

DDD PREVENTION BULLETIN | THICKENERS



Thickeners are used for people with swallowing difficulties who often have issues with drinks entering the lungs when they swallow. Because of this, liquid thickeners can be prescribed by their doctor.

The three common consistencies of thickened liquids are: nectar-thick, honey-thick, and pudding-thick. Your doctor will determine what consistency your liquids should be, with recommendations from a Speech Language Pathologist.

As a general rule:



- **Nectar-thick** liquids are easily pourable and are comparable to tomato juice or heavy syrup found in canned fruit.



- **Honey-thick** liquids are slightly thicker, similar to honey or a milkshake. They pour more slowly than nectar-thick.



- **Pudding-thick** liquids hold their own shape. They do not pour in a stream, and must be eaten with a spoon. However, they should not be too thick; a spoon placed in the cup should fall to the side.

How to make a thickened-liquid:

The instructions here are for powdered thickeners, such as “Thick It.” (Gel thickeners, such as ‘Simply Thick,’ have different procedures).

You will need:

- **Drinking cup**
- **Measuring cup** (for measuring the drink)
- **Scoop or dry measuring spoon** (check package directions)
- **Spoon for stirring**



Follow the instructions on the label of the container.

1. Measure the drink, pour it into the drinking cup, and add the correct amount of thickener.
2. Stir with a spoon. Stop stirring as soon as the powder is absorbed. Too much stirring causes over-thickening.
3. Wait a full minute for the liquid to thicken completely. Avoid stirring it since this will change its consistency.
4. Always test the beverage before serving by taking a spoonful and letting it flow back into the cup.

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Testing Thickened Liquids

	Examples	Spoon Test	Fork Test
NECTAR	<p>Apricot Nectar Tomato Juice Eggnog</p> 	<p>Flows easily off the spoon. Leaves a thin coating on the spoon.</p> 	<p>Forms a thin web on the prongs of the fork. Flows through easily.</p> 
HONEY	<p>Liquid Honey Milkshake</p> 	<p>Flows off the spoon in drips rather than a smooth stream.</p> 	<p>Forms a thick web before falling through the prongs of the fork.</p> 
PUDDING	<p>This: </p> <p>Not this: </p>	<p>Does not pour. Falls off the spoon in a glob.</p> 	<p>Sits on the prongs of the fork.</p> 

Keep in mind:

- Become familiar with the different thickness levels so you can tell when a drink is too thick or thin. You can also purchase pre-thickened beverages. There are many manufacturers of thickening agents and pre-thickened drinks.
- No food should be thinner than beverages. Examples of foods that must be thickened: soup, milk in cereal, sauces, etc. Do not use packaged thickeners to thicken food. Instead, instant potato flakes, bread crumbs, or infant cereal work well and are more nutritious.
- Watch out for mixed-consistency foods, such as vegetable soup, fruit cocktail, meat sauces, etc. These can be difficult for individuals to chew and swallow, and the liquid may be too thin.
- Ice cream, sherbet, water ice, ice cubes, and Jell-O are considered thin liquids since they melt in the mouth to a thin consistency. Ask your doctor about whether the person is allowed these items.
- Be sure the individual drinks enough water to stay well-hydrated. Because of the taste and texture, some people may not reach their daily recommended fluid intake. Encourage everyone to drink 6 to 8 cups of fluid every day, unless the doctor restricts the fluid intake because of a medical condition.



If you have any questions regarding this material or would like to schedule a training, please contact The DDD Resource Team at ddd.resourceteam@dhs.nj.gov.