

Information on Liquid Thickener

Why do I need to use thickener?

For some people with swallowing difficulty, thin liquids, like water and juice, are sometimes the hardest consistencies to swallow safely. Because liquids flow into the throat so quickly, a person may not swallow fast enough. The result can be that some or all of the liquid travels down the airway (called aspiration) instead of down the food pipe into the stomach. This can cause coughing, choking, breathing problems, and even pneumonia. Most healthy people will cough in response to aspiration, but people with various illnesses do not cough when this occurs. This is called "silent aspiration." Regardless of the type of aspiration you may experience, it is important to follow the thickening guidelines to prevent further medical problems.

Liquid thickener is available to make liquids easier to swallow for those with difficulties. Thicker liquid may be easier to swallow because it travels more slowly down the throat. Several different liquid thickener products are available and can be stirred with any liquid to make it thicker and therefore safer to swallow. Your speech-language pathologist has evaluated your swallow and determined the consistency of liquid most safe for you:

_____ **Nectar (syrup) consistency**
_____ **Honey consistency**

How do I use it?

Specific instructions on how to use thickener are available on the product label. Based on the speech-language pathologist's recommendations, pour the appropriate amount of thickener into the liquid to create the desired consistency. Use a whisk, spoon, fork, or closed container to mix the thickener into the liquid. Allow powder based thickeners to sit for a few minutes before serving as they continue to thicken for several minutes after stirring.

Where can I purchase liquid thickener?

Liquid thickener is available over-the-counter from a pharmacy, including most CVS, Rite Aid, and Walmart pharmacies in the area. Any brand will work. Several common brands are:

- Thick It: a powder thickener that can be used with hot or cold liquids and contributes to calories.
- Nutra-Thick: a powder thickener that contains added vitamins and minerals.
- ThickenRight: similar to Thick-It
- Simply Thick: a gel based thickener that can be used with hot, cold, or carbonated beverages.

Powder thickener can also be ordered from Bruce's Medical Supply at 1-800-225-8446 or www.brucemedical.com.

Gel thickener can be ordered from Simply Thick at 1-800-205-7115 or www.simplythick.com.

With questions and concerns, please call: Speech-Language Pathologists at University of Virginia Health System at 434-924-9916