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West and North London (WNL)

Oral Nutritional Supplement (ONS) Formulary for adults

Primary Care Prescribing Guidance

Please note: This formulary applies to the following boroughs in NHS West and North London ICB: Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington

March 2026 UPDATE

Background

Oral Nutritional Supplements (ONS) are commercially produced products approved by the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS) for specified indications and are available for prescribing on FP10 prescription for the management of malnutrition.

[NICE](#) guidelines define malnutrition as:

- A body mass index (BMI) of <18.5 kg/m² OR
- Unintentional weight loss of >10% in the last 3-6 months OR
- A BMI of <20 kg/m² and unintentional weight loss >5% in the last 3-6 months

ONS should be considered only after a 4-week food-first approach has not improved either weight or BMI and where one of the above criteria are met.

Financial implications

Approximately 3 million adults in the UK are affected by malnutrition, with an estimated annual treatment cost of around £20 billion. In NCL, more than £4 million was spent on ONS in 2024–25, with audit data suggesting approximately 60% of prescribing may not be clinically indicated .

Aim and purpose of document

The NCL guidance provides a recommendation that ONS are prescribed only when malnutrition criteria are met (as per the NICE definition) and cost-effective options are selected wherever clinically appropriate.

The guidance also provides clinicians with a concise, clinically robust and cost-efficient ONS formulary; including sustainability notes and a practical, stepwise pathway for initiation, review and discontinuation.

Top-tips on prescribing efficiently

- Use a food-first based approach as first-line treatment for 4 weeks prior to consideration of prescribing ONS
- If food-first based principles are unsuccessful in improving outcomes, first-line ONS choices can be considered
- Trial patient on the WNL formulary ONS choices in one of the following ways:
 - Request free samples from company website (creating an account is required for the first order)
OR
 - Prescribe one-off starter pack on acute prescription to trial different flavours OR
 - Prescribe small quantity on acute prescription for patient to trial
- Avoid prescribing starter packs on an ongoing basis, as these are not cost effective
- Issue ONS on acute prescription and review benefit regularly – ideally monthly
- Do not prescribe more or less than the clinically effective dose (2 servings daily or 56 servings monthly – equivalent to 56 x 57g sachets, 56 x 125ml bottles or 56 x 200ml bottles etc)
- Discontinue ONS if no improvement in either weight or BMI after 3 months or if treatment goals are met
- Avoid initiating/continuing ONS from hospital discharge summaries without a clear clinical indication and plan for review ([as per NCL prescribing position](#)).
- Take caution with products of similar name or products that look-alike or sound alike as this can lead to prescribing errors.

WNL Primary Care Guidance for the management of Malnutrition Prescribing Pathway – Steps 1-3

First line treatment of malnutrition (where criteria above is met) Food-First Based Approach

STEP 1 – OPTIMISE DIETARY INTAKE WITH FOOD FIRST BASED ADVICE FOR A MINIMUM OF 4 WEEKS BEFORE INITIATING ONS

Principles:

- Eat little and often: aim for 3 small meals with 2-3 snacks daily
- Fortify meals with high calorie/protein ingredients (double cream, butter, Greek yoghurt, cheese, ground nuts, nut butters, skimmed milk powder, pea protein powder, olive oil etc)
- Avoid diet/light/low-fat options where possible
- Choose higher fat/sugar options where possible (yoghurts, milk, ice cream, etc)
- Include milk-based drinks and nutrient dense fluids (milkshakes, juices, smoothies, milky coffees, etc).
- Choose nutrient dense foods and snacks (full fat dairy, nuts, seeds, meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses, avocados, meat-free alternatives etc)
- Include a serving of starchy food at each meal (bread, potatoes, pasta, cereal, yam, plantain, rice, chapatti, etc)

See following available patient resources to support the above principles:

Top tips on making the most of eating and drinking	Fortified recipe ideas for drinks and snacks
Spotting and treating malnutrition - BDA	Vegan friendly energy and protein booster ideas
Nourishing drinks recipes	Fortifying African meals

STEP 2 – REASSESS AFTER 4 WEEKS

Assess whether patient continues to meet the malnutrition criteria above

Where the patient's BMI and/or weight has improved and one of the above criteria is not met, please continue with food first based approach and monitor nutritional status – **DO NOT PRESCRIBE ONS**

