



Prescribing Tip No. 200 Date: 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018

## Fluid Thickener for patients with Dysphagia – formulary recommendation

### What are thickeners used for?

Thickeners are used to thicken fluids and foods to achieve a desired consistency. They help to slow down the transit of food and fluids to allow more time to co-ordinate the swallowing process safely. Patients who have had a stroke or have a neuro-degenerative condition often present with signs of swallowing difficulties which can lead to aspiration pneumonia, chest infections or death through choking.

### When should thickeners be prescribed?

Thickeners are recommended by Speech and Language Therapists following patient assessment. There are 2 types of thickener available for use: xanthan gum-based and starch-based. Improvements have been made to ensure that thickened fluids are more palatable and that their appearance and solubility have improved. The xanthan gum-based thickeners result in a higher compliance rate and consequently improve hydration.<sup>1</sup> (NHS PresQIPP, 2015).

### Which Thickener?

- **Thick and Easy CLEAR is now the first choice thickener in Lancashire NHS Trust for most patients. It is more cost effective and more palatable for patients (it is made from xanthan gum). It does not thin in the mouth or thicken when standing.**
- **NB: Thick and Easy CLEAR is xanthan gum based and very different from Thick and Easy (starch-based).**
- **If one thickener is used across the CCG, care homes would find it easier to use resulting in fewer errors being made. Different brands of thickeners use different numbers of scoops for each stage. Always read the directions on the tin.**
- **Training for staff in care homes in how to mix Thick and Easy CLEAR will be available.**

### Fluid Consistency

**The amount of thickener needed for each patient will vary dependent on how much fluid the patient takes and the required consistency needed.**

Fluid consistency is usually recommended by Speech and Language Therapists in the following stages:

- Stage 1      Syrup            Coats a spoon and pours like single cream
- Stage 2      Custard            Can be sipped from a cup but not a straw
- Stage 3      Pudding            Needs to be taken with a spoon

Monthly prescription amount:

A patient drinking 1500 ml per day will require the following number of tubs of **Thick and Easy CLEAR** (126g) per month:

- Stage 1 = 5
- Stage 2 = 9
- Stage 3 = 14

**Check stocks before ordering new supplies to reduce overstocking and waste.**

### Medications

- Any drinks given with oral medication will need to be thickened.
- Medication in liquid form may also need to be thickened to the correct consistency. However thickening a medication may affect how the medication works. Seek pharmacy advice to ensure this is appropriate.

### Contact Numbers

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