Thickened Liquids for Safer Swallowing

Your Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) and doctor want you to thicken liquids for safer swallowing. Some liquids are naturally thick. Other liquids can be made thick with powders or gels. Thickened liquids:

- Give you better control of swallowing the liquids in your mouth.
- Reduce the risk of liquids going into your windpipe or trachea, which leads to your lungs. Liquids in your lungs can cause pneumonia, a lung infection.

Levels of Liquid Thickness

You will be told how thick liquids should be for you to swallow safely. This depends on your problem with swallowing, also called dysphagia.

- **Thin liquids**: such as water, milk, juice, coffee, tea, Ensure, carbonated drinks, Jell-O, ice cream, sherbet, sorbet and broth-based soups. Thin liquids may be mixtures of solids and liquids, such as soups or cereal with milk.
- **Nectar-like liquids**: such as fruit nectars, maple syrup, egg nog, tomato juice and cream based soups.
- **Honey-like liquids**: with the thickness of honey.
- **Spoon-thick liquids**: with the thickness of pudding.

Thickening Products

Products are available to thicken liquids without changing the taste. Most can be used with hot and cold liquids. Thickening products are found at your local pharmacy or medical supplier, or can be ordered online. You do not need a prescription. Some products are not kept in stock. Be sure to order in advance to avoid running out.

Product information for some common thickening products is provided below. Visit the product’s website for more information and to find a store near you.
Consider the cost, ease of use and availability of the product as you decide what to use.

- **Nestle Resource ThickenUp Clear**, [www.thickenupclear.com](http://www.thickenupclear.com), 1-800-422-2752
  - Product comes as a powder to mix with liquids. It is sold in canisters or as single serving packets.
  - Pros: Product has a quick mixing time and does not separate over time.
  - Cons: Product reduces carbonation in carbonated beverages and has a longer mixing time if beverage contains protein.
  - **Instructions for use:** Measure 1 scoop of product for nectar-like, 2 scoops for honey-like or 3 scoops for spoon-thick into an empty, dry glass. Add 4 ounces of liquid. Stir with a spoon or fork until liquid thickens. If using milk or a supplement, mix for up to 5 minutes for liquid to fully thicken.

- **SimplyThick**, [www.simplythick.com](http://www.simplythick.com), 1-800-205-7115
  - Product comes as a gel to mix with liquids. It is sold as single servings, bulk servings, or in a dispenser bottle with pump.
  - Pros: Product has a smooth texture, and does not thicken or separate over time. Product can be mixed in large quantities and stored in the refrigerator.
  - Cons: Product reduces carbonation in beverages and does not mix well with supplements.
  - **Instructions for use:**
    - There are two ways to mix this product:
      1. Measure 4 ounces of liquid into a beverage glass. Add product*. Mix with speed for 20 seconds using a fork or whisk. If mixed well, you should see air bubbles suspended in the liquid.
      2. Measure 4 ounces of liquid into a container with lid. Add product*. Put lid on tightly and shake with speed for 10 seconds.
    - *If using a single serving packet*, you will need one packet of nectar-like, one packet of honey-like or two packets of honey-like for spoon-thick depending on your level of thickness.
    - *If using dispenser bottle with pump*, you will need one full pump of product for nectar-like, two pumps for honey-like and four pumps for spoon-thick.
Thick & Easy, [www.homecarenutrition.com](http://www.homecarenutrition.com), 1-800-491-6876

- Product comes as a powder to mix with liquids or as pre-thickened, ready to serve beverages. Powder is sold in canisters or as single serving packets.
- Pros: Product is easy to use and locally available.
- Cons: Pre-thickened beverages must be thrown away within 10 days of opening.
- Instructions for use:
  - **For powder product**, measure 4 ounces of liquid into a container with a lid. For nectar-like, add 1 tablespoon of product. For honey-like, add 1 tablespoon plus 1 ½ teaspoons of product. For spoon-thick, add 2 tablespoons of product. Close lid tightly then shake well.
  - **For pre-thickened beverages**, pour desired amount and store the rest in the refrigerator for up to 10 days.

Thick-It, Thick-It 2 or Thick-It AquaCareH₂O, [www.thickitretail.com](http://www.thickitretail.com), 1-800-333-0003

- Thick-It and Thick-It 2 come as powders to mix with liquids. They are sold in canisters or as single serving packets.
- Thick-It AquaCareH₂O comes as pre-thickened, ready to serve beverages, including water, coffee and some juices. May be heated or chilled. Can use with alone or with powdered drink mixes.
- Pros: Products are locally available.
- Cons: Powder products take up to 5 minutes to mix well or lumps may form. Powder products may separate over time, and thickening results vary depending on the type of liquid used. They also reduce carbonation in beverages.
- Instructions for use:
  - **For powder products**, measure 4 ounces of liquid into a beverage glass. Slowly add product*. Mix with speed using a spoon or whisk until dissolved. Let stand for at least 1 minute until mixture thickens to desired consistency. If using milk or a supplement, let mixture stand for 5 to 10 minutes. Do not let sit once mixed to avoid separation.
**Amount of product to use with 4 ounces of water:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Nectar-like</th>
<th>Honey-like</th>
<th>Spoon-thick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thick-It</td>
<td>3 ½ - 4 teaspoons</td>
<td>4 – 5 teaspoons</td>
<td>5 teaspoons – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tablespoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thick-It 2</td>
<td>3 – 3 ½ teaspoons</td>
<td>3 ½ - 4 teaspoons</td>
<td>4 – 5 teaspoons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please see the products’ usage charts online for amount of powder product to use with other liquids: [Usage Chart for Thick-It](#); [Usage Chart for Thick-It 2](#).*

- **For pre-thickened beverages,** pour desired amount and store the rest in the refrigerator for up to 14 days.

**Other Tips**

- If you have questions or are still having swallowing problems, please talk to your SLP. There may be other tips or products for you to try.
- Talk with your dietitian if you have questions about the nutrition of the liquids you consume.
- For powder products, add more thickener if the liquid is too thin. If too thick, add more liquid until the thickness level you need is reached.
- Do not consume Jell-O, sherbet, sorbet and ice cream. These products turn to liquid as they melt in your mouth. Check with your SLP before using.
- Broth-based soups are thin liquids. Do not use unless the broth is thickened to the right level for you.

If you like popsicles or to cool your beverages with ice cubes, the thickness will change as it melts. You can make popsicles and ice cubes with xanthan gum thickening products, such as Simply Thick, ThickenUp and Thick-It AquaCareH₂O. Check the product’s food label to see if xanthan gum is listed as an ingredient. To prepare, thicken water to the right level of thickness for you then freeze it in popsicle or ice cube trays. Modified corn starch thickeners are not recommended for freezing as they will separate with melting.

- Take your supplies with you when eating out. Many thickening products come in single serving packets that make travel easy.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.