

Guidance on the Prescribing of Oral Nutritional Supplements in Dysphagia

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The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI)

The IDDSI [framework](#)¹ provides a common terminology to describe drink thickness and contains of a continuum of 5 'Levels' ranging from 0 - 4. A Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) should assess and advise which IDDSI 'Level' is required for drinks based upon the patient's degree and type of dysphagia. **Note:** an IDDSI 'Level 0' fluid is classified as a 'Thin Fluid' and therefore 'Level 0' drinks do not require thickening.

Oral Nutritional Supplements (ONS) Prescribing Criteria

Dysphagia is a risk factor for malnutrition². ONS are commercial products that can help treat malnutrition and are available on prescription for those who **meet all** the following criteria³:

- 1) Patient has either a BMI <18.5kg/m² **OR** unintentional weight loss of >10% within 3-6 months **OR** initial BMI <20kg/m² **AND** weight loss >5% **OR** Eaten, or likely to eat little or nothing for >5 days
- 2) Malnutrition has been caused by an underlying disease
- 3) If realistic and safe, 'Food First' has been trialed for at least one month without success

Pre-Thickened ONS

'Pre-thickened' ONS are the only type of ONS that have been identified by the product's manufacturer as suitable for patients with dysphagia who have an active SLT recommendation for thickened fluids. 'Standard' ONS products are unsuitable whilst on thickened fluids as room temperature, flavour and product shelf-life can all influence their thickness. Moreover, adding thickener to 'standard' ONS products is not recommended as achieving a consistent final texture can be challenging⁴. **Important:** 'Pre-thickened' ONS should only be prescribed following the recommendation of a Dietitian or Speech and Language Therapist.

Pre-Thickened ONS on the Barnsley Joint Formulary

IDDSI Level	Product Name	Preparation	Energy (kcal)*	Protein (g)*	Cost (£)**	'Traffic Light' Classification
1	Slō Milkshake+ Level 1	Powder	402	27.6	0.95	All 'Amber G'
2	Slō Milkshake+ Level 2	Powder	334	24.2	0.85	
	Fresubin® Thickened Level 2	Liquid	300	20.0	2.35	
3	Slō Milkshake+ Level 3	Powder	334	24.2	0.85	
	Fresubin® Thickened Level 3	Liquid	300	20.0	2.35	
4	Slō Milkshake+ Level 4	Powder	266	20.8	0.95	

* Per bottle/sachet as per manufacturers website ** Price per bottle/sachet (MIMS Aug 2021)

Caution

Product packaging can look similar across product ranges. As such, patients and carers should be advised to double check the packaging before consuming the product, ensuring that the IDDSI 'Level' specified aligns with the IDDSI 'Level' recommended by a SLT.



Key Points:

- ONS should **ONLY** be prescribed in patients with dysphagia following the assessment and **recommendation of a Dietitian and/or Speech and Language Therapist**
- Patients who are recommended a pre-thickened ONS on prescription should meet ONS prescribing criteria
- 'Standard' ONS products are unsuitable for patients who require thickened fluids
- Pre-thickened ONS are the **ONLY** type of ONS deemed suitable by manufacturers for patients with dysphagia who have an active SLT recommendation for thickened fluids
- Unless contraindicated, a powdered, pre-thickened ONS product should be considered as the 'first-line' choice for dysphagic patients due to their superior cost effectiveness
- Patients and carers should be warned of the visual similarities between products. They should be advised to cross check the products packaging and ensure its IDDSI level aligns with the current IDDSI recommendation made by a SLT.

References

1. The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (2019) *The IDDSI Framework*. [Online] Available at: <https://iddsi.org/framework/>. Accessed 17th Aug 21.
2. McGinnis, C.M et al (2019) *Dysphagia: Interprofessional Management, Impact and Patient-Centred Care*. Nutr Clin Pract 34 (1) pp 80-95.
3. Ward, J and Lawson, K (2021) *Oral Nutritional Supplements (ONS) Prescribing Guidelines in Primary Care: Adults aged 18 years and over*. [Online] Available at: <https://best.barnsleyccg.nhs.uk>.
4. Roberts S, Smith A (2021) *Dysphagia in the Community*. [Online] Available at [Complete Nutrition Vol 21, No 4 June 2021 15-17](#). Accessed 29th Sept 21.