classics (Tomato Aspic and Old-Fashioned Lemonade). Wilson suggests spices and herbs to enhance foods that are common to specialized diets. For instance, thyme enlivens squash soup; nutmeg, a Salmon Tetrazzini; and oregano, an egg-beef-spinach dish.

The recipes for appealing seasonal food are original and enticing. Chilled Asparagus Soup and Strawberry Milkshake suggest spring; for summer there's Gazpacho de Madrid and Zucchini Mexicali; autumnal delights include Autumn Bisque Soup, Maple Pumpkin Pie, and Sweet Potato and Apple Casserole; Holiday Chicken Casserole and Honey Baked Custard are perfect for winter.

Some recipes are nearly standard for patients undergoing chemotherapy, like Fortified Milk and High Protein Milkshake. Wilson also lists commercial products for such patients.

The recipes assume basic culinary knowledge on the part of the reader-cook. For instance, white sauce is simply listed as an ingredient. Wilson's preface reviews common sense about healthy diets. Mark Piper, a graduate of the Harvard School of Dental Medicine, contributed a foreword that is serious and informative about chewing disorders. Both are worthy.

Ultimately, the book is a tribute to love. Wilson collected and refined the recipes to help his wife, who required soft foods during a six-month post-surgery period. The spirit of such care testifies to the worth of the recipes. For those who suffer mouth disorders and for their caretakers, Wilson has provided an excellent soft food resource.

SALLY KETCHUM (March / April 2003)

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