

# Thickened Liquids for Safer Swallowing



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Your Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) and doctor may 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 can:

- 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 and can cause 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. **Slightly thick** is the term used for infant formula and supplements.
- Mildly thick or nectar-like liquids:** such as fruit nectars, maple syrup, egg nog, tomato juice and cream based soups.
- Moderately thick or honey thick liquids:** with the thickness of honey.
- Extremely thick or 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. Sold in canisters or 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.

**❑ 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.

**❑ 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.

**❑ Thick-It, Thick-It 2 or Thick-It AquaCareH2O, <http://thickit.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 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.

## Other tips

- Talk with your dietitian if you have questions about the nutrition of the liquids that 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.
- Check with your SLP before consuming Jell-O, sherbet, sorbet and ice cream. These products turn to liquid as they melt in your mouth and may not be safe for you.
- 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, the thickness will change as it melts. Talk to your SLP or dietitian about how to safely cool or freeze liquids for your diet.
- Take your supplies with you when eating out. Many thickening products come in single serving packets that make travel easy.

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.

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**Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.