

Thickeners

Modifying Fluids

Regular fluids (eg water, milk) can be modified by adding thickening agents or thicker fluids. Thicker fluids (eg purees) can be thinned down by adding water or a similar liquid (eg thinning custard or yoghurt with milk, thinning apple puree with apple juice or water).

It is preferable to choose fluids that are naturally thicker, or thin down purees by adding water or another liquid rather than always using thickeners. There are also companies that produce specially thickened fluids for people with swallowing difficulties.

Thickeners

There are many commercially available products and specific liquid thickeners on the market. Many thickening agents are naturally occurring, being produced from vegetables, beans, grains, seeds and seaweeds. Commercially available thickeners are processed to make them dissolve into liquids easily and to thicken without needing to be cooked. These thickeners are generally based on modified food starch to maximize fluid availability.

The best way to mix thickening agents into liquids in general is to slowly add the fluid to the agent using a stab mixer or blender in a tall narrow container until you attain the right consistency. Various thickeners require more or less product to be added to reach the desired fluid consistency depending upon the type of liquid you are adding it to. Commercial thickeners generally have clear instructions as to how to use the specific product to achieve the various fluid thicknesses.

Fluid availability

Thickeners consist of modified food starches, vegetable gums or both. Once added the starches and or gums in the thickener absorb the fluid content and the food or drink thickens. For starch based thickeners, once these are ingested the normal digestive process reverses this action and the water content is then available as free fluid for absorption by the body. Vegetable gum based thickeners however don't release all the fluid so may slightly reduce water availability.



Thickening agents

Some of the thickening agents available include:

- Agar (made from seaweed)
- Baby rice (rice starch)
- Bread crumbs
- Carobel (carob gum)
- Cornflour (corn starch)
- Diafoods Thick it
- Gelatine
- Guarcol (guar gum)
- Instant Gel-it (pregelatinised and modified waxy maize starch)
- Karicare Thickener
- Keltrol (Xanthine Gum)
- Liquiset (pregelatinised tapioca starch)
- Mira – Gel
- Supercol - U (Guar gum)
- Sustagen (modified food starch)
- Pregel-N (pregelatinised unmodified wheat starch)
- ThickenUp

Various amounts of thickeners (depending upon the type and brand) may be required to bring fluids up to the correct consistency. ThickenUp is currently subsidised to allow families to purchase it at a reduced cost.

