



Medications to Increase Milk Supply: What You Should Know

Galactagogues are medications or substances (herbals) which are used to increase milk supply. Many mothers struggling with low milk supply have tried them over the past few years. Some lactation consultants rely on their personal experience and continue to support the use of galactagogues after weighing the risks and perceived benefits. National experts now discourage the use of galactagogues.

The Expert Evidence

In 2011, the physicians at the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine reviewed the evidence related to galactagogue use as written in Protocol #9, “Galactagogues” found at <http://www.bfmed.org/Resources/Protocols.aspx>.

A 2013 clinical report from the American Academy of Pediatrics, “The Transfer of Drugs and Therapeutics into Human Breast Milk: An Update on Selected Topics” can be found at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2013/08/20/peds.2013-1985>.

Both sources state that available data does not support the routine use of herbal products or other drugs to facilitate lactation. Such medications have not been adequately assessed for safety for the nursing infant. There is no federal regulation of herbals. There is no data proving they actually increase milk supply, and it is likely that any perceived increase in milk supply is due to interventions to support the breastfeeding process rather than the galactagogue itself. It is recommended that nursing mothers work with a lactation specialist and use non-pharmacologic measures to increase their milk supply.

Causes of low milk supply

Milk supply can be low for a variety of reasons. It may fail to come in initially for various reasons or it might decrease over time. There may be an issue with baby’s ability to remove milk and stimulate the milk supply or there may be an issue with mother’s ability to produce adequate milk. Some of the issues can be treated or managed, but other issues simply need to be recognized and accepted.

A separate document discusses low milk supply and offers advice about how to try to increase milk supply without using medications.

Three common galactagogues and what you should know about them

Metoclopramide (Reglan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reglan is still occasionally prescribed for lactation, but recent studies do not support its use. ▪ A large amount of drug gets to the baby, and increased infant prolactin levels have been noted in a few studies. ▪ The risk of side effects in the mother are the greatest concern. ▪ Irreversible abnormal body movements (tardive dyskinesia) can occur if Reglan is used for more than 3 months. ▪ It may also exacerbate maternal depression and cause intestinal upset.
Domperidone (Motilium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Domperidone was taken off the market in the USA in 2004 due to significant heart issues in moms and babies. It is available in other countries but labeling does not recommend using it during breastfeeding. ▪ Despite this, some mothers are able to get it and use it, but you should be aware of the risks.
Fenugreek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fenugreek is available over the counter. Herbal supplements are not regulated by the FDA regarding manufacturing standards, proven effectiveness or safety. ▪ There are many reports of undeclared ingredients and pesticide residues. ▪ Controlled studies have not confirmed previous reports that it is effective. ▪ It may affect blood sugar and blood clotting in mom and baby.