

Free Water Protocol

Purpose of the free water protocol:

- To improve oral hydration in patients with dysphagia (swallowing problems) who must thicken all liquids
- To make it easier to follow feeding/swallowing guidelines with thickened liquids

The idea behind the free water protocol is that water has a neutral pH and is free of bacteria. Drinking other thin liquids (example: juice) can lead to respiratory infections and pneumonia.

Even though water is free and clear of bacteria, there are several guidelines that must be followed when drinking thin water in order to prevent respiratory infections/pneumonia.

Guidelines: You may have THIN WATER according to the rules below:

1. You must do THOROUGH ORAL CARES (full brushing of the teeth, tongue, and insides of cheeks) first thing in the morning and after each meal or snack before drinking thin water.
2. Thin water is allowed BETWEEN MEALS/ SNACKS. Do not drink thin water during a meal or snack. During meals/snacks all liquids need to be thickened.
3. Anytime you have THIN WATER there should NOT be ANY other foods or liquids present.
4. All other liquids (example: juice, coffee, soda, milk, etc.) must be thickened.
5. DO NOT TAKE medications with thin water. Medications may be taken with thickened water. Thorough oral cares must be done after taking medications if you want to drink thin water afterwards.
6. Follow all other swallowing guidelines recommended by your speech pathologist.