



Reimbursement of Standard Oral Nutritional Supplements (ONS) Questions and Answers for Healthcare Professionals

1) What are oral nutritional supplements and what are they used for?

Oral nutritional supplements (ONS) are legally defined as food for special medical purposes (FSMPs) to be used under medical supervision. They are commercially manufactured liquid, powdered and semi-solid food products with varying nutritional content. ONS are an effective evidence-based treatment for disease-related malnutrition.

Standard ONS are defined as either powdered or ready-made multi-nutrient (complete or incomplete) products providing a mix of macronutrients and micronutrients.

The nutrition value is 1 - 2.4 kcals per ml and less than 20% of the energy value is provided by protein.

Best practice indicates that ONS should not be considered an alternative to, or replacement for food except in specific clinical situations under the supervision of a registered dietitian.

Patients who require nutrition support should always be given dietary advice in conjunction with an ONS prescription. Patient dietary resources such as a high-protein, high-calorie diet sheet and a cookbook 'Making the most of every bite' are available at www.hse.ie/nutritionsupports.

2) What standard ONS are recommended in the *HSE First-Line Prescribing List for Adults Living in the Community*?

The *HSE First-line Prescribing List* recommends specific powdered ONS and compact & mini-drink sip feeds (**List A**). These were selected based on clinical evidence, patient factors, and cost.

Standard ONS on List A do not require prior reimbursement approval for dispensing on the Community Drug Schemes.

The HSE updated the *First-line Prescribing List* and *Prescribing Pathway for the Initiation and Renewal of Standard ONS for Adults Living in the Community* in April 2019. This guidance promotes best practice and supports appropriate initiation and renewal of ONS prescriptions (available at www.hse.ie/nutritionsupports).

3) What ONS products does the new online reimbursement application system relate to?

This new online reimbursement application system relates to standard ONS products included on **List B**. These are standard ONS which were not identified as first-line in the Prescribing List.

4) What ONS products are not affected by the new online reimbursement application system?

The following ONS products are not affected and do not require online reimbursement approval:

- ONS products on **List A**.
- Disease-specific ONS (e.g. renal-, diabetic-, oncology- and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease-specific sip feeds),
- High protein sip feeds,
- Pre-thickened sip feeds,
- Modular (single nutrient) ONS,
- Paediatric sip feeds, and
- Thickeners.

5) If none of the standard ONS on List A are clinically appropriate for a patient, can I prescribe from List B for patients on the Community Drug Schemes?

Yes. Reimbursement of standard ONS on **List B** will be approved based on a review of the information provided by the patient's GP, hospital dietitian or medical team, or community dietitian. ONS should only be prescribed for patients who have a clinical indication. Therefore, the application should include the clinical rationale and evidence to support the prescribing decision.

6) If a patient is approved for reimbursement of a standard ONS on List B, how long will this approval last?

Once reimbursement is authorised, the ONS will be reimbursed for a period of up to six months from the date of approval. After this time, a further application can be submitted if the patient requires on going treatment. Please note that reimbursement approval does not replace the normal requirement for prescriptions. Therefore, monthly prescriptions will still be required.

7) How does a GP submit an application for reimbursement approval of standard ONS on List B to the Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS)?

GPs can apply through the **Special Drug Request** section on their **Doctor Application Suite (Claiming > Special Drug Request)**.

Reimbursement applications for standard ONS on **List B** must be submitted through the online system.

8) Can other healthcare professionals submit an application for reimbursement approval of standard ONS on List B to the PCRS?

Yes, HSE dietitians and hospital clinicians can also apply. A link to the application system is available on the PCRS website (www.pcrs.ie > **Online Services > Services for Hospitals Only**).

Note: HSE dietitians and hospital clinicians must be user-registered with the PCRS to apply.

The **Special Drug Request User Registration Form** is available on the PCRS website (www.pcrs.ie > **Online Services > Services for Hospitals Only**). Completed registration forms can be submitted to cert.info@hse.ie. Once authorised, the user will be issued with a username and password.

9) If a standard ONS is required on discharge from hospital or in the hospital outpatient setting, what steps are required for reimbursement approval?

- Where a standard ONS included on **List A** is prescribed on discharge, there is no need to apply online for reimbursement approval.
- Clinicians working in an acute hospital setting are encouraged to give due consideration to the suitability of ONS on **List A** (which do not require an online application), before prescribing a standard ONS on **List B**.
- If an individual patient (irrespective of age) clinically requires a product on **List B**, there is an opportunity for a hospital dietitian or member of the medical team to apply for reimbursement approval, setting out the exceptional circumstances that arise for that patient. The acute clinician should also notify the community prescriber of the clinical indication, recommended product, dose and duration.

10) If a standard ONS on List B is prescribed in the community setting, what steps are required for reimbursement approval?

Where a standard ONS on **List B** has been prescribed in the community setting, due consideration should now be given to the suitability of ONS on **List A**.

If an individual patient (irrespective of age) clinically requires a product on **List B**, the patient's GP or HSE community dietitian can apply for reimbursement approval through the online reimbursement application system. Information from other relevant healthcare professionals (e.g. dietitians, speech and language therapists) who influence the prescribing decision can be included or uploaded to support the application.

11) If a patient is using a standard ONS on List B for bolus feeding via an enteral feeding tube, what steps are required for reimbursement approval?

If a patient is using a standard ONS on **List B** for bolus feeding via an enteral feeding tube e.g. nasogastric, naso-jejunal, gastrostomy or jejunostomy, an online application is required. Reimbursement will be approved on receipt of an online application identifying enteral tube feeding as the prescribing indication.

Prescriptions for patients using standard ONS via an enteral feeding tube should not be adjusted without consultation with a registered dietitian.

12) How can I check if a patient has been approved for reimbursement of standard ONS on List B under the Community Drug Schemes?

Approval for reimbursement of standard ONS on **List B** can be confirmed by the pharmacist or GP through the **Eligibility Confirmation** section on the:

- **Pharmacy Application Suite (Eligibility Confirmation > Secure Scheme Checker)** or
- **Doctor Application Suite (Panel Management > Eligibility Confirmation > Secure Scheme Checker).**

Reimbursement approvals can be found under **Patient Specific Arrangements**.

13) Will List A and List B be updated on a regular basis?

Yes, **List A** and **List B** will be updated as new products are added to the PCRS list of reimbursable items. Updated lists will be available on www.hse.ie/yourmedicines.

14) What is the appeals process if an application for a standard ONS product on List B is not approved?

It is possible to appeal a negative reimbursement decision from the online application process. Appeals must be made by the patient's GP, hospital dietitian/medical team or HSE community dietitian. Sufficient information to support the clinical need for reimbursement of the individual ONS product must be outlined.

Appeals must be sent by email to the PCRS at pcrs.ons@hse.ie and must include the reference number of the initial online application. A secure email address to communicate clinical information must be used, for example; healthmail secure clinical email (www.healthmail.ie).

All communication must be online to provide an auditable record of applications and appeals where they arise.

An email outlining the final reimbursement decision will be communicated back to the GP, hospital dietitian/medical team or community dietitian who made the appeal.

15) Where can I access more information to support people who are identified as at risk of malnutrition or malnourished?

An online toolkit to support the first-line management of malnutrition in the community is available at www.hse.ie/nutritionsupports.

The toolkit includes the Standard ONS Prescribing Pathway and List, high- protein high-calorie dietary advice resources, information on using ONS for patients and carers, and other condition-specific information.