

Oral Nutritional Supplements (ONS) are products that may be prescribed for people who are unable to meet their nutritional requirements through diet alone. They come in various flavours and forms such as powders, ready-to-drink bottles or desserts. This leaflet gives advice on how to use ONS appropriately. Please ask your Dietitian or Doctor if you need any further information, including 'Food First' resources.

Why have I been prescribed ONS?

You may have lost weight unintentionally or be classified as underweight so could be at risk of malnutrition. ONS are also prescribed for conditions such as dysphagia (swallowing difficulties), malabsorptive conditions e.g. gastrointestinal diseases, disease-related malnutrition and others. ONS are normally prescribed for a short time to help you meet your nutrition and fluid requirements and/or to support weight gain, or to prevent further weight loss. Food first interventions should be tried beforehand.



How do I take ONS?



ONS are most effective in addition to a '**Food First**' approach. This means eating a **fortified diet** and having **high energy drinks and snacks** alongside the supplements. **Do not use the ONS as a substitute for meals** (please ask your Doctor or Dietitian for food fortification and fortified drinks [resources](#) if you have not already been given them).

Try to **have ONS between meals** (e.g. mid-morning/mid-afternoon or before bed) or sip them 'little and often' throughout the day (most ONS need to be consumed within 4 hours of being out of the fridge, but they can be stored for up to 24 hours in the fridge once opened).



A prescription is usually two ONS a day (approx. 600-800kcal). Less than this is unlikely to have a significant effect on your weight. Despite this, always take the dose recommended by your healthcare professional as some ONS may be 'once daily'.

ALLERGEN



Use ONS within the use-by date and **check the ingredients for allergens**. Most ONS are not suitable for vegans as they are milk-based. Speak to a Dietitian if you need an alternative.

If you struggle to drink your ONS, **speak to your Dietitian about recipes or tips** e.g. making the ONS into a smoothie, jelly or adding to soup or a dessert. Different flavours and forms can also be tried if you cannot tolerate your ONS. If you have been prescribed a powdered milkshake ONS, always follow the instructions on the packet and use whole milk (blue top) unless advised otherwise.



Store ONS in a cool, dry place. Most ONS taste best chilled, however **always follow the product instructions** or your Dietitian's advice (as some pre-thickened ONS should be stored at room temperature to avoid them thickening further in the fridge).

If you have difficulty swallowing, ask your doctor to refer you to a speech and language therapist (SALT) for assessment. If your swallow has deteriorated and you now require thicker fluids, notify your Doctor or Dietitian, as your ONS may need to be changed to a suitable alternative. Pre-thickened or naturally-thick ONS are available for patients with swallowing difficulties.

When should I stop ONS/will my ONS be stopped?

If **a)** the agreed goals are met, **b)** you no longer meet prescribing criteria, **c)** the ONS are not having a beneficial effect or **d)** you no longer tolerate them. **Please let your GP or Dietitian know if you are not taking your ONS immediately, to avoid wastage and unnecessary prescribing costs.**



Did you know? Most patients find homemade drinks more palatable during taste tests, compared to prescribed ONS. **Have you tried our tasty, fortified drinks recipes?** Ask for leaflets from your Doctor or Dietitian, or access them here electronically: [milky](#), [fruity](#) and [dairy-free](#) recipes.