

Suggested 7 Steps to Appropriate Prescribing of Adult Oral Nutritional Supplements (ONS)

See also 'Promoting Good Nutrition' (PGN) [regional guidance](#).

IMPORTANT: This guidance does not override the individual responsibility of health care professionals to consider individual patient needs. Consider underlying medical conditions (including end of life care), eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties (outside the remit of this guidance) and risk factors for disease, before offering food first advice or prescribing ONS.

Step 1: Identification of nutritional risk – nutritional screening as per PGN using MUST

(Exemptions from MUST: pregnancy, undergoing dialysis, receiving enteral feeds or parenteral nutrition, decompensated liver disease, patients in critical care units and patients on end-of-life palliative care pathway.)

| Low risk MUST Score = 0 | Medium risk MUST Score = 1 | High risk MUST Score ≥ 2 |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record MUST details Recommend a WELL BALANCED DIET | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record MUST details Follow steps 2-7 below Care homes to monitor intake for 3 days (on food record chart) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record MUST details Refer to dietitian (or implement local policy) Follow steps 2-7 below Care homes to monitor intake for 3 days (on food record chart) |



Step 2: Assess for and address underlying causes of malnutrition

Consider availability of adequate diet and identify any difficulties with reduced or altered food intake relating to:

- Ability to swallow or chew, ability to shop/cook, assistance required with feeding, dentition etc.
- Impact of medication on appetite or nutritional intake
- Physical symptoms (e.g. reduced mobility or balance, pain, GI symptoms, vomiting)
- Medical diagnosis (including cancer, mental health issues, e.g. depression, COPD), side effects of treatment and prognosis
- Environmental and social care issues including finance, substance abuse, inadequate support at home etc.

Consider solutions to these issues, e.g. onward referral to appropriate services or assessments.

People with eating, drinking and swallowing (dysphagia) difficulties *should be assessed by speech and language therapists. Thickeners/thickened ONS are outside the remit of this guidance.*

Step 3: Set Goals

Set and document realistic and measurable goals, outline aims to achieve these goals and identify the end point of treatment:

- Minimise losses, e.g. minimise weight loss during catabolism such as cancer
- Maintain nutritional status, e.g. prevent further weight loss, maintain BMI ≥20kg/m²
- Improve nutritional status, e.g. 0.5kg weight gain per week to achieve a target weight or BMI, evidence of wound healing
- Improve quality of life for those in the last few weeks of life

Step 4: Discuss 'Food First' Dietary Advice (*reinforce food fortification advice at each review*)

See 'Food First' advice leaflets for [community](#) and [care home](#) settings.

Promote and encourage the inclusion of:

- **one** pint of fortified milk per day (use with caution in CKD Stage 3 with hyperkalaemia and under guidance of dietitian in CKD Stage 4&5)
- **two** nourishing snacks per day
- **three** fortified meals per day
- **four** week review if MUST score of ≥ 2 , or 2-3 months for those with a MUST score of 1, as per PGN guidance

Step 5: Prescribe ONS

If food first dietary advice has been maximised for 4 weeks *and* it is not possible to meet nutritional requirements from food intake alone *and* there are clinical benefits and clear nutritional goals to work towards *and* patient's condition falls into one of the following ACBS categories:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| ▶ Short bowel syndrome | ▶ Disease related malnutrition |
| ▶ Following total gastrectomy | ▶ CAPD or haemodialysis |
| ▶ Intractable malabsorption | ▶ Dysphagia |
| ▶ Proven Inflammatory Bowel Disease | ▶ Pre-op preparation of undernourished patients |
| ▶ Bowel fistulae | |

then consider prescribing 2 x ONS per day (600 to 800 Kcals)

- Give directions for use, i.e. one sachet/bottle twice a day, between meals. **Do not advise 'as directed'**
- Prescribe a limited quantity initially (e.g. 7 day supply) to reduce wastage and no more than a month's duration for the subsequent prescriptions and reinforce food fortification advice
- For longer term treatment, as per dietetic recommendation, consider adding the review month and year to the dosage instructions and limiting the repeat period to 3 months
- Record the weight, MUST score, ACBS indication, goal and review plan in the patient's record

Step 6: Review need for ONS

Review period depends on clinical need, good practice suggests initial review after maximum one month then at least three monthly thereafter.

- Review weight and MUST score, to re-assess condition and continued need for ONS:
 - Has the underlying condition resolved or deteriorated?
 - Have the goals of treatment been met?
- Reinforce food first advice.
- Can the person safely make meals and nourishing drinks or someone is available to do so on their behalf? (consider suitability of a powdered product)
- Ascertain compliance and tolerance of present oral nutritional supplements.

Step 7: When to Discontinue ONS

- Goals have been met and individual is no longer malnourished
- Nutritional status has improved and the individual is back to an eating and drinking pattern which is sufficient to maintain weight (reinforce food fortification advice)
- The individual is clinically stable and any acute episode has abated
- No further clinical benefit will be realised and/or use may cause the patient anxiety or discomfort e.g. those that may be in the final days of life

N.B. Discontinue the ONS on the patient's medication list and document date, weight, MUST score and reason for stopping ONS.

