

Do I have enough milk? A Guide



It is common for new mothers to wonder whether they are making enough milk for their baby. You want to make sure that your baby is getting what they need. There are easy ways to make sure your milk supply is keeping up with your growing baby. Women's bodies were made to make all the milk their baby requires to grow and be healthy. . Only in rare cases is a woman truly unable to breastfeed her baby. Some key factors can help you to have a bountiful milk supply.

Remember...

Milk production is about supply and demand. Your body makes milk based on how much your baby nurses or how much you express. When milk is removed, it stimulates more milk production to replace it.

How do you know that you're making enough milk? Here are some clues.

- Your baby is gaining weight at the expected rate (see link to WHO Growth Chart on next page)
- Your baby is wetting and soiling the expected amount of diapers, based on age
- Your baby is satisfied after or between feeding
- Ability to hear your baby swallowing while at the breast
- Breasts feeling full before a feeding and less full after

If you or your doctor is concerned about your milk supply:

One of the best things you can do is to continue breastfeeding or pumping to stimulate milk production. Consider increasing the number of times you breastfeed or pump per day. Make sure that you breastfeed or pump at night. Newborn infants breastfeed, on average, every 2 to 3 hours, or 8 or more times every 24 hours but it is okay if they want to be near you and nurse more.

Even if you are pumping or expressing by hand, provide opportunities for your baby to be near the breast. Milk-producing hormones in your body are stimulated by your baby's smell, touch and cry. Even gazing at your baby can help improve milk levels. Increasing contact with your baby will also signal this response. Holding your baby helps make milk!

Check that your baby is positioned and latching correctly to maximize nursing—no amount of stimulation will increase milk supply if your baby is not latching correctly and expressing the milk! With a correct latch, you will minimize pain and trauma to your nipple.

Consult a breastfeeding specialist if you continue to have nursing difficulties or concerns. They can assess latch, determine how much milk you're producing, and suggest a variety of approaches to improve your breastfeeding technique.

Breast massage prior to and during feeding or pumping has also been shown to increase milk production.

- Gently massage the breast using a circular motion, moving from the outside of the breast inwards towards the nipple
- Try a warm wash cloth or small towel soaked in warm water

Complementary Alternative Therapies:

Make sure baby receives a minimum of 8 feeds daily. Organize your schedule to include times to nurse. Breastfeeding during stressful times has been shown to reduce stress for both mother and child, though it can slow the milk letdown. Breathe and enjoy holding your baby.

Diet:

Grains such as oats, barley, and whole grain rice are recommended. Eat lots of green, leafy vegetables and try to add more vegetables to every meal. Adequate hydration is important, so drink plenty of water!

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Herbs:

Several formulations of tea are available commercially which contain a mixture of herbs that are known to help increase milk production. Most of these herbs have the added benefit of soothing your baby's stomach too.

- Blessed Thistle is a galactogenic herb, meaning it stimulates milk production. This herb can be made as a tea, tincture or capsules
- Fenugreek is another galactogenic herb for stimulating milk production. It can be taken as a tea, tincture, or capsule. However, people with allergies should use this herb with caution. It has caused breathing difficulties and hay fever like symptoms in people who are allergy prone.
- Milk Thistle is another herbal medicine found to have milk stimulating properties. It is most often taken in capsule or tincture form.
- Other commonly used herbs that are either milk producing or very nutritive and tonifying to the breastfeeding mother include Alfalfa, Chasteberry (Vitex), Fennel, Goat's Rue, Hops, Raspberry, Stinging Nettle and Shatavari.
- I recommend avoiding large quantities of Parsley, Sage and Peppermint as these can decrease milk supply.

Useful Links:

World Health Organization (WHO) Growth Charts

Girls: http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/data/who/GrChrt_Girls_24LW_9210.pdf

Boys: http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/data/who/GrChrt_Boys_24LW_9210.pdf

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