

Increasing Milk Supply with Herbs

While not proven, it is possible that herbal remedies can help increase milk supply. However, herbal treatments are only *part* of the solution to “not having enough milk.” Herbs will not fix a milk supply without adequate stimulation to the breasts by either nursing or pumping.

Before trying herbs, note that they can have side effects, even serious ones. Luckily, as with most drugs, babies only get a tiny percentage of the mother’s dose, so it is extremely unlikely the baby will have any side effects from herbs.

Two herbal treatments that seem to increase milk supply are *fenugreek* and *blessed thistle*. They seem to work better if taken simultaneously, and in the following dosages:

- **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

Note: Some preparations of these herbs are labeled “not for use by nursing mothers,” presumably because of the tiny amount of alcohol the mother would get. However, these herbs are safe because so little gets into the milk.

More tips:

- **Do not take Fenugreek if you are allergic to peanuts.** Take raspberry instead.
- Fenugreek may cause a decrease in blood sugar in susceptible patients.
- It is best to buy each herb separately, not in combination with other herbs.
- Herbal remedies are not standardized, so though the bottle may say that it contains 405, 505, 605 or 705 mg/capsule, it can be difficult to know exactly how much of the active ingredient you are taking.
- Fenugreek will likely make your skin, sweat or urine smell like maple syrup. If you cannot smell it on your skin, you may not be taking enough.
- You will usually notice a difference within 3-5 days of starting fenugreek and blessed thistle. If not, you can increase the dosage of the herbs to 4 pills, 4 times per day. If after taking this dosage for a week you still do not notice a difference, these herbs probably won’t work for you. In this case, contact the Lactation Office to discuss prescriptions medication.
- When you are ready to stop taking herbs, you should wean yourself off over the course of several days – go down in number of pills from 3 to 2 to 1 each day until you stop.

Other herbal treatments that have been used to increase milk supply are raspberry leaf, fennel, goat’s rue, brewer’s yeast, alfalfa, and nettle tea. These herbs can be found at most health food stores, such as Whole Foods, Earth Fare, Garner’s Natural Foods and Market for Life.