



## Thickened Liquids

### *For safe swallowing*

*This handout explains why your speech pathologist has recommended that you drink only thickened liquids. It includes instructions for thickening liquids, and a list of thin foods that you should not eat.*

### Why do liquids need to be thickened?

Your *speech pathologist* (swallowing specialist) has recommended that you drink only thickened liquids and avoid thin liquids. This is because:

- Thickened liquids go down your throat more slowly. They are usually easier to control while swallowing.
- Thin liquids are more easily *aspirated*. This means that they can more easily enter your airway during or after you swallow. When liquids are aspirated, it can lead to pneumonia.

Your speech pathologist has recommended either *nectar-thick* or *honey-thick* liquids, depending on which one will work best for your needs.

Here are your specific instructions:

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*Talk with your speech specialist if you have any questions about thickened liquids or swallowing issues.*

## How long will I need to thicken my liquids?

This depends on how you are progressing. Before you can drink thin liquids again, your speech pathologist may want you to have:

- Speech therapy to strengthen your swallow and help you swallow safely
- A *barium swallow study* to find out if you are still aspirating

## Barium Swallow Study

For this study, you will drink barium sulfate and then have an X-ray taken of your throat. This study can be done during your hospital stay or after you leave the hospital. We will give you more information about this study as needed.

## Where can I buy the thickener?

You can buy thickener in powdered form for mixing, or in pre-mixed bottles. You can find both forms at most drugstores and pharmacies.

Read more about thickeners and order products at these websites:

- [www.hormelhealthlabs.com](http://www.hormelhealthlabs.com)
- <http://thickit.com/products/beverages>
- [www.thickenupclear.com](http://www.thickenupclear.com)

## How do I use the thickening powder?

- **Follow the directions on the package of the thickener that you buy.** For most products, you will add the thickener to the liquid and stir for 20 seconds. Let it sit for about 2 minutes before drinking.
- **Thicken all beverages before drinking them.** This includes water, milk, Ensure, juice, soda, coffee, and tea. All liquids can be thickened, even carbonated beverages. But, these drinks will lose their carbonation when the thickener is added.

Only a few beverages are thick enough to drink without adding thickener. Two of these are tomato juice and eggnog.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Speech Pathology:  
206.598.4852, Monday  
through Saturday, 8 a.m. to  
4:30 p.m.

## What foods should I avoid?

Unless your speech pathologist says it is OK, do **not** eat or drink:

- **Broth-based soups.** Try cream-based soups and chowders instead. Or, you can add thickening powder to soups before eating.
- **Fresh or canned fruit.** Most fruits are juicy, and can cause problems with swallowing. A fresh banana is OK.
- **Ice cream and Jell-O.** When ice cream and Jello-O melt in your mouth they become a thin liquid. Ask your speech pathologist about other options.