



# How to use oral nutritional supplements

## What is this leaflet about?

Your doctor, or other registered 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. This leaflet tells you more about the supplements and how to take them.



## 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 prescribers, often on the recommendation of a dietitian. There are different types available including:

- powdered oral nutritional supplements that are usually made up with milk;
- ready-made milk-based 'sip feeds';
- juice-style 'sip feeds'; and
- 'compact-style sip feeds'.

If you have a difficulty swallowing, you might be prescribed semi-solid or pudding-type oral nutritional supplements. Your prescriber or dietitian will help you to decide which one is best for you and they 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; or
- have unintentionally lost weight.

## 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 as well as the oral nutritional supplements. Your doctor, nurse or dietitian can give you advice to help you increase the amount of calories and protein in your regular diet. This leaflet also provides information for [Making the most of your food - advice for community settings and - Watch out for weight loss advice | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](#)

## When do I take oral nutritional supplements?

They are best taken 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.

Unfinished oral nutritional supplements should keep it in the fridge to take later but should be thrown 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 the oral nutritional supplements?

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



## How should I reorder my oral nutritional supplements?

- Reorder from your doctor as for all prescription items
- Always check your stock before reordering
- Only tick or request the oral nutritional supplements you will run low on in the next month
- If your treatment is short term, only order a small amount to reduce waste
- Tell your community pharmacist about the flavours you like
- Please tell your community pharmacist if you have enough stock, especially if they order prescriptions on your behalf.

## Who do I contact if I have questions about my oral nutritional supplements?

Speak to your doctor or pharmacist unless the dietitian has given you their contact details.

This leaflet was adapted for use in HSCNI by a multi-disciplinary working group, with permission from the HSE Ireland.