

Thickener Prescribing Guide for Primary Care:

Thickeners for adult patients with dysphagia

Background

- Thickeners are indicated when people with dysphagia require liquids to be thickened in order for them to swallow safely.
- They act by slowing down the transit of fluids to allow the patient more time to co-ordinate their swallow.
- Evidence on their use and benefits has been questioned O'Keefe (2018) and therefore any decision to recommend their use should be made by a qualified health care professional e.g. a Speech and Language Therapist, monitoring any potential side effects such as reduced fluid intake or possibility of increased chest infections.

Choice of Thickener

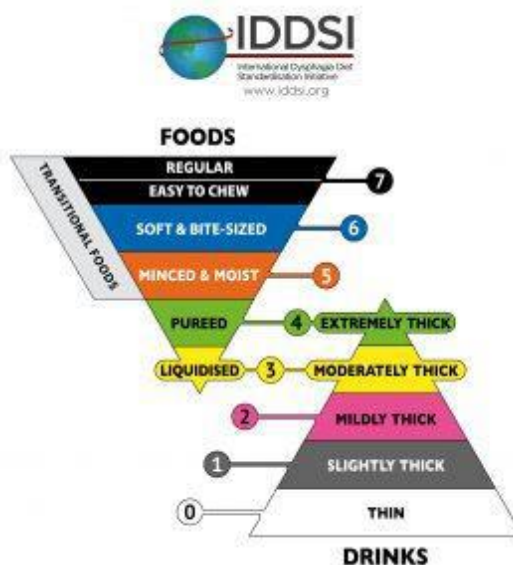
- There are two main types of thickener available: Gum and Starch based thickeners.
- **Clear gum based thickeners (e.g. Nutrilis Clear or Resource Thicken up Clear) are preferred due to their improved stability and palatability.**
- Starch based thickeners tend to be unstable as they thicken over time, separate on contact with saliva and are more grainy in texture.
- Cost of product should be determined by cost per a drink rather than cost per tin as products vary on the amounts of thickener required per a drink.

International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative.

The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) is an evidence-based framework developed by experts to standardise the names and descriptors of texture modified foods and thickened liquids. The framework has eight levels (0-7) which are colour coded as shown in the diagram below.

When prescribing a thickener, guidance should be given on the recommended IDDSI level that drinks should be thickened to.

Thickening level required
IDDSI 0 – Thin (no thickener needed)
IDDSI 1 – Slightly thick
IDDSI 2 – Mildly thick
IDDSI 3 – Moderately thick
IDDSI 4 – Extremely thick



The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative 2016
@<https://iddsi.org/framework/>

Which thickener to prescribe?

To ensure that clear gum based thickeners are being prescribed and that errors in relation to thickener usage are reduced, please prescribe:

Nutilus Clear (Nutricia 175gram tin)

(unless Resource ThickenUp Clear (127gram tin) has been requested by the discharging acute hospital or community speech and language therapist)

Thickener sachets should not be prescribed as these are more expensive.

GPs are asked **NOT** to change the prescriptions of existing patients unless requested by a speech and language therapist

If GPs or prescribing health care professionals are prescribing a thickener whilst the patient is awaiting a speech and language therapist assessment, **they should prescribe Nutilus Clear in 175g tins unless the care home primarily uses Resource ThickenUp Clear** and provide guidance to the client or carer on its use as well as ensuring that the patient is being monitored appropriately to ensure it is not causing more harm. They should ensure that a referral is made to speech and language therapy to review the appropriateness of the thickener.

How much thickener to prescribe?

Adults should be encouraged to drink approximately 1600-2000mls fluid per day, therefore the amounts of thickener advised below are the minimum quantities required for 28 days to thicken 1600ml fluid per day to the correct consistency. Patients who drink more than 1600ml fluid per day will require more thickener. **Please adjust prescription according to fluid intake.**

Thickener (Gluten & Lactose free)	Presentation	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Nutilus Clear (gum based) Est. starting no. tins per month	175g tin (£8.46)	2 tins	4 tins	5 tins	12 tins
No. scoops required per 200mls & cost per drink	Scoop size 1.25g	1 scoop 6p	2 scoops 12p	3 scoops 18p	7 scoops 42p
Resource Thicken Up Clear (gum based) Est. starting no. tins per month	127g tin (£8.46)	3 tins	5 tins	9 tins	13 tins
No. Scoops required per 200mls	Scoop size 1.2g	1 scoop 8p	2 scoops 16p	4 scoops 32p	6 scoops 48p

Prescription directions should contain information regarding the number of scoops per 200ml and /or the IDDSI level descriptor. Speech and Language Therapists will have detailed this on their prescription request to the GP. If other professionals are prescribing thickener they should ensure this information is detailed on the prescription.

References:

- Presquipp Bulletin 100 Appropriate prescribing of thickeners in dysphagia May 2015
- NHS England. Patient safety alert- Risk of death by asphyxiation after accidental ingestion of thickening powder Feb 2015
- O’Keeffe ST. Use of modified diets to prevent aspiration in oropharyngeal dysphagia: is current practice justified? BMC Geriatr 2018; 18: 167. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-018-0839-7>.