

Support For Taking Oral Nutritional Supplements



This fact sheet helps you (and your carer) understand more about oral nutritional supplements and how you can work in partnership with your healthcare professional with regards to treatment and goals for your own nutritional care.

1 What are oral nutritional supplements?

As a treatment, these are designed to improve your nutritional intake and recovery. They are normally used along with food.

They come in the form of:



Ready-made liquids



Powder you make up



Desserts

They typically contain:



Energy



Protein



Vitamins & minerals

2 Why have I been advised to take these?

Oral nutritional supplements are advised when:

- Medical conditions and illness affect eating, digestion or absorption of nutrients, leading to disease-related malnutrition. To learn more, go to: <https://www.patients-association.org.uk/improving-your-nutritional-health>
- Extra nutrition is needed to recover from illness, surgery or treatment.
- A person is experiencing poor nutrition.



3 How do I know if I need them?

Your risk of disease-related malnutrition is assessed by a healthcare professional such as a doctor, nurse or pharmacist. They will ask about your:



Eating



Weight and any unintentional weight loss

They will also consider other factors such as your:



Nutritional health



Medical condition or illness



Medication and side effects



Treatment

You can assess your risk yourself using simple and easy-to-use tools such as:

- **The nutrition checklist** a conversation starter
<https://www.patients-association.org.uk/patients-association-nutrition-checklist-toolkit>
- **Your risk of malnutrition** online tool
<https://www.malnutritionselfscreening.org/self-screening.html>



4 How often should I take them?

Most people need at least two bottles of liquid or two sachets of powder a day.

Please always follow the prescription advice just as you would when taking a medicine.

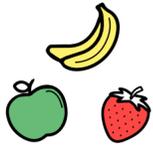
Please talk to the healthcare professional who prescribed the supplement or your pharmacist, dietitian or GP surgery if you are not sure how often to take them.

5 When should I take them?

They should normally be taken between meals as they provide extra nutrition. They are not meant to replace food or meals. If your dietitian or other healthcare professional advises differently, then please always follow their advice.

6 What if I don't like the supplement I've been given?

Talk to your healthcare professional. Most people can be supported to find one they like. Here are some tips:



Try another flavour



Try another brand



Try another type



Try chilling it in the fridge



Try smaller "compact" versions

7 How long should I take them for?

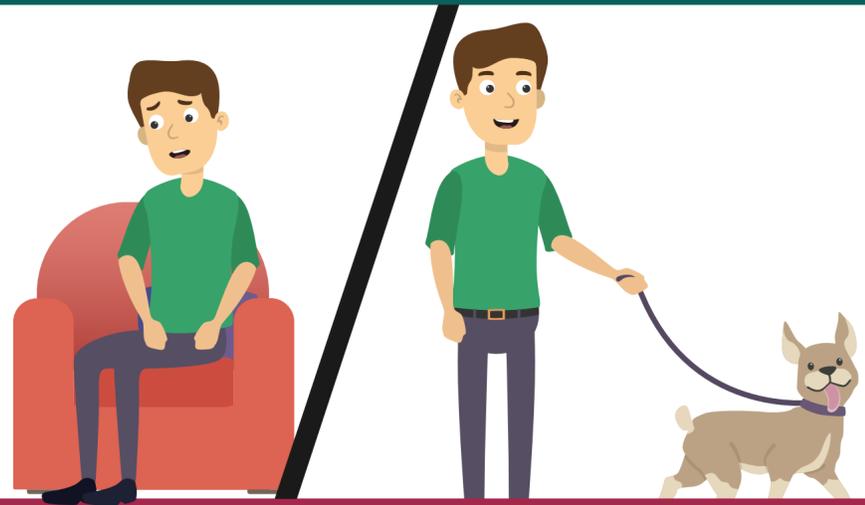
You normally need to continue until eating, weight or other measures of nutrition improve or your treatment goals are met. Research suggests improvement is usually seen after 12 weeks.



8 How do I know if they are working?

Setting treatment goals with your healthcare professional is a good way to measure how well they are working. This goal might not be about gaining weight. It could be wanting to have the energy or strength to do the things you usually do.

For example, being able to go out shopping, meet up with friends or walk your dog.



9 What if my prescription is changed?

Sometimes your healthcare professional might change your prescription to a different brand or type of oral nutritional supplement. It could change from a ready-to-drink liquid to a powder mixed with milk. This should provide you with the same nutrition and still meet your needs, but it is important that your healthcare professional tells you the reason for the change.

Here are some questions you may want to ask your healthcare professional:

- Why has my oral nutritional supplement been changed?
- How is this different?
- Does it give me the same nutrition including energy, protein, vitamins and minerals?
- If the type I'm on was assessed and prescribed in hospital, can I remain on it?
- Can I be switched back if I don't like the new oral nutritional supplement or it makes any of my disease symptoms worse?



10 For more information:

Visit <https://www.patients-association.org.uk/improving-your-nutritional-health> or scan the QR code to learn more about how you can partner with your healthcare provider to improve your nutritional health. You can also ask someone to assist with accessing the link and printing the information.



This fact sheet was designed in partnership with patients, carers, and experts in nutritional health, and has received endorsement from the following organisations: Malnutrition Pathway, PINNT, and the Self Care Forum.