

# Teen gets her drinks, but Pharmac won't back down

**Kate Saunders**  
kate.saunders@dailynews.co.nz

A Taranaki cystic fibrosis sufferer has been inundated with donations of critical food supplements.

In an article in Friday's *Taranaki Daily News*, Ashlee Butler, 17, revealed her ready-made liquid feeds were costing her family about \$70 a month since a Pharmac cut subsidises in April. It will fully fund a powder alternative.

Her mother, Wendy, said her daughter's energy levels dropped



**Ashlee Butler**

after she halved her intake of the supplement

Fortisip to save money. Cystic fibrosis sufferers can need up to 150 per cent of a normal calorie intake or malnutrition and chest infections can develop.

But the family has been put in touch with five *Daily News* readers, each with between 20 and

80 of the Fortisip bottles to donate. "I wasn't expecting it at all, gosh no. That's just so cool," Mrs Butler said.

Pauline French said she had a lot of the nutritional drinks left over after her husband died. He had needed the drinks because of cancer and other health complications.

"I read it in the paper and thought giving them to the girl would be just ideal," Mrs French said.

"I'd only just picked up a new lot. I thought I'd like to give them to someone who needs it and will get some use out of it."

Mrs Butler said although there was a fully-subsidised powdered alternative, it wasn't convenient and tasted awful.

"It's great people have donated these, but in the long run the important thing is for Pharmac to change their ways.

"We've obviously tried the powder and it's just not going to work," Mrs Butler said.

Pharmac chief executive Matthew Brougham said the subsidies on mixed liquid foods were reduced because the more economical powdered alternatives worked the same way.

"While ready-mixed liquid

supplements may be more convenient, they are more expensive, and provide no additional nutritional benefit over the powder alternatives.

"The savings generated from using powdered products can be used to fund other nutritional products and medicines," he said.

Asked if he was worried about the financial impact on those wanting the ready-mixed drinks, he said Pharmac was concerned about good health outcomes.

The subsidy cut was part of a significant review of the special foods area and it would be unlikely that ready-mixed liquid

foods would be fully funded in the near future unless there was a significant new development or a price reduction by the suppliers of the products.

Mr Brougham said the powder formulations were very flexible and could be mixed with Milo, coffee, hot chocolate or other foods like ice cream and fruit.

But Mrs Butler said that was just another cost to absorb.

She said would continue to pay for the liquid supplement so Ashlee could have drinks she could actually stomach.

"That's what you've got to do in life sometimes to get by."