Following discontinuation consider review after an appropriate period to ensure there is no reoccurrence of the precipitating problem or deterioration of nutritional status.

Adapted with the kind permission of Hertfordshire Medicines Management Committee

Oral Nutritional Supplements

General Notes

- **Products within the first line choices category are suitable for most people.**
 - Products within the other categories should only be considered where these products are not suitable and there is clinical justification for their use.
 - Some products should only be prescribed under the recommendation of a dietitian, or a health care professional with expertise in this area, see here for dietitian led products for reference. (add link)
- Products containing less than 1.5Kcal/ml (1-1.49Kcal/ml e.g. Ensure Liquid and Fresubin Original) should not be prescribed. Not all ONS are suitable for vegans and many are not gluten/lactose free, or suitable for patients with specific food allergies. Refer to individual product data sheets for product details for this information.
- Use with caution in CKD Stage 3 patients with hyperkalaemia – use under guidance of dietitian in CKD stage 4 & 5.

Practical Information for Prescribers in Primary Care

- ONS products need to be taken at least twice per day to provide a sufficient nutritional boost.
- Ensure directions for use are clear, e.g. one sachet twice a day between meals.
- Prescribe a limited quantity initially (7 day supply) to reduce wastage and no more than a month's duration for subsequent prescriptions.
- Review period depends on clinical need, good practice suggests initial review after maximum one month then at least three monthly thereafter.
- Reinforce food fortification advice (link) during each review.

Powdered ONS – Cost Effective Choice for Primary Care

Powdered ONS products are more than 50% cheaper than ready-made ONS and are a cost effective option in primary care. However they are NOT SUITABLE FOR ALL PATIENTS, the following should be considered for each individual patient prior to prescribing:

- Ability to make up shakes? (either patient themselves or carer)
- Access to fridge, fresh milk and adequate storage for both milk and prepared product?
- Ability to adhere to the requirements for safe handling of a fresh milk product?

First Line

Powdered ONS >1.5 kcal/ ml (make up with 200ml whole milk)

| | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|--------------|--------------------|--|----------------------------------|--|
| First choice | Aymes® Shake | 57g sachet Available as 1 box of 7 x 57g sachets of one flavour | 388 kcal 16g protein | Banana, Chicken, Chocolate, Neutral, Strawberry, Vanilla |
| | Ensure® Shake | 57g sachet Available as 1 box of 7 x 57g sachets of one flavour | 389 kcal 17g protein | Banana, chocolate, strawberry, vanilla |
| | Foodlink® Complete | 57g sachet Available as 1 box of 7x57g sachets of one flavour | 385 kcal 19g protein | Banana, Chocolate, Strawberry, Natural |

Ready Made ONS 1.5Kcal/ml Milkshake Style

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content | Flavours |
|---------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------|---|
| If powdered ONS is not suitable | Aymes® Complete* <i>*cost effective choice</i> | 200ml bottle Available as 1 pack of 4x200ml in one flavour | 300 kcal 12g protein | Banana, Chocolate, Strawberry, Vanilla |
| | Ensure® Plus milkshake style | 220ml bottle | 330 kcal 14g protein | Banana, Chocolate, Coffee, Fruits of the Forest, Neutral, Orange, Peach, Raspberry, Strawberry, Vanilla |
| | Fortisip® Bottle | 200ml bottle | 300kcal 12g protein | Banana, Chocolate, Neutral, Orange, Strawberry, Caramel, Tropical, Vanilla |

Juice style and Savoury ONS

Prescribing notes

- Consider the following if sweet or milk based alternatives are disliked.
- Please note 'Foodlink Complete' can also be mixed with fruit juices or water to make a juice style ONS. If reconstituting 'Foodlink Complete' using alternative liquids note that the nutritional profile will vary.
- Juice style supplements are not recommended as first line product for those with diabetes. Where required they should be used with caution.
- Suitable for those who do not like milky products but these are **NOT MILK FREE**.
- Note protein content is lower than milkshake style products.

Powdered ONS 1.5kcal/ml Savoury (make up with 200ml hot water)

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| First choice | Aymes ActaSolve Savoury [®] | 57g sachet Available as 1 box of 7 x 57g sachets of one flavour | 251 kcal 9g protein | Chicken, Vegetable |

Ready Made ONS 1.5kcal/ml Juice style

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|---------------------------------|--|--------------|----------------------------------|--|
| If powdered ONS is not suitable | AltraJuce ^{®*} <i>*cost effective choice</i> | 200ml bottle | 300 kcal 7.8g protein | Apple, Black currant, Strawberry, Orange |
| | Ensure [®] plus juce | 220ml bottle | 330 kcal 11g protein | Apple, Fruit Punch, Lemon-Lime, Orange, Peach, Strawberry |
| | Fortijuce [®] | 200ml bottle | 300kcal 8g protein | Apple, Black currant, Forest Fruits, Lemon, Orange, Strawberry, Tropical |

Compact ONS

Prescribing notes

- Compact style ONS should not be prescribed without consideration of the patient's overall fluid balance and risk of dehydration. See alternative choices above.(add link)
- Suitable for those requiring low volume.
- Suitable for those with early satiety.

