



ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

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Increasing Your Milk Supply With Galactogogues

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Many mothers think they don't have enough milk for their babies. Low milk supply is the number one reason mothers give formula to their babies. When you are doing your best and baby still is not growing well, you may wonder what else you can do. Mothers often hear about things they can take to make more milk. *So what is the truth?*

Foods, herbs, and drugs that help boost your milk supply are called *galactogogues*. We know the most about drugs because they are easy to study. There is less research about how well foods and herbs increase milk. What we do know comes partly from the experiences of mothers all over the world.

Should I try a galactogogue?

- First, find out if your milk supply really is low. If your baby is gaining weight well, you have plenty of milk. If your baby is fussy, he could be going through a growth spurt. So feed him as often as he wants to eat.
- If your supply really is low, *find out why*. Not breastfeeding often enough is the most common cause of low milk supply. Try breastfeeding more frequently for a few days. Galactogogues are not magic. They will not boost your supply if milk is not regularly taken out of your breasts by breastfeeding or pumping. Taking milk out more often tells your body to make milk faster.

- When low milk supply is due to not breastfeeding often enough or a baby who is unable to suck well, taking a galactogogue along with good breastfeeding or pumping at least every 2 to 3 hours can help boost your milk.
- If your baby is not latched on the breast right, he may not be able to get enough milk. Galactogogues can help your milk supply, but you will need to fix his latch. A lactation consultant can help you with this.
- When low milk supply is caused by problems in your body such as breast surgery or a hormone problem, galactogogues may help a little but cannot fix the main problem.

What is the best food, herb, or drug for me?

That depends on the cause of your low milk supply. Foods and spices are safest because they are taken in normal amounts and rarely cause problems. Herbs that come as pills, liquid tinctures, or teas are stronger and may sometimes cause side effects. How well they work depends on how fresh and pure they are, along with how well they are prepared. For this reason, some brands are better than others. Your health care provider must prescribe galactogogue drugs. For best results, talk to your lactation consultant about why your milk supply is low. She can help you decide if a galactogogue might help. If so, she can also help you sort through your options and



may refer you to another expert or your health care provider when necessary. Be sure to let your baby's health care provider know if you are taking anything to increase your milk supply.

- **Foods:** High-fiber foods and grains such as oats (not instant), barley, brown rice, and beans. Calcium-rich foods such as sesame, almonds, and dark green leafy vegetables. Fruits such as apricots, dates, figs, and cooked green papaya. Soups made from Torbangun or Mulunggay leaves.
- **Herbs:** Some of the most common cooking herbs include anise, blackseed, caraway, coriander, dill, fennel, and fenugreek. Nonfood herbs include alfalfa, blessed thistle, milk thistle, nettle, goat's rue, red clover, and shatavari. Some companies also make special blends for breastfeeding mothers.
- **Drugs:** The 2 most common galactagogue drugs are metoclopramide (Reglan/Maxeran/Maxolon) and domperidone (Motilium). Both work by raising prolactin, the hormone that boosts your milk. Reglan can

For Your Health Care Provider: Health care providers interested in references and specific dosages can find them at www.ilca.org under "Information for Health Care Providers."

cause depression in some women, so it should not be used longer than a few weeks or by anyone with a history of depression. Domperidone does not have this problem.

Books with more information

- Textbook of Human Lactation* (Chapter 35 by Sheila Humphrey) by Thomas Hale and Peter Hartmann
- The Nursing Mother's Herbal* by Sheila Humphrey
- The Breastfeeding Mother's Guide to Making More Milk* by Diana West and Lisa Marasco