

Thickened Fluids

People with swallowing problems may find it difficult to swallow thin fluids such as water, milk, tea, coffee etc. Thin fluids do not hold together well in the mouth and can easily pass into the lungs (aspirated). Thickened drinks can be safer because they move around the mouth more slowly and allow better control of swallowing.

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 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 of dehydration include:

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

Seek medical advice should you be experiencing any of the these symptoms.

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 for how to check if your drink is at the correct thickness level.*** <https://iddsi.org/>

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.

These foods may be suitable for you:

- Thick custard
- Thick vanilla or plain yoghurt
- Fruche
- Mousse
- Pureed fruit
- Thick gravies or sauces

These fluids may require thickening:

- 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[®]

These fluids are NOT OK because they become too thin. They should be avoided:

- Jelly & gelatine desserts
- Icy poles
- Icecream
- Thin custards (may be ok if you need mildly thick fluids – check with your speech pathologist).

Types of Commercial

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

- Stir-in thickeners are more expensive than those that need a blender. They 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.
- We recommend that you make the bulk of your thickened fluids 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.

Stir-in Thickeners:

- Commercial stir-in thickeners include the following brands:
 - Nestlé RESOURCE®
ThickenUp® Clear
 - Flavour Creations
easythick®, *instant*THICK®
 - Precise Thick-N INSTANT
 - Karicare®
 - QuikThik
 - RD Thickener®
- Hot and cold fluids can be thickened.
- 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.
- Water based drinks, soft drinks and juices must be left for 5 minutes to thicken fully. Milk based drinks must be left for 15 – 20 minutes to thicken to a point where they are safe to drink.

- After thickening all drinks, check for lumps and use a fork to test that the thickness is correct.

Thickeners that need to be blended:

The following products need to be mixed in a blender:

- Flavour Creations ThickPlus®
- Supercol®
- Guarcol®
- Nutricia Nutilis®
- Viscaid®

How to mix thickeners using a blender

1. Use a blender, food processor or hand beater.
2. Measure out the required amount of thickener accurately and sprinkle over the fluid.
3. Blend for the recommended time. Check that all the powder has been mixed in. If not, blend for another 30 seconds.
4. Remove any lumps or grit by pouring the fluid through a sieve.
5. Use a fork to test that the fluid is thick enough.
6. If the fluid is too thin then add a little more thickener and repeat the steps.

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.

Things I can do to improve my hydration:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

For further information contact your Dietitian or Nutritionist: _____

Using household ingredients to thicken liquids:

To thicken hot liquids like soups, sauces, pureed casseroles and gravies, try adding one of the following:

- baby cereal
- gravy powder
- mashed potato
- pureed baby food
- instant potato flakes (e.g. Deb)
- powdered sauce mixes (e.g. cheese or white sauce)
- cornflour

(Make a paste with cornflour and water and add to the liquid while heating and stirring. Stir until it thickens).