



A guide to the use of Oral Nutritional Supplements

Oral Nutritional Supplements

You have been advised by your healthcare professional (doctor, nurse or dietitian) to take an oral nutritional supplement. This means that you may have lost weight, have a poor appetite or are not able to eat enough food. This leaflet provides information on what oral nutritional supplements are and how they work. Some commonly asked questions are answered below.

What are oral nutritional supplements?

Oral nutritional supplements have been specially designed to provide adequate energy, protein, vitamins and minerals. They are designed to provide a balance of nutrients. Oral nutritional supplements are prescribed by a doctor when people need to increase their nutritional intake or for medical reasons. There are many types of oral nutritional supplements available including:

- Milkshake or yoghurt style supplements
- Pudding style desserts
- Juice based supplements
- Savoury style supplements that can be heated gently to make a nourishing soup
- Powders and liquids can be added to foods to make the foods more nourishing

A wide variety of styles and flavours are available which means that most people can find at least one that they like. Oral nutritional supplements are covered by the medical card, long term illness and drug payment scheme.



Why have I been prescribed an oral nutritional supplement?

There are several reasons why you may be prescribed a nutritional supplement.

1. You may be finding it a struggle to eat normal foods at the moment or have difficulty swallowing normal foods
2. You may be unable to eat enough food to meet your body's needs
3. You may have an illness which means you need extra calories and protein
4. You may have lost weight through illness or as a result of treatment or an operation
5. Your child may not be growing adequately
6. You may be prescribed a special liquid diet for a medical reason

Before you receive your prescription, your doctor, dietitian or nurse will explain why you need to take nutritional supplements. If in doubt, ask a healthcare professional.

Should I eat my normal food when I am taking oral nutritional supplement?

These products are only meant to 'compliment' your diet, not replace your ordinary food (with the exception of where you may have been told to consume a special liquid diet only). You should continue to keep eating as much of your regular meals as possible, and focus on fortifying your normal diet to increase its nutritional content. Oral nutritional supplements can be used as a 'top up' between meals. Your doctor, dietitian or nurse will advise you on what supplement would suit you best.

When do I take them?

There is no specific time that is best for taking nutritional supplements and you can decide the timing that suits you best. Try to take the full amount that has been prescribed for you.

Most people find it best to take their nutritional supplement between mealtimes so they do not affect your appetite for meals. Some people prefer to sip the supplements throughout the day. Others take their nutritional supplement as a bedtime snack. Unless you have been advised to add nutritional supplements to your meals, you should avoid taking them with or just before meals. They can be filling and may reduce the amount of normal food you can manage, if taken too close to meal times.



Where do I store them?

Oral nutritional supplements should be stored in a cool dry place before opening. Most taste better chilled so it is useful to keep small amounts in the fridge. Some can be frozen and served as a dessert. Check the 'best before' dates before opening. Once opened, they must be kept in the fridge and thrown away if not used within 24 hours.

Keep out of reach of children.

Do not give to anyone except the person who has been prescribed them.

How long will I need to take them for?

Your dietitian or doctor will decide how long you need to take nutritional supplements for. In most cases you only need them while you are having difficulties with a normal diet or until you have gained a certain amount of weight.

Your dietitian or doctor will set out goals in your treatment which will correspond to your treatment with oral nutritional supplements.

What can I do to make my oral nutritional supplements more appealing?

-Try a new flavour! There are many different flavours available – ask your dietitian/doctor/nurse about them.

-Try adding them to foods – ask for a list of foods that these products can be added to

Milkshake/ yoghurt style oral nutritional supplements:

- freeze them into ice pops
- warm gently to make a nourishing hot drink (but never boil)
- add neutral flavour to soups, custard, jelly or milk based desserts
- mix with milk and/or ice cream

Juice style oral nutritional supplements:



- these can also be frozen and made into ice pops
- make into jelly by replacing some of the water in the recipe with the nutritional supplement
- mix with water/mineral/fizzy drinks

What can I do if I have any problems with my oral nutritional supplements?

If for any reason you have problems with your oral nutritional supplements, e.g. you can't take them as prescribed or you dislike them, contact the doctor who prescribed them for you as soon as possible.

For ideas on how to make foods more nourishing, and some quick and easy meal ideas see INDI Factsheet called "Food Fortification" available from www.indi.ie

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