

Community Guide to Prescribing Thickeners for Dysphagia in Adults

The Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) team may recommend modifying the consistency of food and drinks to help make swallowing safer for people with swallowing difficulties. This may include a request for prescription of thickener.

Thickening fluids can slow the transit time of fluid through the mouth, potentially reducing aspiration risk in some people. However, thickened fluids may be contraindicated for some people. Whilst increasing fluid thickness may reduce overt signs of aspiration or increase comfort, it may not reduce risk of adverse events linked with aspiration, e.g., chest infections. Therefore, **all people with swallowing difficulties** where thickened fluids are being considered, including prescription changes, **must be referred for assessment by SLT who can give patient specific advice.**

Which Thickener to Prescribe

Patients should be prescribed a “clear” thickener, unless otherwise specified by SLT. There are two preferred thickener products in Surrey Heartlands: **Nutlis Clear®** and **Resource ThickenUp Clear®**. Both are clear, gum-based thickeners and are more palatable and stable than starch-based thickeners.

Thickener choice should reflect the thickener choice in the local acute hospital (see below).

How Much Thickener to Prescribe

The amount of thickener required each month will vary depending on the identified IDDSI level suitable for the patient. Adults should be encouraged to drink at least 1600mL fluid per day, (although this can vary depending on age, gender and weight). The amounts of thickener advised in the table below are the minimum quantities required for 28 days to thicken 1600mL fluid per day to the correct consistency. Scoops per 200ml are based on thickening water, other drinks may need more or less thickener powder.

Thickener	Presentation	IDDSI level	No. of scoops per 200ml fluid*	Amount required per 28 days for 1600ml fluid per day (number of tins / total grams)
Nutlis Clear	175g tin	Level 1	1	2 / 350g
		Level 2	2	3 / 525g
		Level 3	3	5 / 875g
		Level 4	7	11 / 1925g
Nutlis Clear is the formulary thickener in Ashford and St Peters, Epsom and St Hellier and Royal Surrey Hospitals				
Resource ThickenUp Clear	127g tin	Level 1	1	2 / 254g
		Level 2	2	4 / 508g
		Level 3	4	9 / 1143g
		Level 4	6	13 / 1524g
Resource ThickenUp Clear is the formulary thickener in East Surrey, Frimley Park and Kingston Hospitals				

Medications

Review medications to ensure they are suitable. Liquid formulations may not always be appropriate (especially if they are thin fluids). Consider review of medicines by a pharmacist to review medication indication, alternative formulations or other routes of administration and seek advice from manufacturers or hospital medicine information services as required. Thickener products can affect the absorption and bioavailability of oral medications. [Advice](#) has been issued advising of an interaction between polyethylene glycol laxatives and starch-based thickeners.

Note: thickeners are not licensed for mixing with medications (this is an off-label use of the medication), so decisions on medication administration should be on an individual patient basis and clearly documented (e.g. in prescription directions). Specialist Pharmacy Service provide resources giving advice, including [preparing medicines for administration to adults with swallowing difficulties](#), [thickening liquid medicines](#) and [giving medicines safely with food or thickened fluid](#).

Key Recommendations

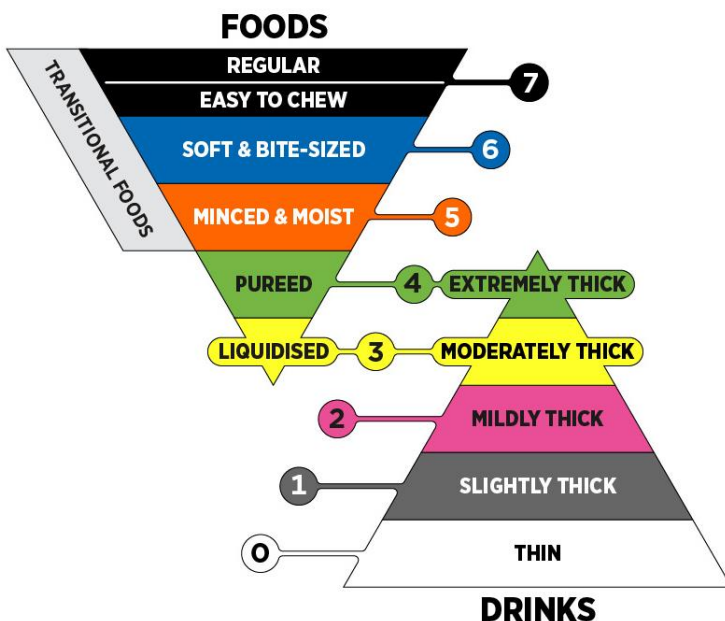
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Include consistency directions on the prescription information, e.g., ‘thicken all fluids to IDDSI level 2’ ✓ SLT assessments are time specific and patients with dysphagia will need assessment by SLT, after discussion with GP, where there is on-going concern around eating, drinking and swallowing safety, even if symptoms appear to improve with thickener. Patients should be re-referred to SLT if there are changes to their swallowing, relative or carer concerns. ✓ While waiting for SLT assessment thickened fluids can be started at IDDSI Level 1; monitor for warning signs and increase to IDDSI Level 2 if the thicker level reduces symptoms further. ✓ Follow the manufacturers direction for use. Ensure drinks are left to stand for the recommended time before serving and the consistency of the drink is checked before serving. ✓ Review quantities prescribed to avoid waste and over prescribing. Only prescribe alternative thickeners at SLT request. ✓ Good oral care is particularly important in people with swallowing difficulties and should be encouraged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✳ Avoid prescribing thickeners in sachets (unless advised by SLT), prescribe tins instead and check prescribing volume when selecting product. ✳ Store thickeners safely and out of reach to avoid accidental ingestion (see patient safety alert). ✳ Avoid prescription of pre-thickened drinks (e.g., Slo-drinks, Fresubin Thickened, Nutilis Complete) unless recommended by a dietitian or SLT. ✳ Remove previous thickener prescriptions on receipt of a new prescription request'.
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Additional Key Recommendations for Care Homes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In areas where there is more than one local acute hospital, residents should all be prescribed the same thickener in the care home to avoid thickener product errors. ✓ If there are several residents with dysphagia requiring thickener, Bulk Prescribing could be considered. Please refer to the guidance on the PAD for further information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✳ Thickener stock in care homes should not be automatically disposed of each month, stock should be carried forward.
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International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) framework

A set of [detailed definitions](#) has been developed to standardised global terminology and definitions for thickened liquids and texture modified foods used by patients of all ages and in all care settings with dysphagia. The final dysphagia diet framework consists of a continuum of 8 levels and is used in all care settings in the UK. [Printable patient information](#) is available.



If an individual experiences any of the following issues, please contact SLT for review and advice:

- Choking, excessive throat clearing or regular coughing when eating, drinking or swallowing
- Voice regularly sounding wet or ‘gurgly’ when eating, drinking or swallowing
- Recurrent chest infections
- Gasping for breath when eating, drinking or swallowing
- Change of colour in the face when eating, drinking or swallowing

Any of these signs at other times may suggest other aspiration related issues and should also be referred to SLT for assessment.