



London Health Sciences Centre

Patient Information

HERBAL USE WHILE BREASTFEEDING

Before using any medication or herb, talk with your health care provider and/or a Lactation Consultant to get more information.

If you are considering using an herbal:

- Do you want to increase or decrease your milk supply?
- Are you trying to relieve symptoms unrelated to breastfeeding or milk supply?

If you decide an herbal is right for you while breastfeeding, consider the following:

- There is limited research to support the use of herbals. Most of their popularity comes from another mother sharing her experience about taking the herbal.
- Herbals are available without a prescription and are regulated under the Natural and Non-prescription Health Products Directorate (NNHPD). For more information, see the Health Canada website: www.hc-sc.gc.ca.
- It is important to understand the potential benefits and risks of using herbals and to avoid possible overdose, unplanned side effects or interactions with other medications or herbals.
- It is generally suggested that you start with a low dose or concentration. Different forms of herbals are available, as well as different concentrations. Usually teas are less strong, followed by capsules, then tinctures.
- Make sure you inform your health care provider and/or pharmacist that you are taking an herbal. If your health care provider is different from your baby's, or your baby is in hospital, be sure to mention everything you are taking to your baby's health care provider.

If you would like to increase or decrease your milk supply, it is important to try non-drug options first.

Foods and Herbs that may INCREASE milk supply:

Foods	Herbs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrefined grains (oatmeal, brown rice, barley) • Garlic • Mushrooms • Sesame seeds, sunflower seeds • Almonds • Asparagus • Pumpkin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blessed Thistle* • Chaste Tree Fruit* • Fennel* • Fenugreek* • Goat's Rue • Milk Thistle*

*Monitor baby for any side effect such as allergy, rash

For more information about increasing your milk supply, see the handouts *Building Your Milk Supply* and *Domperidone*.

Foods and Herbs* that may DECREASE milk supply:

Foods	Herbs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coffee/Caffeine• Alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peppermint• Parsley• Oregano• Sage• Jasmine• Yarrow

*Other products such as nicotine and some medications (e.g. cold, flu, allergy medications, hormonal birth control) can decrease milk supply. Talk to your health care provider for more information.

For more information about too much milk or a very fast flow, see the handout: *Overabundant Milk Supply/Overactive Letdown*.

**Remember that just because an herbal is available over the counter,
it does not make it safe.**

Some mothers find taking one herbal works well. Others choose to use more than one herbal at a time. Some commercial products combine herbs. Currently, the combined effects of herbals are not known.

**Consult with someone knowledgeable in herbals such as your health care provider,
pharmacist or someone formally trained in herbals.**

How do I know if someone is formally trained in herbals?

- Ask what their qualifications are
- Ask if they belong to a professional organization related to herbals
- Do they follow a code of ethics or pay fees to a college?
- Go to the following website to find someone near you:
<http://www.herbalists.on.ca/find-a-registered-herbalist>

When deciding to take an herbal for symptoms unrelated to breastfeeding, consider the following:

- Try non-drug ways to relieve your symptoms
- Delay use of the herbal until you are no longer breastfeeding
- Ask your health care provider if the herbal is safe to use while you are breastfeeding
- Start with a low dose
- Talk to your health care provider about the best time to take the herbal while you are breastfeeding

References:

- 1) Hale, T. (2019). *Medications & Mothers' Milk 2019*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
- 2) Morrison, B. & Wambach, K. (2016). Women's Health and Breastfeeding. In Wambach, K. & Riordan, J. *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation* 5th ed. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, pp. 584-588.
- 3) Nice, F. (2017). *Nonprescription Drugs for the Breastfeeding Mother*, 2nd ed. Derwood, MD: Nice Breastfeeding.
- 4) Nice, Frank J. *Common Herbs and Foods used as Galactagogues*. ICAN. 2011; 3(3): 129-132.
- 5) Health Canada. (2019). *Natural Health Products*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/natural-non-prescription.html>.

Developed by the Middlesex London Elgin Breastfeeding Coalition in September 2015. Currently revised by the Breastfeeding Coalition of Southwestern Ontario with representation from Chatham Kent Health Alliance, London Health Sciences Centre, Middlesex London Health Unit, Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital, St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital, Southwestern Public Health, December 2019