STEP 3 – MOVE ONTO SECONDARY TREATMENT – INITIATE ONS USING FORMULARY ONS CHOICES BELOW, AND REVIEW AND DISCONTINUE ONS WHEN APPROPRIATE

Where food first based principles have been trialled for a minimum of 4 weeks and one of the above criteria is met:

- Prescribe 1st line ONS choice on acute prescription
- Set clear treatment goals (weight/BMI increase)
- Monitor weight/BMI monthly
- Discontinue ONS when BMI reaches 18.5 kg/m²
- If no improvement after 3 months, discontinue and consider alternative management

Secondary Treatment of Malnutrition – Initiating ONS

1st line choices of ONS - Powdered ONS

GREEN: Can be initiated in primary or secondary care

(where dietary modification was not sufficient to improve outcomes and where **NCL prescribing criteria is met**)

Most powdered ONS (for mixing with milk) have a lower carbon footprint than ready-to-drink ONS due to the lower carbon load connected to manufacturing destinations and transportation emissions.

Clinical contraindications for powdered ONS include

- Patients fed via enteral feeding tube
- Cow's milk allergy or intolerance
- Renal disease above stage 3

Product	Price per unit	Nutrition per serving	Available flavours	Presentation / pack size	Volume required for 28-day prescribing cycle	Additional information
Standard volume milkshake style shakes (made with 200ml full-fat whole milk)						
Complan Shake	£0.53	387 kcal 15.6g protein	Vanilla, original, banana, strawberry, chocolate	57g sachets (box of 4 x 57g sachets)	56 x 57g sachets monthly / 3192g monthly / 14 boxes monthly	Low CO2 option, Suitable for vegetarian diet.
Aymes Shake	£0.57	388 kcal 19g protein	Strawberry, chocolate, banana, vanilla, ginger, neutral	57g sachets (box of 7 x 57g sachets)	56 x 57g sachets monthly / 3192g monthly / 8 boxes monthly	Low CO2 option, Halal and Kosher certified, suitable for vegetarian and gluten free diets.
Foodlink Complete	£0.58	389 kcal 19.5g protein	Strawberry, chocolate, banana, neutral, vanilla			Low CO2 option, Halal Certified, suitable for vegetarian and gluten free diet.
Ensure Shake	£0.65	389 kcal 17g protein	Banana, chocolate, vanilla, strawberry			Suitable for gluten free diet.
Low volume options for patients who cannot tolerate standard volume or those on a fluid restriction (made with 125ml full-fat whole milk)						
Aymes Shake Compact	£0.57	320 kcal 12.2g protein	Strawberry, chocolate, banana, vanilla, ginger, neutral	57g sachet (box of 7 x 57g sachets)	56 x 57g sachets monthly /	Low CO2 option, Halal and Kosher certified, suitable for vegetarian and gluten free diets.
Foodlink Complete Compact	£0.58	318 kcal 15g protein	Strawberry, chocolate, banana, neutral, vanilla			Low CO2 option, Halal Certified, suitable for vegetarian and gluten free diet.
Juice smoothie style for patients who cannot tolerate milk – caution with diabetic patients						
Actasolve Smoothie	£1.08	297 kcal 10.7g protein	Mango, peach, pineapple, strawberry and cranberry	66g sachet (box of 7 x 66g sachets)	56 x 66g sachets monthly / 3696g monthly / 8 boxes monthly	Low CO2 option Suitable for gluten free, vegetarian and vegan diets,
Foodlink Smoothie	£1.11	287 kcal 10g protein	Orange and mango, red berry, peach, tropical			Low CO2 option Suitable for vegetarian, gluten free and vegan diets, Halal certified

2nd line choice of ONS – Ready-to-drink ONS
AMBER 1: Can be initiated in primary care on the recommendation of a dietitian
(when first-line options are clinically contraindicated or poorly tolerated)

Hospital/community dietetic reports and prescription requests must include:

- Clear clinical justification for requested product, including why 1st line powdered ONS formulary options cannot be prescribed
- Aim or goal of intervention
- Duration of required prescription
- Plan for review

