



## Medications to Increase Milk Supply: What You Should Know

Galactagogues are medications or herbal supplements used to increase milk supply. Mothers around the world have used various substances over the years to optimize milk production.

There is little scientific evidence that galactagogues help milk production, side effects are possible, and they cost money. If you consider using galactagogues, first understand the possible risks and lack of proven benefits. A perceived increase in milk supply while taking a galactagogue is likely a placebo effect or from improved breastfeeding management. Sometimes, the cure simply is *time*. Yet, as a last resort, some lactation consultants continue to encourage the use of galactagogues. But, international physician experts do not support the use of galactagogues – references are below.

**Causes of low milk supply:** There are a variety of reasons for a low milk supply. Perhaps your baby can't effectively remove the milk, so your milk supply isn't stimulated. Or, perhaps there's a problem within your breasts, or your hormones are insufficient. Sometimes milk supply decreases over time – for all sorts of reasons.

**How to increase milk supply:** A separate document discusses low milk supply and offers non-pharmaceutical advice about how to try to increase milk supply. Medications or herbal supplements should not be used without first working with a breastfeeding expert, if possible. Improved breastfeeding management resolves most issues, but other issues can't be fixed. Sometimes, you must simply accept your reality and redefine success. Establish a sustainable feeding plan that hopefully includes some breastmilk.

### What you should know about galactagogues

- **Herbal supplements:**

Fenugreek, goat's rue, milk thistle (*Silybum*), oats, barley, dandelion, millet, seaweed, anise, basil, blessed thistle, fennel seeds, marshmallow, moringa leaf, shatavari, and torbangun, among others.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• available over the counter.</li><li>• not regulated by the FDA, so there are no manufacturing or dosing standards, and contaminants may be present.</li><li>• potential allergic reactions and anaphylaxis, due to cross reactions with ragweed and related plants, peanuts, chickpeas, soybeans, and green peas.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• side effects include diarrhea, maple syrup body odor, asthma, bleeding, dizziness, flatulence, hypoglycemia, loss of consciousness, skin rash or wheezing.</li><li>• possible drug interactions with warfarin, heparin, hypoglycemics, insulin, antiplatelet drugs, aspirin, feverfew, primrose oil and many other herbals.</li></ul> |
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- **Dopamine antagonists:** Domperidone and Reglan

These drugs treat nausea and gastrointestinal problems. They incidentally increase low prolactin levels to hopefully increase milk supply. Physician experts in lactation do not recommend the use of these drugs. There's some evidence they do increase milk supply a little bit, but the evidence is not strong enough to warrant risking the possible significant side effects.

- > **Domperidone** was removed from the USA market in 2004 due to deaths from heart arrhythmias. Many believe the pill form is not as risky as the intravenous form. Some mothers obtain the drug from other countries. Prescribers in the USA risk their medical license if they prescribe domperidone.
- > **Reglan** side effects can be significant. This drug can exacerbate anxiety and depression. Irreversible abnormal body movements (tardive dyskinesia) can occur in the mother if it's taken more than 3 months.

### The Expert Evidence

- The 2018 Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine - Protocol #9 - "Use of Galactagogues in Initiating or Augmenting Maternal Milk Production, Second Revision 2018" reviewed and summarized the research and evidence related to galactagogue use. View the protocol here: <https://abm.memberclicks.net/assets/DOCUMENTS/PROTOCOLS/9-galactagogues-protocol-english.pdf>
- A 2013 American Academy of Pediatrics clinical report, "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>.