

Oral nutritional supplements (ONS) comparison chart (adult patients only)

For use by non-Dietitian Healthcare Professionals (HCPs) in Secondary Care

INTRODUCTION

The Medicines Optimisation (MO) Team at Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (NWICB) promotes high quality, safe, and cost-effective prescribing in our local area. We are asking for your assistance to optimise prescribing of oral nutritional supplements (ONS), where expensive brands (usually Fresubin®) are being continued on prescription in Primary Care after being initiated in Secondary Care.

MO Dietitians at NWICB have provided links to information leaflets outlining first-line dietary treatment advice, which you can signpost your patients to, and have produced the chart below comparing Fresubin ONS with similar but more cost-effective products, for your consideration.

If your patient requires ONS on prescription, please consider requesting a more cost-effective product if appropriate.

BACKGROUND

- In Secondary Care most of the ONS items available are heavily subsidised by the manufacturers as part of ongoing enteral feed contracts (currently Fresubin ONS provided by Fresenius-Kabi cost 1p per item to the Trust) but in Primary Care Fresubin ONS are much more expensive and often are not the most cost-effective of the commercially available products.
- In Secondary Care there are no restrictions on when ONS can be issued to patients but in Primary Care ONS should only be prescribed if first-line dietary treatment advice has been trialled but proved unsuccessful and even then ONS can only be prescribed in Primary Care if criteria set by **ACBS (Advisory Committee for Borderline Substances)** are met: *evidence of disease-related malnutrition, dysphagia, intractable malabsorption, total gastrectomy, short bowel syndrome, bowel fistulae, inflammatory bowel disease, or pre-operative preparation of undernourished patients.*
- In Secondary Care there is no guidance for non-Dietitian HCPs about issuing or monitoring ONS but in Primary Care there are [local guidelines](#) available, which include a care pathway to ensure ACBS criteria are met and evidence is documented, plus a list of pre-approved cost-effective ONS options to choose from (accommodating different nutritional requirements and patient preferences) as well as instructions for regular monitoring. Norfolk and Waveney GP Practices and Health & Social Care staff are strongly encouraged to follow these guidelines when prescribing or requesting a prescription for ONS.

There are several routes by which “non-guideline” ONS are prescribed in Primary Care as a result of treatment initiated in Secondary Care:

- *Dietitian request:* if the patient had a dietetic review during their admission and the Dietitian recommends ONS should continue after discharge, they will contact the Practice directly to request a pre-approved ONS from the prescribing guidelines if appropriate, or another cost-effective option if a more specialist product is clinically indicated (they are required to justify any “non-guideline” ONS choices.) The Dietitian will provide monitoring or specify when care and monitoring is to be handed over to the Practice.
- *Discharge Summary:* ONS is listed whenever it’s provided during a hospital admission and will often automatically be continued on prescription in Primary Care, even without any accompanying evidence that nutrition support is still clinically indicated.
- *Consultant request:* ONS may be requested on prescription by a consultant after an inpatient or outpatient review.
- *Specialist Nurse or other HCP request:* ONS may be requested on prescription following a Multi-Disciplinary Team outpatient review e.g. Oncology, Gastroenterology, Cardiology, Respiratory etc.

REQUEST TO ALL NON-DIETITIAN SECONDARY CARE HCPs

Please consider the following actions if you plan to request a prescription for ONS:

- Check if the patient is already known to a dietitian and highlight any nutritional concerns to them for review.
- Please provide relevant **first-line dietary advice** to your patients if appropriate (information leaflets linked below).
- If ONS is required, please provide **evidence** that ACBS criteria above have been met (see below for examples of evidence).
- If ONS is required, discuss **taste preferences** with the patient (milk or juice / sweet or savoury / flavour options), specify the name and brand of the ONS product required and the daily dose to be prescribed (typically 2 x doses daily between meals).
- If the patient requires thickened fluids (per SALT), ensure your ONS choice is appropriate for the recommended IDDSI level.
- Please specify plans for monitoring ONS e.g. to be reviewed in outpatient clinic (by a consultant, a trust dietitian or other HCP), the patient is to be managed in primary care, or the patient will be monitored by the local community dietitians- Please ensure referral is completed by secondary care including all relevant information such as weight, BMI and MUST score (Note- referrals are usually only accepted if MUST = 2 or more, see below for MUST info).

