



How to use oral nutritional supplements

A guide for adult patients,
their carers and families

What is this leaflet about?

Your doctor, or registered nurse prescriber, has prescribed an oral nutritional supplement for you to help increase your calorie and protein intake. Calories in food are what give your body energy. Protein is known as the 'building block' of the body, helping it to build, repair and maintain strength.

If you are prescribed an oral nutritional supplement, you should take it along with your usual diet not instead of your usual diet. You may need it if you are ill and eating less than usual, or have lost weight without intending to.

This leaflet tells you how to take oral nutritional supplements.

What are oral nutritional supplements?

Oral nutritional supplements are specially-made food products with energy, protein and other nutrients. They are also called 'sip feeds'. They can be prescribed by doctors and registered nurse prescribers. It is often a dietitian who recommends that oral nutritional supplements are prescribed.

There are different types of oral nutritional supplements available. These include:

- powdered oral nutritional supplements;
- ready-made milk-based 'sip feeds'; and
- juice-style 'sip feeds'.

If you have a difficulty swallowing, you might be prescribed semi-solid or pudding-type oral nutritional supplements.

Your doctor, nurse or dietitian will help you to decide which one is best for you.

Before you receive your prescription, your doctor, nurse or dietitian should explain:

- why you need to take oral nutritional supplements;
- how much to take; and
- for how long you need to take them.

Why have I been prescribed an oral nutritional supplement?

There are several reasons why you may be prescribed an oral nutritional supplement. For example, you might:

- find it a struggle to eat normal foods due to illness;
- have difficulty swallowing normal foods due to illness;



- have lost weight through illness, medical treatment or surgery; and
- have lost weight without intending to.

Should I eat normally when taking an oral nutritional supplement?

Yes. It is very important that you try to eat regular small meals and snacks.

You should take oral nutritional supplements as well as normal foods, not as a replacement for normal foods.

Your doctor, nurse or dietitian can give you advice to help you increase the amount of calories and protein in your regular diet.

You can also find helpful dietary information in the 'Making the most of every bite' leaflet and recipe book, available at www.hse.ie/nutritionsupports.



When do I take oral nutritional supplements?

You should take them between or after meals, or before bedtime. You should not take them with a meal, or just before a meal, because they may fill you up and reduce the amount of normal food you can manage to eat.

Your doctor, nurse or dietitian will advise you how many to take each day.

How do I store oral nutritional supplements?

You should store oral nutritional supplements in a cool dry place before opening.

Most ready-made supplements taste nicer chilled, so it is useful to keep small amounts in the fridge.

Always check the best-before date on the container before opening it. Once you have opened the oral nutritional supplement or made it up with milk, you should keep it in the fridge and throw it away if you haven't used it within 24 hours.

Keep oral nutritional supplements out of the reach of children. You should not give oral nutritional supplements to anyone except the person who has been prescribed them.

How long will I need to take oral nutritional supplements for?

Your doctor, nurse or dietitian will decide how long you need to take the supplements for.

In most cases you only need them while you are having difficulties eating a normal diet or until you have gained weight.

Many patients require supplements for about 2-3 months. However, some patients may require them for shorter or longer.

Your doctor, nurse or dietitian will review your progress regularly while you are taking oral nutritional supplements.

How will I be monitored while taking oral nutritional supplements?

Your healthcare professional will monitor your progress on a regular basis. They will:

- check your weight;
- ask questions about what you are eating; and
- ask about how many of the supplements you are taking.

Regular reviews are important to make sure:

- you are getting the maximum benefit from the supplements; and
- that you only take them for as long as you need them.

