

## Background

People with swallowing difficulty (dysphagia) should have food and fluids that are compliant with the International Dysphagia Diet Standardization Initiative (IDDSI). Some people with dysphagia need texture modified food and/or thickened drinks. Thickeners can be prescribed if appropriate to help modify the consistency of foods and fluids. The recommendation to prescribe a thickener should come from an appropriately trained healthcare professional, e.g. a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) after a diagnosis of dysphagia has been made. The person's management plan should contain clear documented details of the consistency of fluids and foods that the person is able to manage, as per SLT assessment. **To reduce the risk of choking, people with eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties must receive foods, fluids and medications that are IDDSI compliant.**

## Adverse incidents in primary care

HSCB has received reports of adverse incidents where people with dysphagia received thickeners or thickened oral nutritional supplements that were not suitable for them. Reasons for this include:

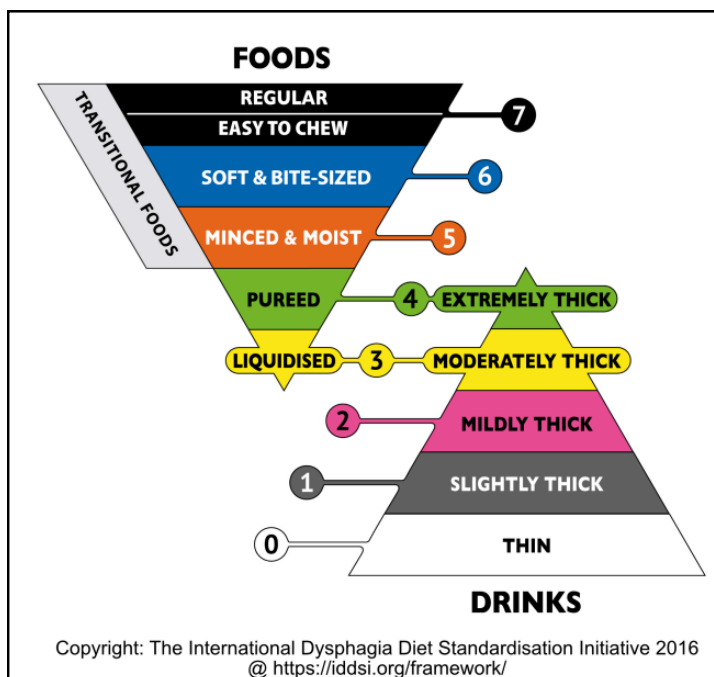
1. Parallel imported products were dispensed from community pharmacies that could cause confusion and increase patient risk; these include thickening products that are not IDDSI compliant and thickened oral nutritional supplements in packs using older "Stage" terminology rather than the new "Level" description.
2. These products are prescribed on the recommendation of a SLT or dietitian. Non-specific product descriptions e.g. "Thickening product" can result in an inappropriate product being prescribed. Product details should be clearly described when writing letters of recommendation to avoid any confusion.

## International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) New Standard for Texture Modified Foods and Thickened Liquids

In 2018, following an NHS improvement Patient Safety Alert [NHS/PSA/RE/2018/004](https://www.nhs.uk/psa/2018/004), the Department of Health issued [HSC \(SQSD\) 16 /18 Resources to Support Safer Modification of Food and Drink](https://www.hsc.gov.uk/resources/sqsd-16-18), which mandated the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) terminology and provided implementation guidance across Health and Social Care settings. This meant a change in the way in which dysphagia diets were classified, from the old UK "National Descriptor" *stages* to the new IDDSI *levels*:

- The majority of UK manufacturers of thickeners and thickened oral nutritional supplements changed their labelling and instructions accordingly.
- SLTs now make recommendations for patients who need texture modified food and/or thickened drinks in terms of IDDSI levels.

There was a transition period in 2018, with full implementation of the new framework in Northern Ireland by April 2019. HSCB previously wrote to primary care in November 2018 ([HSCB letter](#)) to highlight this change. Further information on IDDSI can be found at <http://iddsi.org/> or by downloading the App.



