

Nutrition Drinks (known as Oral Nutritional Supplements) Advice for patients and carers

The importance of good nutrition

Food and water are essential as they give us the energy (calories) and nutrients to go about our day to day activities and keep our bodies working normally. If you are unwell or recovering from an illness, you may need more food than usual but your appetite might be poor and you could struggle to eat and drink enough. The effects of illness and medication may also cause taste changes or the feeling of getting full more quickly. Your Dietitian, Nurse or Doctor has prescribed oral nutritional supplements (nutrition drinks) in addition to your usual diet as they think you require extra nutrition to meet your energy and nutrient needs. Ideas on how to boost your usual diet are given in the accompanying information sheet 'Your Guide to Making the Most of your Food'.

What are oral nutritional supplements?

Oral nutritional supplements are specially formulated foods that contain energy, protein, vitamins and minerals. They contain lots of nutrition in a small quantity of drink or dessert, so people who may not be able to eat enough food get the nutrition they need. Oral nutritional supplements could help you maintain your body weight or regain weight you may have lost recently. They may also help you cope better with an illness, help you tolerate therapy or treatments or help you to recover more quickly.

How many oral nutritional supplements should I take and how do I take them?

- Your Dietitian, Nurse or Doctor will explain how many oral nutritional supplements you should take to meet your needs or medical condition (this will often be a prescription of 2-3 a day but this will depend on circumstances).
- Oral nutritional supplements will help improve your dietary intake and it is important that you take the recommended dose each day. In general people take oral nutritional supplements when they most feel like drinking or eating them.
- This may be between meals, like a snack, first thing in the morning or before bed time. Others find that taking small amounts of their supplements regularly throughout the day helps. Remember, oral nutritional supplements are versatile - you could incorporate them into one of your favourite recipes too (see question on next page - 'Can I use oral nutritional supplements in cooking?').
- Most oral nutritional supplements taste best when served chilled (except soup/savoury style which are most often served warm).
- You should shake the oral nutritional supplement well before opening.
- You can drink most oral nutritional supplements straight from the bottle using a straw if provided or you can pour it into a glass or cup if you prefer.
- It is important to take the supplements you have been prescribed.

Getting the most from oral nutritional supplements

Everybody is different and for this reason there are many different types of oral nutritional supplements available to choose from.

Style: There is a comprehensive range of oral nutritional supplements available in the style of milkshakes, juices, yogurts, desserts and soups.

Size: Some people may find it difficult to finish large volumes of oral nutritional supplement drinks. Luckily, oral nutritional supplements come in a range of sizes (volumes) offering similar nutritional content, i.e. 220ml, 200ml and 125ml.

Flavour: There are lots of flavours available to try so you don't have to just pick one. Speak to your Dietitian, Pharmacist, Nurse or Doctor about the different flavours available. Starter variety packs are also available (ask your healthcare professional for more information).

Are oral nutritional supplements suitable for patients with diabetes?

Most oral nutritional supplements would be suitable for people with diabetes. However, it is recommended to ask your Dietitian, Pharmacist, Diabetes Nurse Specialist or Doctor if you need further advice.

Can I heat oral nutritional supplements?

Yes, some people may prefer to take oral nutritional supplements warm, especially if they want to incorporate certain flavours into soups, hot drinks or custard. For example, oral nutritional supplements can be gently warmed to make hot chocolate. Decant the oral nutritional supplements into a pan and warm through gently without boiling as boiling may alter the taste and damage the sensitive vitamins.

Can I freeze oral nutritional supplements?

Yes, decant the oral nutritional supplements into a freezer safe container or ice cube tray and freeze. You can also freeze oral nutritional supplements in ice lolly moulds. Freezing is particularly suitable for juice style oral nutritional supplements.

Can I use oral nutritional supplements in cooking?

Yes, some people may prefer to take oral nutritional supplements that have been incorporated into foods and drinks. Oral nutritional supplements can be used to fortify a variety of meals, desserts and drinks. You can replace milk in sauces, cakes, desserts and drinks with a milkshake style oral nutritional supplement. Recipe books are often available from the companies that produce the supplements.

How should I store oral nutritional supplements?

If they are unopened they can be stored in a cupboard out of sunlight. Once opened they should be stored in the refrigerator – check the pack for instructions to see how long they can be stored in the refrigerator.

NB: if you follow a special diet (e.g. gluten-free, halal, vegetarian) please seek further medical/dietetic advice on the suitability of the products.



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For further information on malnutrition please visit:
www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk

Developed by a multi-professional group of healthcare professionals