

How We Make Milk

Bottle-feeding mothers don't explode. That's because we stop making milk if milk isn't taken out. If a woman breastfed or pumped only once a day, she'd have a tiny trickle of milk. If she breastfed five times a day, she'd have a lot more. If she breastfed ten times a day, she'd have still more. The more often milk is removed, the more milk we make.

Okay, let's face the inevitable analogy. Picture a cow. The cow that's milked three times a day gives more milk each day than the one that's milked only twice a day. (Farmers limit milkings to twice a day to limit labor costs, not to maximize production.) And the baby who breastfeeds only a few times a day isn't going to generate a very large supply. More frequent breastfeeding puts our breasts into higher production.

Now imagine the cow hooked up to a milking machine *all day long*. But imagine that it's a really terrible milking machine, and takes out only small amounts of milk, or only at a very slow rate. Cows don't explode any more than bottle-feeding mothers do. This cow would end up making only small amounts of milk, even though milk is always being removed. Milk has to be removed *efficiently* for good production.

What about the baby who is at breast a lot but doesn't breastfeed effectively? Like the inefficient milking machine, he can spend all day "breastfeeding" and still not empty the breast... or fill his stomach. And if he doesn't take out enough milk, we don't make enough milk. Poorly feeding babies result in poor milk supplies.

We make milk fastest when our breasts feel emptiest. We make milk most slowly when our breasts feel fullest. So what happens if we "wait for our breasts to fill" before breastfeeding? By increasing the time between nursings, we drop the number of chances per day for milk to be removed. Less milk. And making our breasts get fuller and fuller just means production gets slower and slower. Less milk. Taking milk out **often** and taking it out **effectively** are what signal us to make more milk.

What about early mornings, when we feel the fullest and baby guzzles the most? A lot of milk has collected - that's what the baby is drinking - but our *rate* of production is pretty low. Later in the day, when the baby seems to feed all the time and we feel as if there's no milk there? There isn't a lot of stored milk, so the baby goes through it quickly, but our *rate* of production is probably at its highest point of the day.

Some mothers are discouraged to find that if they pump more often, at first they get less at each session. True, but where they might have gotten, say, 2 oz every 4 hours, which is 12 oz in 24 hours, they're now getting, say, 1 ½ oz every 2 hours, or 18 oz in 24 hours. The twenty-four hour total is greater, and that's what counts.

Breastfeeding **often** and breastfeeding **well**. The key to a good milk supply.