# Changes to thickening products

The majority of manufacturers of thickeners made changes to their products to ensure they were IDDSI compliant in 2019. **This required a change to the labelling of the products and, for some products, a change in scoop size also.** Product labels were moved directly to IDDSI, i.e. **no transition labels on products.** However, the companies have produced additional information for each thickener, including conversion charts, to guide transition from previous descriptors to IDDSI descriptors. This additional information can be found on the companies' websites or by contacting a local representative.

## Parallel imports of Thick & Easy™ powder

While IDDSI is the recognised international descriptor, not every country has adopted this framework. Parallel import thickening products from countries that are not IDDSI compliant will have different mixing instructions on the labels, and different scoop sizes to the UK product. Incorrect mixing instructions and incorrect scoop size can lead to patients receiving the incorrect thickness of food/drink. This poses a significant risk to patients who need texture modified food and/or thickened drinks.

In an adverse incident reported to HSCB, a parallel import of Thick & Easy™ powder from Germany was over-labelled to reflect the IDDSI framework, but the scoop supplied was the old 4.5g size. Therefore, a patient assessed as requiring a Level 1 could potentially receive 5 x 4.5g scoops instead of 5 x 1.5g per 200ml of liquid.

Parallel import from Germany	UK product
Name: Thick & Easy™ powder Scoop size: 4.5g	Name: Thick & Easy™ Original powder Scoop size: 1.5g

**Note: ACBS requires that all products indicated for dysphagia include IDDSI-compliant labelling. Therefore, parallel imports with incorrect labelling, prescribed under Part XV of the Drug Tariff, do not comply with ACBS policy.\***

## Nutlis® Powder and the move to IDDSI compliance

At the time of writing, Nutlis® Powder has not yet changed to IDDSI labelling, i.e. labelling and instructions on the product remain in the old UK descriptor 'stages'. However, from November 2021, the manufacturers of Nutlis® Powder are to change their labelling to align with the IDDSI framework. **In order to ensure a smooth transition, healthcare professionals should be aware of the following:**

- The current Nutlis® Powder is unsuitable for people who have been assessed under the IDDSI framework.
- Whilst IDDSI compliant Nutlis® Powder is expected in November 2021, old non-IDDSI compliant stock may still be in circulation in local wholesalers and community pharmacies.
- There may be some patients who have been on Nutlis® Powder for many years following a previous SLT assessment using the old UK descriptor stages. These patients (or carers or nursing / residential homes) will require information to guide transition from previous descriptors to IDDSI descriptors. Liaise with SLT if there is a clinical need, e.g. patient is not managing the matched IDDSI descriptor.

**Note: Nutlis Clear® is not changing as this product is already compliant with the IDDSI Framework.**

## Actions for primary care

### GP practices

- Contact the SLT to clarify the exact product to be prescribed if the prescribing recommendation does not include a full product description.
- Where a patient had been assessed by SLT under the IDDSI framework, i.e. in *levels*, ensure that an IDDSI compliant product is prescribed.
- For patients currently prescribed Nutlis® Powder, provide patients, carers and nursing / residential homes with information for their thickener to guide transition from previous descriptors to IDDSI descriptors. Liaise with SLT if there is a clinical need, e.g. patient is not managing the matched IDDSI descriptor.

### Community pharmacies

- Ensure familiarity with dysphagia products and IDDSI levels.
- Raise awareness of the imminent changes to Nutlis® Powder IDDSI levels and ensure robust procedures are in place for the transition from old to new stock.
- Whilst HSCB recognises that community pharmacies may order parallel imports, it is strongly recommended that community pharmacies stock the UK version of dysphagia products where possible in the interest of reducing confusion and potential risk to this vulnerable patient group.
- In the event of a shortage of the UK product and a parallel import product is sourced, steps should be taken to ensure the patient/carer is adequately supported to use an equivalent dose.

### Other useful dysphagia links:

- [Medication information for adults with swallowing difficulties](#)
- [HSC letter Risk to patient safety: parallel imports of thickened oral nutritional supplements](#)
- [Dysphagia NI Newsletter for front-line staff](#)
- [SPS. Q&A Thickening agents and thickened fluids: do they interact with medicines?](#)
- [MHRA Drug Safety Alert, Apr 2021](#)