

# Herbal Remedies for Milk Supply

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It is quite possible that herbal remedies help increase milk supply. Almost every culture has some sort of herb, plant, or potion to increase milk supply. Some may work, some may work as placebos (which is fine), and some may not work at all. Some will have active ingredients that will not increase the milk supply but have other effects, not necessarily desirable.

Note that even herbs can have side effects, even serious ones. Natural source drugs are still drugs, and there is no such thing as a 100% safe drug. Luckily, as with most drugs, the baby will get only a tiny percentage of the mother's dose, which means the baby is extremely unlikely to have any side effects.

If you take other medications or supplements or have any health conditions, check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any of the remedies below.

## Fenugreek and Blessed Thistle

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Fenugreek: 3 capsules 3 times a day

Blessed Thistle: 3 capsules 3 times a day, or 20 drops of the tincture 3 times a day

- Fenugreek and blessed thistle seem to work better if you take both, not just one or the other.
- These herbs work quickly. If they do work, you will usually notice a difference within 24 hours of starting them. If there is no effect by 72 hours, they probably won't work.
- Fenugreek is often sold as a combination with thyme. Do not buy this combination.
- Herbal remedies are not standardized. You may see bottles of fenugreek and blessed thistle with the number of milligrams in each capsule listed but we do not really know how much of the active ingredient is in each capsule.
  - o Use 3 capsules of each herb 3 times a day as a starting point.
  - o Fenugreek has a distinct smell. Ensure the capsules are fresh and give off a strong odour.
  - o When you are taking enough fenugreek, you will be able to smell it on your skin, in your sweat, and/or in your urine. If you cannot smell it, consider increasing the dose to 4 capsules 3 times a day.
- Lactation teas with fenugreek and blessed thistle also seem to work sometimes, but the amount of herbs you get in a cup of tea is much less than the capsules.
- If you have diabetes, fenugreek may lower your blood sugar. Test your blood sugar levels more often until you know how fenugreek affects you. You may also want to start with fewer capsules per day and increase slowly to 3 capsules 3 times a day.
- Fenugreek and blessed thistle seem to work better in the first few weeks after birth than later. Domperidone works better after the first few weeks (see the information sheet "Domperidone"). Individual experiences vary.
- You can take fenugreek and blessed thistle together with domperidone if you feel it is helpful.

- If you are ready to stop fenugreek and blessed thistle, you can probably stop suddenly, or wean off over a week or so, with little effect on the milk supply.

- **Note:** if you are allergic to legumes (including peanuts), you may also be allergic to fenugreek.

Some manufacturers sell capsules or tinctures that contain fenugreek and blessed thistle together (as well as other herbs for milk supply, in some brands). In general, follow the manufacturer's instructions. Because the herbs are combined in one capsule or liquid tincture, these types of products are a good option if you have difficulty taking many capsules multiple times per day.

If the product does not seem to help, try increasing the dose slightly. If there is still no difference, trying fenugreek and blessed thistle separately may be worthwhile.

## Goat's Rue

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Tea: Make an infusion with 1 teaspoon leaves per 1 cup boiling water. Let steep for 15 minutes, covered, and drink 2 times a day.

Tincture: Take 20-40 drops in water or juice, 3 times a day.

Capsules: Read the directions on the bottle.

- Goat's rue comes from the same family as fenugreek.
- It contains a compound that can be used to make the medication metformin.
- Goat's rue may be especially helpful for increasing milk supply if you have a hormonal condition, like polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).
- Like fenugreek, goat's rue may lower blood sugar levels – if you have diabetes, check your blood sugar more often until you know how goat's rue affects you.

## Malunggay/Moringa

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Capsules: take multiple times a day (e.g. 3 or 4 times per day), up to a total of 1.5 g a day.

Powder: follow manufacturer's directions; can be mixed into a beverage, such as a smoothie.

- Moringa is a plant grown in sub-Himalayan areas and in the tropics. In some cultures various parts of the plant are cooked or dried and consumed as food or made into medicine to treat a variety of conditions.
- It is high in protein and nutrients, including vitamin C and calcium.
- Moringa may lower blood sugar levels – if you have diabetes, check your blood sugar more often until you know how moringa affects you.

## Shatavari

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Powder: 2 teaspoons stirred into warm milk 1 to 2 times per day. This is the traditional ayurvedic formulation for the powdered root. It can probably be mixed with other beverages if you do not consume dairy.

Capsules: 1 to 2 500 mg capsules, 3 times per day

- It is traditionally used in China and India for various conditions, including infertility and increasing milk production.
- Shatavari may lower blood sugar levels – if you have diabetes, check your blood sugar more often until you know how shatavari affects you.

## Other herbal treatments that have been used to increase milk supply are:

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- Alfalfa
- Fennel seed
- Red raspberry leaf
- Stinging nettle

## Food that may help increase milk supply:

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- Oatmeal
- Garlic, in moderation
- Ginger, in moderation
- Many cultures have traditional foods they have found helpful (fish and papaya soup, hot curry dishes, etc.).

Everything listed here is thought to help milk supply. None of these herbal or food treatments, including blessed thistle and fenugreek, has been proved effective scientifically.

**Remember:** herbal treatments are only part of the solution to “not enough milk”. Breastfeeding technique is important – see the information sheet “Latching and Feeding Management”.

**The information presented here is general and not a substitute for personalized treatment from an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) or other qualified medical professionals.**

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**Questions or concerns?** Email Dr. Jack Newman (read the page carefully, and answer the listed questions).  
**Make an appointment at the Newman Breastfeeding Clinic.**