Product	Price per unit	Nutrition per serving	Available flavours	Presentation / pack size	Volume required for 28-day prescribing cycle	Additional information
Ready to drink milkshake style						
Altraplen Energy	£0.99	300 kcal 12g protein	Chocolate, banana, vanilla, strawberry	200ml carton	56 x 200ml cartons monthly / 11200ml monthly	Suitable for vegetarian, lactose free and gluten free diets.
Actagain 1.5 Complete	£1.11	300 kcal 12g protein	Strawberry burst, double chocolate, smooth vanilla, banana	200ml carton	56 x 200ml cartons monthly / 11200ml monthly	Suitable for vegetarian and gluten free diets.
Ready to drink low volume milkshake style for patients who cannot tolerate standard volume or those on a fluid restriction						
Ensure Compact	£1.60	300 kcal 12.8g protein	Banana, café latte, vanilla, strawberry,	125ml bottle (pack of 4 x 125ml bottles)	56 x 125ml bottles monthly / 7000ml monthly / 14 packs monthly	Suitable for halal and gluten free diets, suitable for vegetarian diet (except for strawberry flavour)
Ready to drink juice style for patients who cannot tolerate milk – caution with diabetic patients						
Ensure Plus Juice	£1.80	330 kcal 10.6g protein	Orange, apple, lemon and lime, peach, fruit punch, strawberry.	220ml bottle	56 x 200ml bottles monthly / 11200ml monthly	Suitable for kosher and vegetarian diets (except strawberry), halal diet (except lemon and lime) and vegetarian diet (except for strawberry)
Plant based ONS						
Actagain 1.5 Plant Powered	£1.54	300 kcal 13.4g protein	Madagascan vanilla, café latte, salted caramel	200ml carton	56 x 200ml cartons monthly / 11200ml monthly	Suitable for vegan, vegetarian and gluten free diets.
Fresubin Plant-based Drink	£1.60	300 kcal 15g protein	Vanilla	200ml bottle (pack of 4 x 200ml bottles)	56 x 200ml cartons monthly / 11200ml monthly / 14 packs monthly	Suitable for vegan, vegetarian, dairy free and gluten free diets.

NHS list prices sourced from dm+d and correct as of March 2026.

Other ONS products not listed on the formulary may be used in exceptional circumstances, where first or second line ONS products are contraindicated or not well tolerated and where a specialist dietitian provides:

- Clear clinical justification for requesting the product, including why first and second line products are not suitable,
- Duration of required prescription
- Aim/goal of intervention
- Plan for review

If you require this document in an alternative format such as easy read, large text, braille or an alternative language please contact nclibc.medsoptimisation@nhs.net

Disclaimer

This guideline has been reviewed and approved by the West and North London (WNL) Integrated Care Board (ICB) Medicines Clinical Reference Group (mCRG) and is intended solely for use by healthcare professionals to aid the treatment of patients within WNL boroughs; Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington. However, clinical guidelines are for guidance only, their interpretation and application remain the responsibility of the individual clinician. If in doubt, contact a senior colleague or expert. Clinicians are advised to refer to the manufacturer's current prescribing information before treating individual patients.

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While we have tried to compile accurate information in this guideline, and to keep it updated in a timely manner, we cannot guarantee that it is fully complete and correct at all times. If you identify information within this guideline that is inaccurate, please report this to the nclibc.medsoptimisation@nhs.net. If a patient is harmed as a consequence of following this guideline, please complete a local incident report and inform nclibc.medsoptimisation@nhs.net.

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Document management

Groups / Individuals who have overseen the development of this guidance:	NCL Nutrition Group NCL ICB Dietetic Advisor
Groups which were consulted and have given approval:	NCL ICB Medicines Clinical Reference Group (mCRG)
File name:	Oral Nutritional Supplement Formulary in Adults - Primary Care Guidance
Version number:	3.0
Available on:	Medicines Optimisation North Central London Integrated Care System
Disseminated to:	All stakeholders and prescribers in WNL boroughs: Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington
Equality impact assessment:	NIL identified
NCL ICB mCRG approval date:	March 2026
Review date:	March 2029