

# Increasing Breast Milk Supply



In order to establish and maintain a good milk supply, it is important to put the baby to the breast right after birth, feed on-demand both day and night (8-12 times per 24 hours during the first weeks after birth), assure that the baby is correctly latched on and sucking effectively, and no food or other drink than breast milk is given, unless medically indicated. (Read handout “Starting Up Breastfeeding”.) If for any reason you do not have enough milk, try the recommendations in this handout. If you are consistent, you will likely see an improvement within a few days. Although it may take a month or more to bring your supply up to meet your baby’s needs.

## 1. More Breast Stimulation

In the first week after birth milk production is regulated by the hormonal changes that occur after delivery. In the second or third week milk production will start to be controlled by the “demand=supply” principle: the more milk is “demanded”, the more milk the breasts will “supply”. Another mechanism will stop full breasts from producing milk and will allow an empty breast to produce milk. In this way your milk supply is adjusted to the needs of your baby. (Read handout “Milk Production – How it Works”.) So, to improve milk supply:

### *Empty and Stimulate Breasts Regularly*

- Feed the baby more often (at least 8-12 times per 24 hours).
- Try to feed the baby before you go to bed, even if you have to wake him.
- Offer both breasts at each feeding.
- Do not give the baby a pacifier. When the baby sucks on a pacifier you may miss feeding cues, which results in less frequent feeds.
- Feed on demand both day and night. During night feedings you produce more prolactin than during the day, resulting in even more milk production.
- Is the baby not full after a feed? Give a short feeding after 10-20 minutes.
- Massage the breast or use breast compression during breastfeeding and/or pumping.



- Make sure the baby is latched properly and sucks effectively. (Read handout “Does My Baby Get Enough to Eat?”)
- Make sure the baby completely empties the breasts at each feed.
- “Burp & Switch”, using each breast twice or three times.
- Rooming in, limiting the number of visitors and skin-to-skin holding will help to increase breastfeeding frequency.
- “Super charge” your milk supply every couple of weeks for 2-3 days: On these days, get lots of rest, nurse very frequently and pump after as many nursing sessions as possible.
- **Express Breast Milk:**



- Use a good quality bilateral electric pump and pump in between feeds or after a feed. (Read [handout “Choosing a Breast Pump”](#).)
- Try “power pumping”: Pump for 15 minutes every hour for a day. Or try pumping 10 minutes, resting 10 minutes, pumping 10 minutes for an hour.
- Apply warmth to your breasts and massage breasts before pumping.

## ***2. Get Comfortable and Relax***

If you are anxious and tense during breastfeeding or pumping, you will release less oxytocin, which will result in reduced milk flow. Below are some tips to help you feel comfortable and relaxed:

- Find a comfortable position to feed the baby. It may help to set up a “nursing corner”, where you can sit comfortably whenever you need to pump or feed the baby. Have a comfortable chair with pillows, a footstool, some soothing music, and hot drinks nearby.
- Try different nursing positions.
- Pain can cause you to tense up during feeding. If you are in pain, the use of painkillers half an hour prior to nursing can help. Ask your doctor for advice. If breastfeeding is painful, seek the help of a lactation consultant.
- Have a shower or bath prior to feeding the baby.
- Have a bath with your baby and feed the baby whilst taking a bath.
- Hold your baby skin-to-skin and relax together.
- Read or watch a movie to help you empty your mind of things that need to be done.
- Close your eyes, take some deep breaths prior to feeding.
- Reduce stress and activity, eat a healthy diet and make sure you drink plenty.

## ***3. Stimulate Let-Down Reflex***

Every time you stimulate the breasts (through nursing or pumping), a signal goes to your brain, causing the release of the hormones prolactin and oxytocin. Oxytocin causes the milk to flow. This is what we call the “let-down reflex”. Tension, stress, anger, pain, fatigue and lack of confidence can inhibit the flow of milk. Usually this is only a temporary problem. Below are some suggestions to stimulate the let-down reflex:

- Make sure you’re in a pleasant surrounding with a comfortable temperature.
- Start with a ritual before pumping or breastfeeding: do some relaxing exercises, relax shoulders, get a back massage, have a warm drink, massage your breasts, gently rub your nipples with the palm of your hand, roll your nipple gently between thumb and index finger. Massaging your breasts, stimulating the nipples and using warm flannels on your breasts will help to get the milk flowing.
- When pumping, try to pump in close proximity to the baby. If this is not possible, look at a picture of your baby, smell baby smells, think of your baby, think of holding him or her.
- Express one breast while the baby drinks from the other breast. (See photo)
- Oxytocin nose spray: Talk to your doctor if you have a hard time relaxing and stimulating a let-down reflex. Your doctor might prescribe this synthetic hormone, which you spray into your nose five minutes before pumping or breastfeeding.





#### ***4. Things to Avoid***

Avoid these things as they are known to reduce breast milk supply:

- Caffeine, smoking and alcohol inhibit the let-down reflex.
- Birth control pills and injections (especially those that contain oestrogen).
- Decongestants, antihistamines.
- Severe weight loss diets.
- Mints, parsley, sage (excessive amounts).

#### ***5. Herbs, Foods, and Medication***

There are certain herbs, foods and medication that may increase milk supply:

- Eat a bowl of cooked oatmeal daily.
- Herbs, like alfalfa, blessed thistle and fenugreek can help to increase milk supply. Fenugreek is recommended in doses of 580-600mg, 3-5 times daily. Avoid fenugreek if you are diabetic, hypoglycemic, asthmatic or allergic to peanuts or other legumes. Taken as directed, it may cause a faint maple body odour. That is to be expected and means that the herb is doing its job.
- Prescription medications sometimes help increase milk supply. Metaclo-promide (Reglan) has been used with limited success. Domperidone has been used with more success.

Discuss the use and dosage of herbs and prescription medication with your physician.

#### ***6. Retained Placenta, Hyper- or Hypothyroidism***

Both a retained placenta (small bits of the placenta are left in the womb) as well as a low or over-active thyroid can affect breast milk supply and/or milk flow. If your milk supply does not improve and you are still having vaginal bleeding two weeks after the birth, discuss the possibility of retained placental fragments with your doctor. If you have been taking thyroid medication, have your levels rechecked after delivery. You may need your thyroid medication adjusted.

#### ***7. Keep Records***

Keep a daily log with the number feeding and pumping sessions, how much milk you expressed, how much breast milk and/or formula you are having to supplement your baby at each feeding session and the total amount during a 24 hour period - this amount is more important than the pumped amount at each session. (See "feeding log".) This will help you and your health provider see your progress over the days. Advice can be modified accordingly.

#### ***8. If Supplementation is Needed***

- Determine the amount needed with your health care provider.
- Pump after the feeding.
- Ask a lactation consultant to help you find the best way to offer the expressed breast milk and/or formula.
- Gradually wean your baby off the supplements and increase feedings at the breasts.