Powdered ONS 2.4Kcal/ml Compact Milkshake Style (make up with 100ml whole milk)

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|------------------|---|--|----------------------------------|---|
| First Choice | Aymes [®] Shake Compact | 57g sachet Available as 1 box of 7 x 57g sachets of one flavour | 315-320 kcal 15g protein | Banana, chocolate, Strawberry, Vanilla, Neutral |
| | Foodlink [®] Complete Compact [®] | 57g sachet Available as 1 box of 7 x 57g sachets of one flavour | 318 kcal 15g protein | Natural, Strawberry, Vanilla, Chocolate, Banana |

Ready Made ONS 2.4kcal/ml Compact Milkshake style

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|
| If powdered ONS not suitable | Altraplen [®] Compact | 125ml bottle Available as pack of 4x125ml in one flavour | 300 kcal 12g protein | Vanilla, Strawberry, Banana, Hazel Chocolate |
| | Ensure [®] Compact | 125ml bottle | 300 kcal 13g protein | Banana, Strawberry, Vanilla |
| | Fortisip [®] Compact | 125ml bottle | 300 kcal 12g protein | Apricot, Banana, Chocolate, Forest Fruit, Mocha, Neutral, Strawberry, Vanilla. |

Dietitian Led Products

These products should only be prescribed under the recommendation of a dietitian, or a health care professional with expertise in this area. See Oral Nutritional Supplements ([link](#)) to view standard first and second line choices.

Products within the first line choices category are suitable for most people.

Products within the other categories should only be considered where these products are not suitable and there is clinical justification for their use.

Fibre containing ONS

- Fibre containing products are not first line options.
- Use of a fibre containing product must meet the ACBS criteria and must not be prescribed when the criteria is not met
- Use of fibre containing ONS should be part of a constipation management plan including assessment of dietary fibre and fluid intake.

Powdered ONS 1.5kcal/ml with Fibre

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|---|
| First choice | Foodlink complete with fibre® | 66g sachet Available as 1 box of 7 x 66g sachets of one flavour | 397 kcal 13 g protein 4.5g fibre | Strawberry, Chocolate, Banana, Natural, Vanilla |

Ready Made ONS 1.5Kcal/ml Milkshake Style with Fibre

| Formulary Choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| If powdered ONS is not suitable | Ensure® Plus Fibre | 200ml bottle | 310 kcal 13g protein 5g fibre | Banana, Chocolate, Raspberry, Strawberry, Vanilla |

Ready Made ONS 2.4kcal/ml Compact Milkshake Style with Fibre

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| If powdered ONS not suitable | Fortisip® compact fibre | 125ml bottle | 300 kcal 12g protein 5g fibre | Mocha, Strawberry, Vanilla |

High Protein ONS

Prescribing Notes

- All first line powdered ONS products are high in protein and should be considered prior choosing a specialist product

Ready Made ONS Milkshake Style High Protein

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|------------------|---|--------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| First choice | Altraplen Protein® | 200ml bottle | 300 kcal Protein 20g | Vanilla, strawberry |
| | AYMES ActaGain 2.4 Complete Maxi®* <i>*cost effective choice</i> | 200ml bottle | 480 kcal Protein 19g | Natural, strawberry, vanilla, banana |

Ready Made ONS Compact Milkshake Style High Protein

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|------------------|---------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|--|
| | Fortisip Compact Protein® | 125ml bottle | 300 kcal Protein 18g | Vanilla, banana, mocha, strawberry, berry, neutral, hot tropical, cool red fruits, peach and mango |

Dessert Style ONS

Prescribing Notes

- Dessert style products are not routinely recommended due to their lower calorie content per dose.
- Suitable for those requiring low volume.

Powdered ONS Dessert Style (>200kcal and >10g protein per portion)

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|------------------|--------------------|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| First choice | Actasolve Delight® | 57g Sachet Available as a box of 7x57g sachets of one flavour | 300 kcal Protein 11.2-13 g | Butterscotch, mixed berries, Lemon |

Ready Made ONS Dessert style (>200kcal and >10g protein per portion)

| Formulary choice | Product name | Presentation | Nutritional content [#] | Flavours |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--|
| If powdered ONS not suitable | Nutricrem®* | 125g pot Available as pack of 4x125g in one flavour | 225 kcal 13g protein | Strawberry, Vanilla, Chocolate orange |
| | Fresubin® 2kcal creme | 125g pot Available as pack of 4x125g in one flavour | 250kcal 13g protein | Vanilla, Chocolate, Praline, Wild strawberry, Cappuccino |

Modular Supplements

Prescribing notes

Modular Products do not contain a balance of nutrients and should not be initiated in primary care and should only be prescribed on the request of a dietitian (or a health care professional with expertise in this area) with clinical justification.