

Establishing and Maintaining Milk Supply

The first 10 days after delivery are the most critical time for making milk. While most mothers will start to build a milk supply after birth, no foods, pills or supplements will build a full milk supply without emptying the breasts. These tips can help you establish and maintain your milk supply.

Days 1 to 3

- Hold your baby skin-to-skin as much as possible to help boost your body's milk-making hormones
- Your baby may be sleepy the first day and not seem interested in feeding, but it is important to remove colostrum from your breasts to make more milk
- Remove colostrum at least 8 times every 24 hours by:
 - Breastfeeding your baby from both breasts
 - Hand expressing for at least 5 minutes and feeding all your colostrum to your baby (Small amounts of colostrum can be fed by spoon, syringe or cup)
 - Pumping, and then hand expressing for 5 minutes
 - If your baby presents with any of the following – even if your baby is breastfeeding:
 - was born less than 37 weeks gestation
 - weighed less than 5 pounds 8 ounces at birth
 - is not feeding well — at least 8 times every 24 hours — by the second day
 - is not staying in the same room with you
 - is supplemented for any reason
 - Your nurse or lactation consultant assessed that your breasts need extra stimulation
- It is normal for your baby to “cluster feed” — breastfeeding several times within a few hours — on the second and third days (and nights)
 - This is your baby's way of helping you to make more milk
 - If you are pumping, and your baby isn't breastfeeding, “cluster pump” on days 2 and 3
- If your baby is in the NICU, pump at least 8 times every 24 hours, even if your baby is breastfeeding

Days 3 to 5

- Milk supply should increase by day 3 after a vaginal delivery, but can take up to 5 days after a cesarean
 - Your breasts should feel fuller before feedings and lighter after feedings
 - Your baby should be satisfied after breastfeeding on both breasts
 - If you are exclusively pumping or your baby is not breastfeeding well, you should be pumping at least 8 ounces (240 ml) every 24 hours
 - Get help from a lactation specialist if your supply is low on day 5
 - This is the best time to adjust to help increase your milk supply
- Avoid letting your breasts become full, firm or engorged, as full breasts make less milk
 - Your breasts will make less milk if you wait until they are full before breastfeeding or pumping
 - Remove milk frequently, preferably by breastfeeding

End of week 1

- Milk supply goal: at least 20 ounces (600mL) every 24 hours

End of week 2 and beyond

- Milk supply goal: at least 24 ounces (720 mL) every 24 hours

How do I know if I have a full milk supply?

- A full milk supply for a single baby is approximately 24 ounces (720ml) every 24 hours. If you are pumping, you can easily see if you are making these amounts.
- If you are exclusively breastfeeding, use the following to help you determine your supply:
 - Your baby is feeding well at least 8 times every 24 hours and is satisfied after feeds
 - You hear swallows with at least every 5 sucks by the end of day 3
 - Your breasts feel fuller or heavier before feeding and lighter after feeding
 - Your baby's wet and dirty diapers match the number and color shown on the Baby's Daily Feeding Record in your New Beginnings Resource Guide
 - Your baby is starting to gain weight by day 4
 - Your baby is back to birth weight by day 14 and continues to gain weight
 - Your baby and you are both content when breastfeeding

Working to achieve a full milk supply as soon as possible

In most cases, if you do not produce a full milk supply within the first 2 weeks, it may be difficult to achieve a full supply later. While your baby might not require much milk the first few days, your breasts require frequent milk removal during this time. Only once you have been able to produce a full supply can you expect to be able to cut back a bit on milk removal without losing your supply.

Additional information

- Engorgement and oversupply
 - Pumping does not cause engorgement; lack of milk removal causes engorgement
 - Some engorgement is a normal process of fluids moving around in your body on days 3 to 5
 - The more you empty your breasts, the more milk you will make
- Fluid and nutrition
 - Drink enough fluids (preferably water) to satisfy your thirst
 - If you are dehydrated, you will make less milk
 - Adequate nutrition and rest are also very important for a full milk supply
- Consult a lactation consultant
 - Lactation consultants can help if you notice that you have problems at any point
- Medications
 - Review any new medications you are taking with your physician or a lactation consultant