

# How to Thicken Liquids

Dietitian: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:  
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

*Prepared by:* Nutrition and Food Services  
*Designed by:* Nova Scotia Health Library Services

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## How to Thicken Liquids

For many people with swallowing problems, it can be safer to drink thick liquids. The thickness will depend on how well you are able to swallow.

The Swallow Team has been helping you. **The level that is checked off below is the thickness that is best for you.**

- Level 3: Moderately Thick (or Honey Thick)**
  - > Looks as thick as honey.
  - > Can drink from a cup or take by spoon.
  - > Has a smooth texture with no lumps, fibres, or seeds.
  - > If drinking through a straw is OK for you, it would take some effort to drink through a wide straw.
- Level 2: Mildly Thick (or Nectar Thick)**
  - > Some fruit nectars (like pear, apricot, mango) are naturally mildly thick.
  - > Can sip.
  - > Pours quickly from a spoon, but slower than thin liquids.
  - > If drinking through a straw is OK for you, it would take some effort to drink through a normal-sized straw.

**Call your primary health care provider or 811, or go to the nearest Emergency Department if you have:**

- > fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
- > chest congestion (more mucus and coughing)
- > shortness of breath
- > coughing during or after eating
- > extreme (a lot of) thirst
- > not peed for 8 to 12 hours
- > moderate diarrhea for 5 or more days
- > severe (very bad) diarrhea for 2 or more days
- > vomiting (throwing up) for more than 12 to 24 hours
- > confusion
- > more drowsiness
- > seizure
- > diabetes and cannot control your blood sugar levels

## How much liquid do I need each day?

- How much thickened liquid you need each day depends on your age, health, activity, and drugs you are taking. You may need more liquids when you are more active, if you have a fever, or during hot weather.
- Urine (pee) colour is the best way to check for dehydration (not having enough fluids). Your urine should be clear and pale yellow. Drink more thickened fluid if your urine is dark, or if you do not have to pee as often as usual.
- Drink regular amounts of thick liquids throughout the day. If you drink a lot at once, your kidneys will simply flush the extra fluid away.
- Your total daily thickened liquid requirement is: \_\_\_\_\_ per day.
- Your daily fluid intake includes all drinks, blended soups, and thickened frozen products. You will also get some fluid in the foods you eat.

## ☐ Level 1: Slightly Thick

- › Thicker than water. Some fruit nectars and milk drinks are naturally slightly thick.
- › If drinking through a straw is OK for you at this time, it would take little effort to drink through a normal-sized straw.

## Commercial thickening products and drinks

- There are many thickening products and thickened drinks available online. Look for products that use the International Dysphagia Diet Standardised Initiative (IDDSI) language. IDDSI terms include “Slightly Thick,” “Mildly Thick,” and “Moderately Thick.”
- You can also find thickening agents at the drugstore. **The pharmacy may also be able to order thickened drinks for you.**
- At time of print, the only ready-to-drink thickened liquids available in Canada are:
  - › Hormel Thick & Easy® drinks
  - › Thick-It®
  - › Hydra+ Thickened Beverage®
- You can thicken your own drinks by using commercial thickening agents. **Always follow the package directions.**

- Thickening agents can be xanthan gum-based or starch-based:

#### **Xanthan gum-based:**

- › Resource® ThickenUp® Clear powder
- › SimplyThick® EasyMix™ gel
- › Thick-It® Clear Advantage™ powder

#### **Starch-based:**

- › Kingsmill® Quick Thick powder
- › Purathick™ powder
- › Resource® ThickenUp® powder

- You can also thicken liquids using household thickeners, such as:

- › **Corn starch** mixed with a small amount of cold water to make a slurry. Mix slurry into boiling puréed soups, gravies, or sauces.
- › **Flour** mixed with a small amount of cold water or in a roux. Stir into puréed soups, gravies, or sauces and bring to a boil while stirring.
- › **Instant pudding powder** added to milk, smoothies, or shakes.
- › **Infant cereal** added to soups, milk, smoothies, or shakes.
- › **Instant potato flakes** added to boiling puréed soups, or sauces.
- › **Tapioca flour** added to cooked puréed soups, gravies, or sauces.

<p><b>Stool softeners:</b> PEG 3350, RestoraLAX®, Lax-A-Day®</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These stool softeners can only be thickened with xanthan gum gel thickener.</li> <li>• Mix together:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› ½ cup (125 ml) water</li> <li>› 1 package stool softener <b>OR</b> 1 scoop PEG 3350</li> <li>› One 12 g package SimplyThick® honey consistency <b>OR</b> 2 pumps from a 2 L bottle</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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- See IDDSI’s website for videos to help you assess the thickness of liquids:
  - › [www.IDDSI.org/framework/drink-testing-methods/](http://www.IDDSI.org/framework/drink-testing-methods/)

**Nutrition drinks (like Ensure®, Boost®)**

- Nutrition drinks, except Boost® Fruit flavoured beverages, can be thickened with xanthan gum gel thickeners like SimplyThick®.
- They will stay at the right thickness for 4 hours using a xanthan gum gel thickener.
- Chocolate Ensure® Protein Max is the only Ensure® product that is naturally Level 2: Mildly Thick (Nectar Thick) at room temperature.
- Ensure® Compact is the only Ensure® product that is naturally Level 1: Slightly Thick at room temperature.

**How do I use a commercial thickener?**

- Follow directions on package.
- Start with a small amount of thickener.
- Use a whisk for thorough mixing.
- Add thickener to liquid and mix.
- Slowly add more thickener, as needed.

**Note:** Some commercial thickeners will get thicker once they are made and left to sit or cool.

**Other Thickening Ideas and Tips**

<p><b>Juice</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a commercial thickener.</li> <li>• To create a thickened juice from puréed fruit or baby food fruit: add a few tablespoons of fruit juice to get the right thickness.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pop and carbonated drinks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stir before adding commercial thickener to reduce the bubbles.</b></li> <li>• Keep at least 2 inches (5 cm) of space in the glass above the liquid to allow for expansion.</li> <li>• Be sure to stir slowly.</li> </ul>

<b>Milk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try adding a small amount of vanilla extract to milk before thickening to improve flavour.</li> <li>• Use instant pudding powder as a thickener to make a tasty drink.</li> <li>• Try adding chocolate or strawberry syrup to milk, and then thicken.</li> </ul>
<b>Water</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add lemon juice to water before thickening to improve flavour.</li> <li>• Try commercial water flavouring, like Crystal Light®, Mio, or Stur®.</li> </ul>
<b>Tea, coffee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add cream/milk, and sugar before thickening.</li> <li>• Cool slightly before adding commercial thickener.</li> </ul>
<b>Smoothies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add yogurt to pureed fruit to get the right thickness.</li> <li>• Add pureed banana as a thickener.</li> <li>• Let frozen ingredients thaw before adding, so they do not melt and thin the drink.</li> </ul>

<b>Frozen foods</b> (like ice cream, Popsicles®, ice cubes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular ice cream, ice cubes, and Popsicles® melt in your mouth, and are considered thin liquids.</li> <li>• Only xanthan gum gel thickeners (like SimplyThick®) can be used to thicken and stabilize frozen foods. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› For recipes and instructions, visit: <a href="http://www.simplythick.com">www.simplythick.com</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Thaw frozen ingredients (like ice cream, frozen fruit) before blending to keep thickness.</li> </ul>
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