



Breastfeeding Challenges:

Low Milk Supply

Many new mothers worry about not having enough breast milk. However, most mothers can produce enough milk to feed their babies. If your baby continues to gain weight and grow as expected, he or she is getting enough breast milk. However, if your milk supply is truly low, improving breastfeeding techniques can usually help to solve the problem quickly. If you have tried the suggestions listed below and continue to struggle with your milk supply, please call the Appointment and Advice Line. We can help.

How can I tell if my milk supply is low?

You may have noticed some changes in how your baby is nursing, or your breasts may not feel as “full” as they did before. Often, this is not a sign of low milk supply. It means that your body is adjusting and your baby is becoming more efficient at feeding.

If your baby is gaining weight well on breast milk alone, and has enough wet and dirty diapers, then it is unlikely that your milk supply is low. After the age of one week, your baby should have 6 to 8 wet diapers each day and 2 to 5 soft bowel movements each day. (The number of wet and soiled diapers will decrease when your baby gets older.)

How can I increase my milk supply?

- **Breastfeed your baby often.** Nurse every 1 ½ to 3 hours, or at least 8-12 feedings in 24 hours. Watch your baby for hunger cues (alertness, rooting, or bringing hands to mouth) and feed your baby at the earliest signs of hunger. Don't worry if you just fed him or her recently.
- **Increase skin-to-skin contact.** Undress your baby down to the

diaper and place him or her tummy-down on your bare chest. Relaxing and holding your baby close to you will encourage him or her to feed.

- **Check your latch and positioning.** Your baby should get a big mouthful of areola (the dark area around the nipple). Don't let your baby latch onto the nipple only. A baby who is properly latched will be covering more of the areola with his or her lower lip than with the upper lip. Read more about correct latch position in the “Sore Nipples” handout.
 - **Fully empty your breasts.** Try to nurse your baby until your breast is completely empty. The more milk that is drained from your breast, the more your body will make. For the same reason, avoid supplementing with formula unless advised by your child's doctor or nurse practitioner.
 - **Increase your fluid intake to 8 to 10 glasses each day.** Limit drinks that contain added sugars, such as soft drinks and many fruit juices. Water is best.
 - **Eat a healthy, balanced diet.** Visit <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html> to read the latest nutrition information for breastfeeding moms.
- **Lower your stress level.** Ask for help around the house so you can care for your baby. Give yourself time to rest and take naps while your baby sleeps. Consider joining a support group for new moms.
 - **Breastfeed exclusively.** We recommend breastfeeding without also using formula or other supplements for the first 6 months of life. Using bottles and pacifiers in the first few weeks before your milk supply is well-established can decrease your milk production. Once your milk supply is established, bottles of pumped breast milk can be introduced for feedings, and pacifiers for sleeping and comfort.
 - **Try pumping.** Adding pumping sessions between or after nursing can help increase milk production. Using a pumping bra to hold the pump flanges can free up your hands to do breast compression and massage to encourage milk flow.
 - Use a double-electric breast pump for 20 minutes after or between feedings. Take a warm shower or apply warm cloths to your breasts before pumping. Use hand compression to help express more milk.
 - You can also try “power pumping.” Pump for 10 minutes, then rest for

Breastfeeding is a learned skill that takes practice and patience. It may take some time for new moms and newborns to get used to breastfeeding positioning and techniques. You might feel frustrated while you and your baby are learning and adjusting, but know that we are here to help you succeed.

10 minutes, switching back and forth for an hour once per day to stimulate your supply. Track your progress by keeping a log of your pumping sessions. Include when you pump, how long you pump, and the amount of milk collected each time. Also note how much milk you've collected after 24 hours.

- **Switch sides often.** If your baby is sleepy, he or she may not remove milk from your breast as well. Try switching sides when your baby's sucking begins to slow down. Switch three or more times during feeding and nurse from each side at least twice.
- **Squeeze your breast lightly.** Gently compressing or massaging your breast when your baby pauses in the sucking rhythm helps the flow of milk to continue.
- **Hand-express milk.** Try hand expressing milk for a few minutes between pumping sessions or feedings. Don't worry if no milk comes out.

Is there anything I can take to increase my milk supply?

You may have heard of using herbs or medications to help with milk production; these are sometimes called "galactagogues." Fenugreek and blessed thistle are examples of galactagogues. Kaiser Permanente and The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine have found no strong medical evidence to support the use of medications and herbs to increase milk supply. They may interact

with other drugs or cause allergic reactions and haven't been fully studied for effectiveness or safety.

A lactation specialist can help you find out if and why your milk supply is low and advise you about ways to increase milk production. Speak to your doctor or a lactation specialist before using any type of herb or supplement.

What causes low milk supply? What should I avoid?

Many factors can affect milk supply. For example, your age, prior breast surgery, stress, and low thyroid levels can contribute to low milk supply.

However, there are a few things you should avoid because they can decrease your milk supply:

- **Medications:** Certain medications may decrease your milk supply, such as birth control pills containing estrogen and decongestants that contain pseudoephedrine. Talk to your doctor if you have questions about any medications you take.
- **Alcohol:** Alcohol can change the taste of your milk and decrease your milk production. Alcohol use while breastfeeding can also increase health risks for your baby.
- **Nicotine:** Smoking can decrease milk production. We strongly recommend that you stop smoking cigarettes for your health and the health of your baby. Call the Wellness Coaching Center at (866) 251-4514 to make an appointment, talk with your clinician, or visit

your local Health Education Center for help with quitting or reducing smoking.

When should I call Kaiser Permanente?

- If your baby is not gaining weight.
- If low milk supply is getting in the way of breastfeeding.
- If you are concerned about your milk supply.

Other Resources

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding

La Leche League International:
lalecheleague.org

Visit kp.org/mydoctor to:

- View most lab results and check your preventive health reminders
- E-mail your doctor
- Use interactive online tools to help keep you and your family healthy

Contact your facility's Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

Your health and your ability to breastfeed your baby can be seriously affected by violence or abuse. If you are hit, hurt or threatened by a partner or spouse, there is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor. Herbs and supplements are sold over-the-counter. Kaiser Permanente carries only herb categories for which some evidence exists to show that the herbs may be effective to treat certain medical conditions.

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