We appreciate your assistance and welcome any questions or comments: nwicb.dieteticqueries@nhs.net

EVIDENCING ACBS CRITERIA

FOR PRESCRIBING OF ONS IN PRIMARY CARE

- **Disease-related malnutrition** and / or **pre-operative preparation of undernourished patients**: results of screening tool e.g. MUST ([Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool](#) / [‘MUST’ Calculator](#)), or quantified amount of unplanned weight loss over past 6 months (with comparison to original weight), and / or reports of reduced oral intake or poor appetite, and / or negative effect on oral intake resulting from condition or treatment e.g. cancer / chemotherapy.
- **Dysphagia**: recommendations from Speech & Language Therapist (IDDSI levels for diet and fluids).
- **Intractable malabsorption, total gastrectomy, short bowel syndrome, bowel fistulae, inflammatory bowel disease**: all can be evidenced by confirmation of clinical diagnoses.

INFORMATION LEAFLETS FOR PATIENTS

Malnutrition: “*Food First*” is the first-line dietary treatment for malnutrition and many patients can achieve their treatment goals using this approach, without the need for prescribed ONS:

- [Food First: a guide to gaining or maintaining weight](#)
- [Food First: for people following a plant based diet](#)
- [Easy homemade nourishing drinks](#)

Dysphagia (includes suitable *Food First* advice):

- [Advice for IDDSI level 3 liquidised diet](#)
- [Advice for IDDSI level 4 puree diet](#)
- [Advice for IDDSI level 5 minced & moist diet](#)
- [Advice for IDDSI level 6 soft & bite size diet](#)

Cancer: A guide for people living with cancer who may be struggling to eat or drink normally due to the side-effects of cancer or treatment:

- [Eat well during cancer](#)

Skin wounds: Nutrition is a vital part of prevention and recovery in the healing of wounds to the skin. This fact sheet focuses on how food and fluid choices may be able to help with both prevention and treatment of wounds (e.g. post-surgical, pressure injuries, accidents etc.):

- [Dietary advice for wound healing](#)

Fresubin ONS are priced at 1p per unit in Secondary Care

ONS COMPARISON CHART. Prices checked Dec 2025

STANDARD VOLUME DRINKS (150 - 200mls)

| Fresubin products (swap to a comparable guideline product if able) | | | | Comparable guideline products (pre-approved for prescribing in Primary Care if ACBS criteria met) | | | |
|---|--------|--|-------|---|--------|---|------|
| Product name | Volume | Nutrition | Cost | Product name | Volume | Nutrition | Cost |
| Fresubin 2kcal Apricot-Peach, Cappuccino, Toffee, Fruits of the Forest, Vanilla, Neutral | 200mls | 400kcal, 20g protein High calorie High protein Ready to drink | £2.40 | Complan Shake (Nutricia) (57g powder) Strawberry, chocolate, banana, vanilla, original | 200mls | 380kcal, 16g protein when mixed with whole milk | 53p |
| | | | | Aymes Shake (57g powder) Strawberry, chocolate, banana, vanilla, ginger, neutral | 200mls | 383kcal, 19g protein when mixed with whole milk | 57p |
| | | | | Foodlink Complete (Nualtra) (57g powder) Strawberry, chocolate, banana, vanilla, natural | 200mls | 383kcal, 19g protein when mixed with whole milk | 58p |

ONS COMPARISON CHART. Prices checked Dec 2025

STANDARD VOLUME DRINKS (150 - 200mls) continued

| Fresubin products (swap to a comparable guideline product if able) | | | | Comparable guideline products (pre-approved for prescribing in Primary Care if ACBS criteria met) | | | |
|--|--------|--|-------|--|--------|---|-------|
| Product name | Volume | Nutrition | Cost | Product name | Volume | Nutrition | Cost |
| Fresubin Energy Drink Banana, Vanilla, Blackcurrant, Cappuccino, Chocolate, Strawberry, Lemon, Tropical Fruits | 200mls | 300kcal, 11g protein Ready to drink | £1.53 | Altraplen Energy (Nualtra) Strawberry, chocolate, banana, vanilla | 200mls | 300kcal, 12g protein Ready to drink | 99p |
| | | | | Aymes ActaGain 1.5 Complete Strawberry Burst, Double Chocolate, Banana Milkshake, Smooth Vanilla | 200mls | 300kcal, 14g protein Ready to drink | 99p |
| Fresubin Jucy Drink Apple, Blackcurrant, Cherry, Orange, Pineapple | 200mls | 300kcal, 8g protein Ready to drink | £1.89 | Aymes ActaSolve Smoothie (66g powder) Mango, peach, strawberry & cranberry, pineapple | 150mls | 300kcal, 11g protein when mixed with water | £1.08 |
| | | | | Foodlink Smoothie (Nualtra) (66g powder) Orange & mango, red berry, peach, tropical | 150mls | 287kcal, 10g protein when mixed with water | £1.11 |
| Savoury option (no Fresubin equivalent) | - | - | - | Aymes ActaSolve Savoury (57g powder) Chicken, leek & potato, vegetable | 200mls | 250kcal, 9g protein when mixed with water | 96p |

