

Increasing Milk Supply

An information leaflet from the Breastfeeding Walk-in Clinic, Mater Dei Hospital. Phone: 25454445

Nearly every woman can produce enough milk to breastfeed. Many women doubt this ability and often give-up breastfeeding before they planned to because of the belief that milk supply is low.

It is important to know that the frequency of breastfeeding, the behaviour of your baby, the feel of your breast and the amount of milk you can pump are not indications of your milk supply.

Signs of lack of milk are:

- Poor weight gain or weight loss.
- Small amounts of concentrated urine.

WEIGHT GAIN

- It is normal for a newborn baby to lose weight during the first 3 days of life. It usually takes 10-14 days to return to birth weight.
- Weight-gain is approximately 120g-250g per week during the first 4 months.
- After 4 months weight-gain drops to approximately 50g-150g per week.
- After 6 months weight-gain slows again to 25g-75g per week.
- Diet is not the only factor responsible for weight-gain, genes and metabolic rate also play a part.

REASONS FOR LOW SUPPLY

- Poor positioning, attachment or sucking at the breast. The breast is not well stimulated so it does not produce ample milk.
- Sleepy baby – Some babies are extremely sleepy and only breastfeed for short periods after a long interval.
- Schedule feeding – Your baby should be able to feed whenever he wants for as long as he wants (baby-led feeding). Schedule feeding tends to lead to low milk supply after several months.
- Dummies can reduce the length of time your baby spends at the breast or cause nipple confusion.

- Nipple confusion – Bottles or dummies require a different sucking action. This can lead to incorrect sucking at the breast or even refusal of the breast.
- Supplements – Giving bottles of milk, water or juice decreases the time spent on the breast and the amount of milk being produced.
- Nipple shields – These create a barrier between the breast and the baby's mouth. If the shield is too thick stimulation to the breast is not effective enough to create a good milk supply.

INCREASING YOUR MILK SUPPLY

- Have a breastfeed assessed to ensure positioning, attachment and sucking are effective.
- Breastfeed more frequently. Time feeds every 2-3 hours during the day and every 3 hours at night. Spending 2 days feeding very frequently day and night can be a fast way to increase milk supply.
- Offer both breasts. Offer the 2nd breast once the baby drops the first breast, do not time and change.
- Change breasts every time your baby sleeps. This may mean changing 2 or 3 times during the feed. This often leads to more vigorous sucking.
- If your baby takes a dummy offer the breast instead.
- Expressing milk in between feeds give the breasts more stimulation increasing milk supply. You do not have to worry that this removes the milk that your baby needs; the breasts produce milk on stimulation.
- Look after yourself. Babies catching-up after weight loss or slow weight gain can be extremely demanding for several weeks. Rest, eat well and drink whenever you feel thirsty. You do not have to make yourself drink large amounts of water; this will not increase your supply. It is important though to drink whenever you feel thirsty.
- Compress the breast during breastfeeding especially when the baby pauses.
- If all these measures do not seem to be working you can consider a galactagogue, something that is known to increase milk production. There are certain medications, herbs and herbal teas such as fennel that have this effect. Consult the Breastfeeding Walk-in Clinic for further information.