

# Thick Fluids: Adult

Thick fluids may be needed for those with feeding and/or swallowing problems.

Thickening the fluids you drink makes swallowing safer because it:

- improves your control while drinking
- reduces the risk of fluid going down the wrong way, into the lungs

A fluid is any liquid such as water, juice, milk, coffee, or tea. **Thin fluids need to be thickened.** You can thicken fluids with a commercial thickener, which you can buy or order at a pharmacy.

A fluid can also be a food that melts at body temperature, such as jellied desserts, Popsicles<sup>®</sup>, ice cream, or sherbet. These fluids can't be thickened.

## Examples of thin fluids:

- au jus
- broth
- buttermilk
- coffee, tea
- eggnog
- frozen yogurt, and frozen soy desserts
- fruit drinks, pop, sports drinks, and slushy drinks
- fruit or vegetable juices (except some brands of tomato juice)
- gravy and sauces (thickness may vary)
- ice
- ice cream, Popsicles<sup>®</sup>, sherbet
- jellied desserts such as Jello<sup>®</sup>
- liquid medicines
- milk, table cream, 10-36% milk fat (M.F.)
- milkshake, smoothies
- oral nutrition supplement drinks such as Boost<sup>®</sup> or Ensure<sup>®</sup>
- spirits, wine, beer, and other alcoholic drinks
- soup, strained or blended
- syrup
- water

## Types of thick fluids

There are 3 types of thick fluids. Below is a description of how fluids should look when thickened to each type:

### Mildly Thick fluids (Nectar)

- Fluid runs freely off the spoon but leaves a thin coating on the spoon.
- Fluids pour like most types of fruit nectar.



### Moderately Thick fluids (Honey)

- Fluid slowly drips in dollops off the end of the spoon.
- Fluids pour slowly, like liquid honey.



### Extremely Thick fluids ( pudding)

- Fluid sits on the spoon and does not flow off.
- Fluids are as thick as pudding.



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Note: Thickened fluids should only be started if your healthcare or swallowing team recommends it.

## Your type of thick fluid is:

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Thicken **all** your fluids to the type written on the line above. This includes all fluids you drink with meals and snacks.

If you have any questions about thickening fluids or fluid medicines, talk to your swallowing team.

## Things to keep in mind

- Check that the food or fluid is the right thickness for you. Different brands of products may vary in thickness, like applesauce, custard, gravy, juice, or yogurt.
- Avoid foods that melt, such as ice cream, jellied desserts, milkshakes, Popsicles<sup>®</sup>, sherbet, slushy drinks, frozen soy desserts, or frozen yogurt. These foods cannot be thickened.
- Don't use gelatin to thicken your foods. Gelatin thins as it warms up. Yogurt with gelatin as an ingredient is allowed.
- Don't freeze thick fluids. If you choose to freeze thick fluids, you will need to thicken the fluid again to the right consistency after it has thawed.

## Mixed consistency foods

Don't eat foods that have a mixed consistency. A food with mixed consistency has both thin fluid and solid foods together in one bite.

### Foods to avoid:

- canned fruit in liquid
- cold cereal with milk
- crackers in soup
- juicy fresh vegetables and fruits, such as grapes, oranges, tomatoes, and watermelon (when chewed, these release water, which is a thin fluid)
- fruit in jellied desserts
- ice cream and other frozen desserts with candy, dried fruit, nuts, or other hard pieces
- soups with pieces of solid food, such as grains, meat, pasta, or vegetables
- stewed fruit
- baked, diced, mashed, stewed, or whole tomatoes, whole cherry tomatoes
- more than 1 oz (30 mL) of gravy pooling around the food

### Tips:

- Eat smooth, cooked cereal instead of cold cereal with milk.
- Blend or strain soup until smooth. Some soups may need to be thickened to the right consistency. Follow the directions given by your swallowing team.
- Don't add crackers or bread to your soup.
- Gravy or sauces may need to be thickened.

## Foods or fluids that naturally fit

Some fluids or foods may naturally be the right thickness. They may not need to be thickened. Always check and make sure that the food or fluid is the right thickness for you.

**\*Note:** Yogurt may vary in thickness from Mildly Thick (Nectar) to Extremely Thick ( pudding) depending on the brand and type. Choose the yogurt that is the right thickness for you.

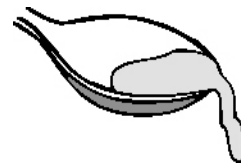
### Mildly Thick fluids (Nectar)

- \*yogurt that is smooth
- some brands of tomato juice such as Heinz<sup>®</sup>
- fruit nectar



### Moderately Thick fluids (Honey)

- \*yogurt that is smooth like a custard
- liquid honey



### Extremely Thick fluids (Pudding)

- \*yogurt that is smooth like a pudding
- smooth cooked cereal, prepared to package directions
- Motts<sup>®</sup> applesauce
- puddings
- pureed food that sits on the spoon and doesn't flow off



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## Commercial thickeners

- You can buy or order commercial thickeners from a pharmacy.
- Different fluids will need different amounts of commercial thickener. **Always follow the directions on the commercial thickener container to thicken your fluids to the right type.**
- The following can have an effect on the amount of commercial thickener needed to thicken your fluids:
  - temperature (hot fluids versus cold fluids)
  - acidity level (cranberry juice versus apple juice)
  - fluid type (alcohol and colas—these bubble and may not thicken)

### **Always follow the directions for using commercial thickeners.**

Examples of commercial thickeners:

- Resource<sup>®</sup> ThickenUp<sup>®</sup>, ThickenUp<sup>®</sup> Clear
- SimplyThick<sup>®</sup>
- Thick-It<sup>®</sup>

## Tips for thickening fluids

- Some thickeners turn lumpy when added to hot fluids, so you may need to add it into cold liquid before you heat it up.
- Stir your liquid and thickener well so you don't get any lumps and to make sure it is the right consistency.
- When making large amounts of thick fluids, you can use a blender or food processor to blend the liquid and thickener together. Mix well after blending to break up air bubbles.
- Thick fluids may be made and stored in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours. Stir well and check if the thick fluid is still the right consistency before using.
- Some commercial thickeners take longer to thicken. Allow the thickened product to sit for the amount of time provided in the directions before adding more thickener.

### **Remember:**

- Drink at least 6-8 cups (1.5-2 L) of thick fluids, such as water, milk, and 100% juice every day.
- The following are signs and symptoms of being dehydrated or not getting enough fluids:
  - Thirst, headache, dry mouth and lips
  - Feeling dizzy, tired, or lightheaded
  - Passing small amounts of dark coloured, strong smelling urine
  - Constipation
  - Dry, sunken eyes
  - Confusion
  - Loss of appetite
  - Dry or fragile skin, wounds or skin breakdown
- Drink enough thick fluids throughout the day so that you don't get dehydrated.
- If you are having trouble drinking 6-8 cups (1.5-2 L) of thick fluids every day, talk to your swallowing team.

If you take pills or any fluid medicines, talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or your healthcare team about how to take them safely.