

# NORTHERN IRELAND MEDICINES MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER SUPPLEMENT:

## Nutritional Needs of Specific Patient Groups

Nov 2023

### Background

There are **7 suggested steps** to ensure appropriate prescribing of adult oral nutritional supplements (ONS) in primary care. Key information for each step is highlighted in a previous [oral nutritional newsletter supplement](#) issued in November 2023 with further detailed prescribing information to be found in the Nutrition chapter (9.0) of the [NI Formulary](#).

The [Northern Ireland Nutrition Formulary](#) chapter was updated in October 2021 and a virtual launch event took place in June 2023 covering a wide variety of topics. A recording of this event can be viewed via this [link](#).

As part of this Formulary work, guidance intended to help healthcare professionals (HCP) support the nutritional needs of people, during the various stages of **palliative care** and in those **at risk of harm due to substance use** has been produced by specialist dietitians in these clinical areas.

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### Palliative Care

In palliative care nutritional management is divided into three stages, depending on the phase of illness:

- **Proactive nutritional care** — for people identified as possibly having years of life or could be in the last year of life
- **Conservative nutritional care** — for people identified as possibly in the last months of life
- **Comfort nutritional care** — for people identified as probably last few weeks / days / hours

Nutritional goals will vary at each stage, for example, for people following a proactive nutritional care plan, patients are supported to meet **full nutritional requirements** as research highlights this as a cost-effective intervention.

Whereas for people with a high symptom burden, a conservative nutritional care plan is recommended. The aim is to reduce food related discomfort, even if this means not meeting full nutritional requirements. It is therefore **appropriate to revise ONS intake** to promote effective symptom management.

However, for people identified in the final stages of life, research recommends a comfort nutritional care plan. Education regarding the normal changes to expect with reduced oral intake, and practical advice for safe swallowing is important. **Prescribing of ONS is generally not recommended** at this phase of illness.

The full guidance document is available to view via this [link](#) and a recorded presentation by the specialist dietitians involved in the production of this guidance can be viewed as part of the Formulary launch event [here](#).



## Patient resources

A leaflet '[When illness affects your appetite](#)' has been produced providing guidance and information for patients and carers receiving palliative care.



Additionally, a patient information leaflet in relation to swallowing information for end of life care has also been developed and is available via this [link](#).



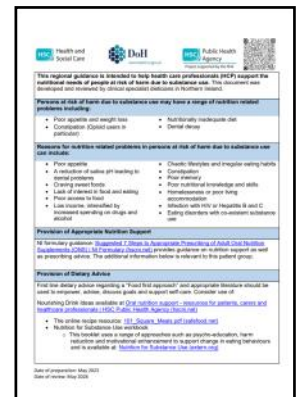
## People at Risk of Harm due to Substance Use

Harm due to substance and alcohol use is not a specified [ACBS](#) indication for ONS, and individuals should be managed as outlined in the 7 suggested steps to ensure appropriate prescribing of adult ONS in primary care.

ONS **should not** be initiated at Step 5 for people at risk of harm due to substance use unless there is:

- a willingness to engage **OR**
- engagement with addiction services **OR**
- a desire to reduce harm from their intake of their primary substance **OR**
- a desire to overcome dependence **OR**
- a desire for abstinence.

[Regional guidance](#) has been produced to help healthcare professionals support the nutritional needs of people at risk of harm due to substance use. A presentation by specialist dietitians involved in the production of this guidance can be viewed as part of the Formulary launch event via this [link](#).



## Prescribing of Vitamins and Minerals

Guidance on prescribing of vitamins and minerals in primary care can be found [here](#).

Vitamins and minerals should only be prescribed for an ACBS approved indication, i.e. only in the management of actual or potential vitamin or mineral deficiency; they are not to be prescribed as dietary supplements or as a general 'pick-me-up'.

Do not initiate vitamin B compound or vitamin B compound strong tablets for any of the following indications:

- Prevention of Wernicke's encephalopathy (WE) in alcoholism
- Dietary supplementation
- Prevention of deficiency
- Maintenance treatment following treatment of deficiency.



## Actions for GP practices

- Share the newsletter with all relevant members of the practice team
- Follow the [Seven Steps to Appropriate Prescribing of Adult ONS](#)
- Review nutritional needs of patients receiving palliative care in line with [guidance](#)
- Review patients prescribed ONS who are at risk of harm due to substance use in line with [guidance](#)
- Ensure patients are weighed, where possible, prior to commencement of ONS and regularly if attending the practice for GP / practice nurse or treatment room appointments
- Review ONS prescriptions; if a pattern reflects collecting is on an 'ad hoc' basis, consider reviewing to establish how patient is taking their ONS and if further use is clinically appropriate
- Signpost to [making the most of your food/watch out for weight loss advice resources](#) and [oral nutrition support resources](#), where appropriate.

## Actions for community pharmacists

- Share the newsletter with all relevant members of the healthcare team
- Discuss with patients requesting to purchase ONS or seeking nutritional advice food fortification advice in line with the [Seven Steps to Appropriate Prescribing of Adult ONS](#)
- Discuss and reassure patients and carers of those receiving palliative care how appetite may be affected
- Discuss and reassure patients who are at risk of harm due to substance use why ONS may not or may no longer be appropriate
- Signpost to [making the most of your food/watch out for weight loss advice resources](#) and [oral nutrition support resources](#), where appropriate.

## Training and information events for healthcare professionals

- [NI Formulary Launch event](#) - Video recording for all healthcare professionals including care home staff, GP practice staff and community pharmacy staff
- [GPNI Share the learning - May Update](#) – Video recording of a presentation given by the NHSCT Prescribing Support Dietetic team aimed at all GP practice clinical staff
- [Effective oral nutritional supplement use](#) — Video recording to promote the safe, effective and appropriate prescribing of oral nutritional supplements (ONS) in primary care
- A series of Nutrition Deprescribing Training events facilitated by Medicines NI and NICPLD are planned prior to Summer 2024.



[image: Freepik.com](#)

This newsletter has been produced for GP practices and community pharmacies by the Regional Pharmacy and Medicines Management Team. If you have any queries or require further information on the contents, please contact one of the [Pharmacy Advisers](#).

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