

Thickened fluids

This material will help you understand thickened fluids. You have been recommended thickened fluids because you are having trouble swallowing (dysphagia) on the advice of your Speech Pathologist.

People with swallowing problems may find it difficult to swallow thin fluids such as water, milk, tea and coffee. Thin fluids are fast moving and can be harder to manage for a person with swallowing problems. They can easily pass into the lungs (aspiration) if someone has swallowing problems. Thickened drinks move more slowly and can be easier to control in the mouth and throat. Before starting on thickened fluids, you should have an assessment by a Speech Pathologist to advise you on the appropriate thickened fluids for you.

Types of thickened fluids

Drinks can be made to different thicknesses. There are five levels of thicknesses:

Level 0 - Thin



Level 1 – Slightly Thick



Level 2 – Mildly Thick



Level 3 – Moderately Thick



Level 4 – Extremely Thick



Your Speech Pathologist will advise you of the thickness your drinks need to be. See the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) handout called 'IDDSI Testing Methods' to check if your drink is at the correct thickness level (located <https://iddsi.org/Testing-Methods>).

How much fluid do you need?

No matter how thick your drinks need to be, it is important to keep hydrated every day to maintain your energy levels, brain function and have regular bowel movements.

Adults need an average of 6 to 8 cups (1.5 to 2.0 litres) of fluid per day. You may need even more than this in hot weather.

Fluid intake for infants and children varies greatly depending on the age and size of the child. Your Dietitian can advise you of your individual fluid needs.

Signs and symptoms of dehydration include:

- Thirst
- Dark coloured urine
- Feeling dizzy
- Fainting
- Dry skin

Seek medical advice if you are experiencing any of the above symptoms.

Thickened fluids & nutrition

If you are relying mainly on a fluid diet, it can be challenging to meet your energy and protein needs with thickened fluids.

It is important to prioritise High Protein High Energy fluids such as milk/alternative, juice or cordial. If you are losing weight unintentionally, talk to your Dietitian.

Infants and children need to **gain** weight as they are still growing. Talk to your Dietitian to ensure your child is growing well.

The following table shows fluids that are safe with or without thickening and fluids that should be avoided.

May be safe without thickening	Safe if thickened	Should be avoided
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick custard • Thick vanilla or plain yoghurt • Fruche • Mousse • Pureed fruit • Thick gravies or sauces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Milk • Fruit juice and fruit nectars • Soft drink & cordial • Tea and coffee • Soup • Infant/toddler formula • Commercial supplements e.g. Sustagen®, Ensure®, Resource®, Pediasure® 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jelly and gelatine desserts • Icy poles • Icecream (unthickened) • Thin, runny custards • Ice and ice chips

Types of commercial thickeners:

Drinks can be thickened using a variety of commercial thickening powders. Some can be stirred in by hand while others must be mixed using a blender.

Try to make enough to last the whole day (1 – 2 litres) and store the thickened drinks in your refrigerator. Throw out any blended drinks that have been left in the fridge for more than 24 hours.

Commercial stir-in thickeners

Stir-in thickeners are best used for thickening small amounts of drinks such as a cup of tea or coffee, a bowl of soup, or a glass of juice.

Commercial stir-in thickeners include the following brands:

Adults	Children
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nestlé RESOURCE® ThickenUp® Clear• Flavour Creations easythick®, instantTHICK®• Precise Thick-N INSTANT• Supercol®• Nutricia Nutilis®	Appropriate thickening products for children depend on their age – your Speech Pathologist will recommend a product that is appropriate for your child.

Tips for using commercial stir-in thickeners:

- Typically, both hot and cold fluids can be thickened – however please refer to the manufacturer's instructions.
- You can use a spoon, fork or whisk to stir the thickener in.
- Add all the thickener at once (do not sprinkle).
- Each thickness of fluid requires a specific amount of thickener to be added.
- It is important to add the right amount of thickener for the thickness required. If extra thickener is added later it will form lumps and the drink will be unsafe for swallowing.
- Please refer to the manufacturer's instructions for thickening and storage as they vary between products.
- After thickening all drinks, check for lumps and use a fork or syringe to test that the thickness is correct. Your Speech Pathologist will teach you how to do this.

Commercial thickeners requiring blending:

- The following products need to be mixed with a hand / stick blender:
 - Flavour Creations ThickPlus®
 - Viscaid®
- Refer to the specific manufacturer's instruction as to preparation as they can vary between products. After preparing, checking the thickness is correct using a 10mL syringe or a spoon (see <https://iddsi.org/Testing-Methods> for more information).

Ready-to-use thickened fluids:

- These are ready-to-serve, long life thickened drinks.
- Check with your Speech Pathologist or Dietitian before using them to make sure you choose the right level.
- Examples of ready-to-use products are:
 1. Resource® ThickenUp® Hydration
 2. Flavour Creations' Ready-to-Drink
 3. Precise Thick'N Ready

All of these brands are available in mildly, moderately and extremely thickened drinks.

Using household ingredients to thicken liquids:

Some hot liquids like soups, sauces, pureed casseroles and gravies may be thickened using a household ingredient such as cornflour or a powdered sauce mix. Please talk to your Speech Pathologist if you would like further information.

Things I can do to improve my hydration:

1.

2.

3.

4.

For further information contact your Dietitian or Speech Pathologist:

Other things to remember:

- Only thicken fluids if you have been recommended to do so by a Speech Pathologist
- Always refer to the manufacturer's instructions for the product you are using
- For children, please ensure the thickening agent you are using is appropriate for use in the paediatric population. Your Speech Pathologist can assist you with this.
- Thickeners can behave differently when added to carbonated or alcoholic beverages – please talk to your Speech Pathologist or refer to the manufacturer's guidelines
- Talk to your Speech Pathologist about where to order thickener or pre-packaged thickened drinks