Thickened Fluids

People with swallowing problems may find it particularly difficult to swallow thin fluids such as water, milk, tea, coffee etc. Thin fluids do not hold together well in the mouth, and can be easily passed into the lungs (aspirated). Thickened drinks are 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 make sure that you are drinking enough fluid every day to prevent dehydration.

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. Your dietitian can advise you of your individual fluid needs.

Types of thickened fluids

Drinks can be made to different thicknesses. Four types of fluid thicknesses are pictured and described opposite. Your speech pathologist will advise you of the thickness your drinks need to be.

The “fork” test is a simple way to check the thickness of a food or drink to make sure it is the correct thickness and safe to use.

To test:
- Dip a fork into the food or drink then raise it up.
- Check with the table of thicknesses opposite.
- For example if your speech pathologist recommends Level 400 – Moderately thick fluids for you then your drink should be the same as picture 3 (opposite).

If a fluid is too thin you will need to thicken it to the right level using commercial thickening powders or household thickeners.

It is important that the fluid is smooth and lump free after thickening, especially if you are on a smooth pureed (vitamised) diet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 150</th>
<th>Mildly Thick (Previously called ¼ Thick or Nectar)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fork test: They coat the fork and quickly sink through the prongs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort is required to drink this level with a standard straw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 400</th>
<th>Moderately Thick (Previously called ½ Thick or Honey)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fork test: They coat the fork and slowly sink through the prongs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very difficult to drink this level with a wide bore straw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a spoon may be the best way to take this fluid level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 900</th>
<th>Extremely Thick (Previously called Full Thick or Pudding)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fork test: They remain on the fork and hold together well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is not possible to drink this level using a straw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A spoon is necessary to consume this level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from the Australian standardised definitions and terminology for texture-modified foods and fluids, Nutrition & Dietetics 2007; 64 (Suppl. 2)
These fluids are OK to have without thickening:

- thick custard
- thick vanilla or plain yoghurt
- Fruche
- mousse
- pureed fruit
- thick gravies or sauces

These fluids are only OK if you thicken them:

- Water
- milk
- fruit juice and fruit nectars
- soft drink & cordial
- tea and coffee
- soup
- Commercial supplements eg. Sustagen, Ensure, Resource

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

- jelly & gelatine desserts
- icypoles
- icecream
- thin custards (may be ok if you need Level 150 – mildly thick fluids)

Types of Commercial Thickeners

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:
  - Karicare®
  - QuikThik®
  - RD Thickeener®
  - Resource Thicken Up®
  - Easy Thick®

- 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:
  - ThickPlus®
  - Keltrol®,
  - Super Col-U®
  - Guarcol®
  - Nutulis®
  - 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.
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. They may not be labelled level 150 mildly thick, level 400 moderately thick, and level 900 extremely thick.

**Resource® Thickened Beverages (Novartis)**
- Available in level 150 mildly thick and level 400 moderately thick.

**Thick Plus Ready-to-Drink (Flavour Creations)**
- All three levels are available

**Swallowade (Bead Foods)**
- All three levels are available

**Thickened Fruit Drinks (Chefs Pride)**
- All three levels are available

**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 (eg. Deb)
- powdered sauce mixes (eg. 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).

If you have any questions please contact:

Dietitian/ Nutritionist: ________________
Phone: ____________________________

Or

Speech Pathologist: ________________
Phone: ____________________________