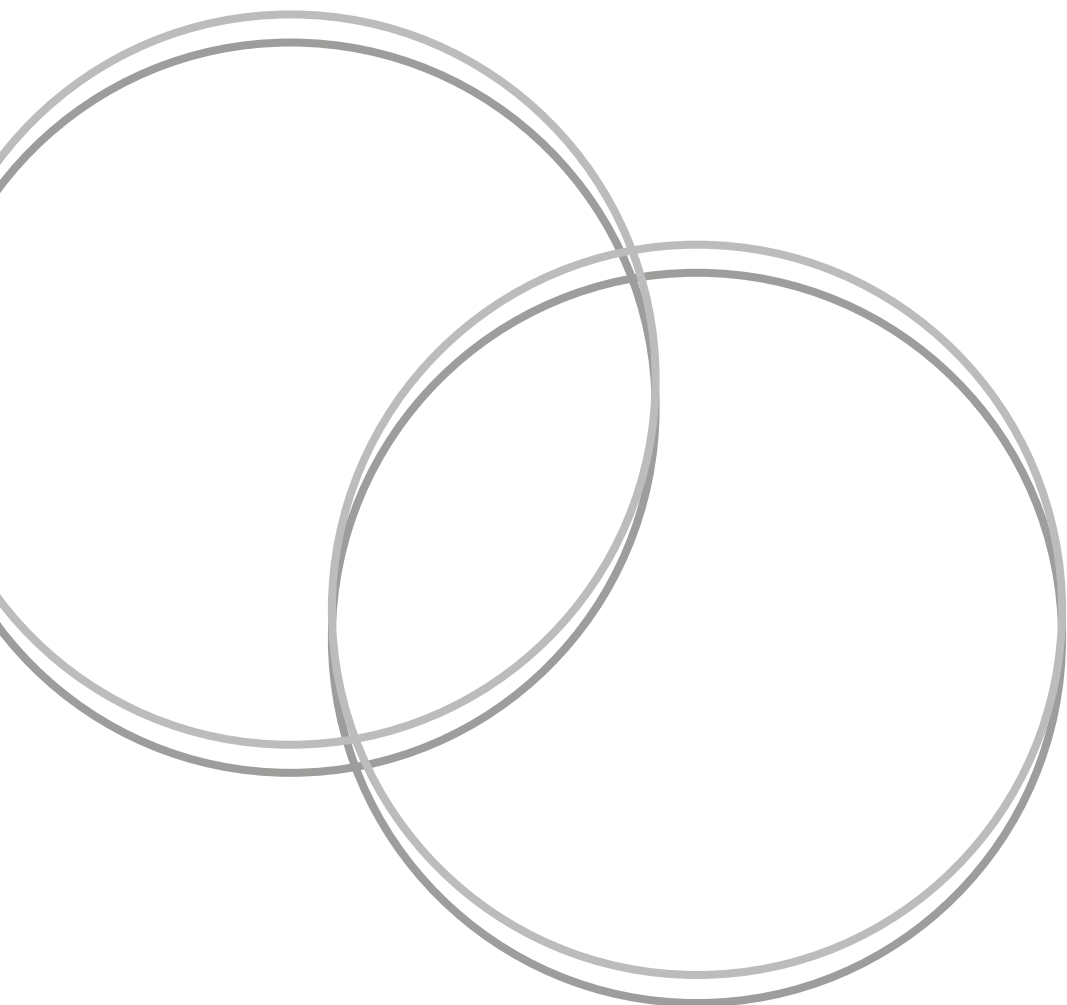




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Thickened fluids

Information for patients



## Who is this leaflet for?

People with a difficulty drinking regular fluids who have been recommended thickened fluids by their Speech and Language Therapist.

Swallowing difficulties are known as **dysphagia** and can occur because of a range of medical conditions, including ageing and frailty, heart disorders, breathing difficulties, cancer, surgery to any body part related to swallowing, trauma, or neurological conditions including stroke, Parkinson's disease and dementia.

## Why thicken?

A Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) has assessed your swallow and recommended a thickener because thin fluids may be **unsafe or uncomfortable** for you. You may be at risk of normal fluids going “**down the wrong way**” into your airway. This is called aspiration and can lead to chest infections.

Thicker fluids can be **naturally thicker** (like smoothies) or fluids which can be made thicker by **adding thickening powders** to them.

| <b>Benefits of thickener</b>   | <b>Risks of thickener</b>  |
|--|--|
| Fluids move more slowly, making them easier to swallow                       | May make you want to drink less and therefore feel thirstier or dehydrated         |
| Reduces the risk of drinks going into the lungs and prevent chest infections | May not eliminate risk of fluids going into the lungs and causing chest infections |
| May make it easier to swallow medications                                    | May affect how the body absorbs certain medications                                |
| Reduces coughing or dribbling when drinking liquids                          |  |

You, or the person you care for, have a choice in the use of thickened fluids, and you can change your mind at any time. Talk to your healthcare professional about what is best for you, especially if you need to take oral medications with thickened fluids.

# Different levels of thickened fluids

Using the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) framework, fluids can be modified to different levels of thickness.