ONS COMPARISON CHART. Prices checked Dec 2025

LOW VOLUME DRINKS (100 - 125mls)

| Fresubin products (swap to a comparable guideline product if able) | | | | Comparable guideline products (pre-approved for prescribing in Primary Care if ACBS criteria met) | | | |
|--|--------|--|-------|--|--------|---|-------|
| Product name | Volume | Nutrition | Cost | Product name | Volume | Nutrition | Cost |
| Fresubin 3.2kcal Drink* Cappuccino, Hazelnut, Mango, Vanilla-Caramel | 125mls | 400kcal, 20g protein High calorie High protein Ready to drink | £2.56 | Aymes Shake Compact (57g powder) Strawberry, chocolate, banana, vanilla, ginger, neutral | 100mls | 320kcal, 15g protein When mixed with whole milk | 57p |
| | | | | Altraplen Compact (Nualtra) Strawberry, banana, hazel- chocolate, vanilla | 125mls | 300kcal, 12g protein Ready to drink | £1.60 |
| | | | | Fortisip Compact (Nutricia) Strawberry, chocolate, banana, vanilla, mocha, neutral | 125mls | 300kcal, 12g protein Ready to drink | £1.60 |

**This product has a thicker consistency and a more concentrated flavour than standard volume options and anecdotally is not as well tolerated, therefore, if a low volume dose is not clinically indicated (e.g. to aid with fluid restriction), please consider the standard volume products comparable to Fresubin 2kcal Drink which provide similar nutrient content to Fresubin 3.2kcal Drink in 200mls*

Some Fresubin ONS are considered “specialist products” and as such are not listed in our local prescribing guidelines. If the items listed below are requested on prescription you will need to provide evidence for why a “standard” guideline product would not be suitable e.g. patient has dysphagia and needs a pre-thickened ONS suitable for their SALT recommended IDDSI level.

ONS COMPARISON CHART. Prices checked Dec 2025

SPECIALIST ITEMS

NOT LISTED IN LOCAL PRESCRIBING GUIDELINES

| Fresubin products (swap to a comparable product if able) | | | | Comparable products (show evidence why non-guideline ONS is required) | | | |
|---|---------------|--|----------------------|--|---------------|--|----------------------|
| Product name | Volume | Nutrition | Cost per item | Product name | Volume | Nutrition | Cost per item |
| Fresubin 2kcal Crème Cappuccino, Chocolate, Praline, Wild Strawberry, Vanilla | 125g pot | 250kcal, 13g protein Ready to eat | £2.10 | Aymes ActaSolve Delight (57g powder) Butterscotch, Mixed Berries, Lemon | 75mls | 302kcal, 11g protein When mixed with whole milk | £1.19 |
| | | | | Aymes ActaCal Crème Chocolate, Vanilla | 125g pot | 188kcal, 9g protein Ready to eat | £1.60 |
| | | | | | | | |
| Fresubin Thickened Level 2 Wild Strawberry, Vanilla | 200mls | 300kcal, 20g protein Ready to drink Suitable for IDDSI Level 2 | £2.71 | No comparable products currently ACBS approved | - | - | - |
| Fresubin Thickened Level 3 Wild Strawberry, Vanilla | 200mls | 300kcal, 20g protein Ready to drink Suitable for IDDSI Level 3 | £2.71 | No comparable product is currently cheaper | - | - | - |

ONS COMPARISON CHART. Prices checked Dec 2025

SPECIALIST ITEMS

NOT LISTED IN LOCAL PRESCRIBING GUIDELINES (continued)

| Fresubin products (swap to a comparable product if able) | | | | Comparable products (show evidence why non-guideline ONS is required) | | | |
|---|---------------|---|---------------|--|---------------|--|---------------|
| Product name | Volume | Nutrition | Cost per item | Product name | Volume | Nutrition | Cost per item |
| Fresubin 5kcal Shot Lemon, Neutral | 120mls bottle | 150kcal, no protein per shot Bottle provides 4 x 30mls shots | £3.55 | AltraShot (Nualtra) Neutral, Strawberry, Vanilla | 120mls bottle | 105kcal, 1.5g protein per shot Bottle provides 4 x 30mls shot | £3.00 |