

Why do I need thickened fluids?

What are thickened fluids?

Thickened fluids are specifically for people who have swallowing difficulty (dysphagia). They are made by adding a thickening powder to drinks so that drinks are not so thin and do not flow so quickly. Thickened fluids are substitutes for normal drinks.

Why are thickened fluids necessary?

Sometimes people with swallowing difficulty will cough and choke when they drink normal drinks. This is because the fluid is going down the wrong way. When this happens, the fluid enters the airway and passes down into the lungs. This is called **aspiration**. If too much fluid enters the lungs it can cause **aspiration pneumonia**, that is, a very serious chest infection.

Thickened fluids enable increased control of the drink, allowing the person more time to prepare to swallow. This reduces the risk of fluids going down the wrong way.

Who recommends thickened fluids?

Thickened fluids are recommended by a speech pathologist. The speech pathologist will assess the person with swallowing difficulty and determine if thickened fluids are required to prevent drinks going down the wrong way.

How much do I have to drink?

At least 6-8 cups of thickened fluids are required each day in order to prevent dehydration.

What thickened drinks can I have?

Any normal drinks can be thickened using a thickening powder. This includes cold drinks such as water, milk and juice, as well as, hot drinks such as tea, coffee and hot chocolate. Fizzy drinks and alcohol can also be thickened however, these can be a bit trickier and require more practice!

Alzheimer's Queensland

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Foods which resemble fluids such as soup, gravy and pouring cream *may* also need to be thickened to ensure they don't enter the airway.

When will I be able to have normal drinks again?

Swallowing difficulties are common in people with dementia, especially in the middle and late stages. Because dementia is a progressive disease, swallow function may not improve and thickened fluids may be required long term. Your speech pathologist will guide you as to why and when thickened fluids should be used.

For more information or to access services please contact the Speech Pathology department at Alzheimer's Queensland on 1800 639 331

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