

# Ask the Pediatrician: What can new moms do about low milk supply?

June 13 2022, by Dr. Hailey Nelson

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Q: I'm concerned that I'm not producing enough milk for my baby. Is there anything I can do about this?

A: Navigating concerns for low breast milk supply can be very stressful for some families. This may be even more so during the baby formula shortage if you need to supplement with formula. Here are five steps that can help if you're looking to boost your milk supply, whether you are exclusively nursing your infant or supplementing with formula or [solid foods](#).

### 1. Visit your child's health care provider

All mothers share the concern about their milk being enough for their baby. If you are worried about breast milk supply, visit your child's pediatrician—we are happy to help! Your pediatrician will start by looking at how your infant is growing. A baby who is tracking along their growth curve as they should is very reassuring.

Sometimes babies are fussy due to colic or other factors, which may not be related to the volume or amount of feeding. Pediatricians can also work with you to identify factors that can help increase your breast milk supply or resolve breastfeeding difficulties, including latching issues and breastfeeding positions. An evaluation by a board-certified lactation consultant can also help you discover any other possible causes of low breast milk supply.

In addition, your pediatrician may also be able to connect you with resources if you are struggling to find baby formula for your infant.

### 2. Tech check your [breast pump](#)

Effective milk extraction is the best way to help keep up your milk supply. If you are pumping and notice that there is a decrease in the volume you are able to produce, check your pump equipment. Ensuring a proper flange fit can optimize pumping. It is also a good idea to inspect the pump valves. Over time, they can become worn and reduce the

effectiveness of your pump.

For information about pump settings, you can look to your pump's manufacturer. Some even have help lines you can call to troubleshoot pump-setting issues. However, it is best to seek the help of a lactation consultant to determine which pump settings work best for you.

Also, consider if the type of pump you're using is best for your specific needs. A double electric pump is best when needing to express breastmilk. Manual or hand pumps can work for short-term use, but are not ideal when you are planning to return to work outside the home or pump longer term. If you do not have an electric pump, your insurance may be able to cover it. Talk with your pediatrician or a lactation consultant to learn more.

### 3. If you are supplementing with formula, offer breast milk first

If you are supplementing your breast-fed baby's diet with formula, start feedings with available breast milk first. Then if needed, give baby formula to meet your infant's growing nutritional demands. Be sure to follow food safety guidelines for breast milk and baby formula. If either are left out too long, especially once a bottle has been used, they can be contaminated with oral bacteria and make your infant sick. Never water down formula to make it last longer.

### 4. Take time to care for you

Staying hydrated and getting good nutrition are very important to breast milk production. You need to take care and nourish yourself so you can provide nutrition to your baby. There are no special tricks or products needed; specific foods or supplements you may see marketed to promote breastmilk production are not necessary. Instead, focus on eating healthful foods and drinking plenty of water, the same things all of us

should be doing every day.

Be mindful, too, of your own stress level. The formula shortage can be incredibly anxiety-inducing for parents, especially when they are already managing the challenge of being a new parent. During this time, be extra mindful of your stress level and get enough sleep and physical activity to keep your mind and body healthy.

## 5. Consider other health factors

If you've noticed a lower-than-usual milk supply, consider other health factors. For example, the return of your cycle or thyroid issues can affect breast milk supply. Infections can also affect your ability to make breast milk. Some other factors that could increase the risk of low milk: your baby was born pre-term; you had a cesarean delivery or a difficult delivery; you delivered multiples, or you had a previous breast biopsy or surgery. Consider seeing your primary care provider or OB/GYN for further evaluation if you have any health concerns.

As the old saying goes, "It takes a village." So, reach out to your village for connection and support and don't blame yourself. If you are running low on formula your baby needs, for example, ask friends and family to keep an eye out for it when they go grocery shopping. And don't hesitate to reach out to your pediatrician with any health or feeding concerns. Working together and helping each other can help ensure your baby gets the nutrition they need until [formula](#) production ramps back up and/or your [breast milk](#) supply is meeting their growing needs.

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