

Prescribing tip for actioning by  
practice



**Appropriate Prescribing of Thickener for Patients with Dysphagia and Certain Medications**

**When should thickeners be prescribed?**

Thickeners are recommended by Speech and Language Therapists following patient assessment. There are two 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.

**Which Thickener?**

**Thick and Easy CLEAR** is now the first-choice thickener in Lancashire for most patients. It is more cost effective and more palatable for patients. It does not thin in the mouth or thicken when standing.

Thick and Easy CLEAR is **xanthan gum-based** which is very different from the **starch-based** Thick and Easy.

**Issues to consider when mixing thickened fluids with medication.**

Thickened fluids may delay or reduce the absorption of medicines, particularly when very thick. This may be more problematic with xanthan gum-based than starch-based thickeners, but available data are limited. This is a complex area, but UK Medicines Information has produced two detailed documents:

- [Thickening agents and thickened fluids: do they interact with medicines?](#)
- [How can people who need thickened fluids take medicines?](#)

**Specific concern regarding macrogol laxatives and starch-based thickening agents:**

- The MHRA has issued a [recent drug safety update](#) stating **macrogol laxatives must not be mixed with starch-based thickening agents**, as macrogol opposes the thickening effect of the starch, resulting in a thin liquid. This interaction has been implicated in a patient death.
- However, **macrogol laxatives can be mixed with xanthan gum-based thickening agents** such as the formulary option Thick and Easy CLEAR.

**Practices are advised to run searches to identify any patients who are currently prescribed a macrogol laxative in combination with a starch-based thickener following this recent MHRA update.**

To contact the Medicines Optimisation Team please phone 01772 214302

If you have any suggestions for future topics to cover in our prescribing tips please contact [Nicola.schaffel@nhs.net](mailto:Nicola.schaffel@nhs.net)