

Thickening Liquids Information Sheet

Difficulty swallowing may result in excessive coughing, aspiration, breathing problems, and pneumonia. Thickened liquids may be safer when you have problems swallowing. Thickened liquids are thicker and move more slowly, so in most cases it can be controlled easier and create a more cohesive swallow. Before you are started on thickened liquids, an evaluation should be done by a speech-language pathologist to ensure that it will help your swallowing and is needed. It does take practice to prepare them accurately, and may take time to tolerate the texture, but it is important to stay hydrated.

Degrees of Thickness

Thickened liquids are divided into consistencies. You will be told which one is safest for you. Always check with your doctor/ speech therapist before trying to change the consistency of the liquids you drink.

- Thin – Unthickened such as water, coffee, tea, or soda
- Nectar – thick but pourable like syrup, consistency of a milkshake, or V-8 juice

- Honey- sticks to the side of the cup and drizzles when poured, like honey
- Pudding – holds its shape, and generally eaten with a spoon

Thickening Liquids

There are two types of thickeners – powder/starch and gum/gel. Whichever type you use, always read the label to know how much product to add to the amount of liquid you are thickening.

The amount of thickener needed in the instructions is often for 4 ounces of fluid. You may need to double or triple the amount of thickener depending on the amount of liquid you are thickening. How much thickener you need to add also depends on the consistency you need. Different brands may suggest using different amounts of their product for specific liquid consistencies. Each manufacturer's guidelines will vary in stirring time and time to let stand prior to drinking. Different drink types such as juice, water, coffee, and soda may require different amounts of thickener or mixing times. Mixing with a starch-based powdered thickener liquids

mixed with powdered thickener will continue to thicken over time. Thickeners should not change the taste of liquids.

*If you have any questions about how to thicken liquids or where to purchase thickeners and pre-thickened products, contact a speech-language pathologist or dietitian.

Mixing Starch-based Thickeners (Thick It and Thick & Easy)

1. Determine the number of ounces of the liquid that needs thickening and how much thickener you need to add, which is located on the can.
2. Pour the measured powder into the liquid slowly and stir quickly to avoid clumping. Using a fork, small whisk or a blender may help reduce clumps and ensure a smooth liquid.
3. Let the liquid sit for the amount of time on the instructions – usually 1 minute– to allow it to set.

*Some liquids might need a little bit more or less of thickener to reach the desired consistency so check it before drinking or serving.

*If it is too thin, add more thickener. If it is too thick, add more liquid. Let it set again before serving.

Mixing with a Gum-Based Powdered Thickener (Thicken Up Clear and Thick & Clear)

1. Determine the number of ounces of the liquid that needs thickening and how much thickener you need to add.
 - Given 4 oz. of liquid, mix in one scoop for nectar; two scoops for honey; three scoops for pudding-thick consistencies
2. Use a spoon, fork, or small whisk to stir it together for 30 seconds. Desired thickness will be achieved within 5 minutes.

*This type of thickener will not continue to thicken over time. It will keep its consistency over time when at room temperature.

Mixing with a Gel Thickener (SimplyThick)

Determine the number of ounces of the liquid you need and use one small packet per 4 oz. of liquid.

1. Pour your thin liquid into a container
2. Open the SimplyThick packet at the tear notch, empty the pouch by squeezing it and rolling it like a tube of toothpaste, or pump the bottle the number of times needed into the liquid (on the bottle).

- One pump = nectar
 - Two pumps = honey
 - Four pumps = pudding
- *Push the pump down fully for one pump.

3. After adding the correct amount of gel, stir quickly with a whisk, fork, spoon or straw for about 30 seconds

*The liquid will start to feel heavier on your utensil when well mixed

* Gel thickener comes in individual 4 oz. packets, packets for 32 oz. of liquid, and SimplyThick pump bottles.

* It comes in nectar or honey consistency, so be certain you have the correct product.

* If you need a pudding consistency, you will need to double the amount of the honey consistency product.

* You can make the beverages ahead of time and store for around 72 hours in a refrigerator/freezer.

*You don't need to wait for the gel thickener to set, it keeps its consistency over time, does not have powder lumps or residue.

Mixing Tips

Soda: Starch-based powdered thickener

Soda will bubble up and make a mess if mixed all at once and in a small cup.

1. Pour a small amount into a cup.
2. Stir in the thickener until the bubbles disappear.
3. Mix in the rest of the soda with the thickener until desired consistency

Ice cream: Gel Thickener

Ice cream mixes in a similar fashion to other liquids, using 1/2 cup or 4 oz. of ice cream at a time.

1. Minimally soften the ice cream in a bowl
2. Add the correct amount of thickener.
3. Stir/mix for 30 seconds
4. Spoon ice cream into serving bowl
5. Freeze until you are ready to serve

Hot Liquids

Starch-based powdered thickener

Hot liquids mix best once they have cooled down. After cooling, thicken the liquid to the recommended amount. Thickened liquids that are hot can get thicker as they cool.

Xanthan gum-based powdered thickener or gel-based thickener

You can mix them while they are hot and reheat in the microwave. When using gel-based thickener, be cautious when shaking the hot liquids, so as not to burn yourself.

Water

Many people don't like the taste of thickened water. It is best to serve it very cold, but do not serve with ice.

You might try to thicken lemonade or use powdered flavor packets with water instead of drinking plain water. These come in regular and sugar-free.

Ice

Do not serve regular ice in any thickened liquid. It changes the consistency of the liquid as it melts – making it thinner than it should be. You can prepare liquids ahead of time and chill them in the refrigerator before serving.

Using gel thickener and xanthan gum-based powdered thickener, liquids can be frozen to make ice cubes and frozen treats that will melt to the correct consistency.

Other Basic Guidelines

- Use caution with or avoid juicy foods such as oranges, grapes, or watermelon
- Ice cream, gelatin, fruit ice, and sherbet are thin liquids as they melt in the mouth and throat. Freeze thickened drinks or try Magic Cup ice cream to eat in place of these.
- Remember soups with thin broth and cereals with milk include thin liquids and need to be thickened or avoided.
- Some medication can be crushed and put in a thickened liquid (or pudding) but some cannot, and so the pill may be needed to be ingested whole; safety recommendations need to be determined by the SLP AND the physician needs to be consulted as to whether or not the pill can even be safely crushed.
- Instead of taking pills with water, possibly take them with applesauce, pudding or thickened liquids.

References

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