IDDSI is a global initiative aiming to standardise the way we talk about the textures of modified diet and fluids. The IDDSI framework is made up of levels and describes food textures and drink thickness. Visit [www.iddsi.org](http://www.iddsi.org) for more information.



## Thickening powder

Thickening powders are available on prescription to make fluids to their recommended thickness. We use **Resource ThickenUp Clear**. This is a xantham gum-based instant thickener. It is a food for special medical purposes for the management of swallowing difficulties and must be used under medical supervision.



If you require thickening powder while in hospital, ward staff can access a supply for you. When you are discharged home, you should be **given a supply** as part of your To Take Out (TTOs) medications. This should be enough to **last until you are able to arrange a prescription** through your GP (approximately 1 tin for IDDSI Level 1, or 2 tins for IDDSI Level 2). If this has not been provided, please speak to your doctor or nurse. Once you run out, you can **request more from your GP**.

**Be aware:** dry thickening powder can be **dangerous if ingested or inhaled**. Please keep out of reach of people who may be at risk of inadvertently eating the powder (e.g. people with cognitive or visual difficulties).

## Your recommendations: IDDSI Level \_\_\_\_\_

| ✓  | IDDSI Level                       | Description  | Amount of Resource<br>ThickenUp Clear*  |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|---|
|  | <b>Level 0 (thin)</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flows fast like water and can be drunk through a straw with ease.</li> </ul>  | No thickener added                      |
|  | <b>Level 1 (slightly thick)</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slightly thicker than water.</li> <li>Runs off a spoon easily.</li> <li>Can flow through a straw.</li> </ul>  | <b>One scoop</b> per 200mL of fluids.   |
|  | <b>Level 2 (mildly thick)</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It runs freely off a spoon, leaving a small coating.</li> <li>Can drink from a cup and through a wide straw.</li> </ul>   | <b>Two scoops</b> per 200mL of fluids.  |
|  | <b>Level 3 (moderately thick)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drips slowly in dollops through the prongs of a fork.</li> <li>Can drink from a cup however easier if spooned into the mouth.</li> <li>Difficult to drink through a wide straw.</li> </ul>  | <b>Four scoops</b> per 200mL of fluids. |
|  | <b>Level 4 (extremely thick)</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holds its shape on a spoon, falls off in one dollop when tilted.</li> <li>Liquid does not dollop or drip continuously through prongs of a fork.</li> <li>Cannot drink from a cup or straw, needs to be spooned into the mouth.</li> </ul> | <b>Six scoops</b> per 200mL of fluids.  |
| <p>* The amount of thickener required will vary between different brands. Always <b>read the instructions on the tin</b> and use the scoop provided.</p> |                                   |  |   |

# How to make thickened fluids



## 1. Powder first

Use the dosage scoop included in the tin.

Add the required number of scoops to a clean, dry cup or glass.

For Resource ThickenUp Clear, use the number of scoops recommended on the previous page.

If you have been prescribed a thickener **other** than 'Resource ThickenUp Clear', follow the guidelines on the tin.



## 2. Add liquid

Make up 200ml of the drink in **another container**.

For drinks with mixed liquids, add squash to the water or add milk to the drink **before** adding to the cup with thickener.

Then add 200ml of the liquid to the powder.



## 3. Stir and stand

**Stir briskly** for at least one minute until the powder is dissolved.

**Leave to stand** for at least one minute until desired consistency achieved.

The preparation timing can vary, depending on the beverage.

## Top tips

- **All drinks** must be thickened, including hot drinks
- For **fizzy drinks**, stir the drink before thickening to reduce the amount of fizz produced
- Thickened drinks must be **thrown away** after **6 hours at room temperature** and after **24 hours if left in the fridge**
- For drinks with mixed liquids, such as milky teas/ coffees or squash, prepare the whole drink in a **separate cup** first before mixing into the cup with thickening powder to **prevent lumps**
- You should not eat foods such as **ice-cream and sorbet** if you are recommended to have thickened liquids, as these melt to a thinner consistency in your mouth
- Some **foods** are considered to be 'thin fluids', such as **soup and sauces**. These must also be thickened to the recommended consistency using the thickener.
- Some drinks are already **naturally thick**, such as vegetable juices (e.g. carrot or tomato), fruit juices (e.g. apricot, mango or peach), milkshakes, or smoothies. Typically, naturally thick drinks are close to **IDDSI Level 1** consistency and can be thickened further with thickening powder (if needed). Check with your Speech and Language Therapist if you are not sure.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ✓ | <b>Other safer swallowing recommendations:</b>                             |
|   | Keep your <b>mouth</b> as <b>clean</b> and <b>healthy</b> as possible.     |
|   | Sit as <b>upright</b> as possible, not tilted back or leaning to one side. |
|   |  |
|   |  |
|   |  |
|   |  |
|   |  |
|   |  |
|   |  |
|   |  |

**Your Speech and Language Therapist is:**

Name:

Telephone:





## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: Speech and Language Team  
May 2026  
Review: May 2029  
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



*Making a difference across our hospitals*

[charity@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:charity@ouh.nhs.uk) | 01865 743 444 | [hospitalcharity.co.uk](http://hospitalcharity.co.uk)

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)

