

Guide to Prescribing Thickeners

(These guidelines are not aimed for catering, where starch based thickeners are used to enhance food consistency/appearance)

What are thickeners?

Thickeners are used to thicken liquids to various consistencies to help people who have swallowing difficulties or [dysphagia](#). They help to slow the transit of liquids to allow more time to co-ordinate the swallowing process safely. The aim is to prevent liquids entering the lungs and causing serious complications (e.g. chest infections, choking, aspiration pneumonia) but they can also contribute to improved ease and comfort of swallowing.

Please note however, the use of thickener is not appropriate for everyone and in some cases the use of thickener can increase the risk of aspiration / choking. Patients should therefore be assessed by a Speech and Language Therapist before use.

Who might need thickeners?

Prematurity, Stroke, Neurodegenerative disease, Head & Neck Cancer, Learning Disability and Dementia are common causes of dysphagia.

The role of Speech and Language Therapy

Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) carry out swallow assessments and recommend specific safe consistency for fluids and foods, following the International Dysphagia Standardisation Diet Initiative ([IDDSI](#)).

Types of Thickeners

There are two types of thickeners; gum-based and starch-based.

Gum-based thickeners (“Clear” in the title) are preferred over starch based thickeners unless specifically requested by the SLT or patient. Around 3 times less “clear” product is needed to achieve the same consistency.

<p>Any gum based thickener is appropriate to prescribe as cost and quality are very similar</p> <p>Check with the patient, carers or Care Home first</p>	Gum-Based “Clear” thickeners	Starch-Based thickeners
	<p>Add liquid to powder</p> <p>Improved stability</p> <p>More palatable</p> <p>Does not affect visual appearance ✓</p> <p>Unaffected by amylase</p>	<p>Add powder to liquid</p> <p>Consistency alters over time</p> <p>Less palatable</p> <p>Cloudy appearance</p> <p>Affected by amylase ✗</p>

How much to prescribe? (based on recommendation of 1500mls of fluid per day)

Gum-Based Thickener (manufacturer) <i>Alphabetical list</i>	Presentation	Est. requirement per 28days			Starch based thickeners: Multi-thick Nutilis Powder Resource Thickenup Thick & Easy Thicken Aid Thixo-D Original
		IDDSI level 2	IDDSI level 3	IDDSI level 4	
AYMES Acusist Clear (Aymes)	126g tin	6	9	12	
Nutilis Clear (Nutricia)	175g tin	3	5	11	
Resource Thickenup Clear (Nestlé Health Science)	125g tin	4	8	16	
Swalloweze Clear (Nualtra)	165g tin	4	5	12	
Thick & Easy Clear (Fresenius Kabi)	126g tin	5	7	14	

Further considerations when prescribing thickeners

- **Other medications:** Review to ensure they are suitable for a patient with dysphagia. Liquid formulations may not be appropriate (as they may need to be thickened) and tablets may not be swallowed safely. Consider alternative formulations or other routes of administration.
- **Prescription Direction:** Specify the level of thickened fluids required (e.g. level 2 fluids – 2 x scoops / 200mls) or any other SLT advice, not just “as directed”.
- **Care Homes:** Encourage use of one thickening brand for all their residents to avoid errors and waste. Ask for the Care Home’s preferred product before issuing a prescription.
- **Starch to Gum-based switch:** Seek advice from a SLT before switching someone from a starch based to a clear based thickener in an established patient.
- **Avoid** prescribing sachets or readymade pre-thickened drinks unless strong rationale is present. Oral Nutritional Supplement (ONS) drinks are often hard to thicken therefore pre-thickened supplements can be helpful in some cases.