Tips from the Trenches – #17

Too Much of a Good Thing?

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Oversupply – Too Much Milk ---

Is it possible to have too much milk? Yes, it is. Oversupply happens when your breasts make more milk than your baby needs.

Symptoms —

1. Engorgement that lasts longer than the first week after birth, despite a baby that’s feeding well and gaining weight.
2. Baby finishes nursing, and is obviously satisfied and full, but your breasts – one or both – still feel full too.
3. You can pump large amounts of milk, even right after your baby has fed really well.
4. Constant leaking may be a sign of oversupply.
5. Getting frequent plugged ducts and / or mastitis can be a symptom of oversupply.
6. If you have so much milk that baby gets full before he gets to the hindmilk, even on the first side, he may show symptoms of lactose overload: green watery stools, lots of gas, and “colicky” behavior. This is also called “foremilk – hindmilk imbalance”

Coping Strategies —

Getting the Baby More Comfortable —

7. If you’ve got so much milk that baby is uncomfortable, make sure you’re giving him the best chance to get hindmilk (which is more soothing to the tummy).
8. “Finish the first side first.” Don’t change sides at some predetermined time. Doing so could prevent him from getting to the hindmilk.
9. Try “block feeding” – feed from the same side for two feedings in a row, or for all feedings within a designated time-frame – like 3 hours or so.
10. While block-feeding, you will likely need to pump or hand express a little milk from the “unused” side to stay comfortable and prevent plugs. It’s important to express only until you’re comfortable, not until you’re empty.

11. Or, you can use a Milk Saver (www.mymilkies.com) to collect milk that leaks from the opposite side while you’re nursing.

Getting You More Comfortable--

12. Since getting emptied out completely is what causes an increase in milk production, it stands to reason that leaving a little milk in one breast (or both) might help slow things down a bit.

13. The trick is not to leave too much in there, or you’ll get plugged ducts and other complications.

14. Some moms find that careful use of peppermint (natural essential oil) like in Altoids, helps gently decrease milk production.

15. Other moms prefer an herbal tea made of parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme. (also called “Scarborough Fair” Tea or “Simon and Garfunkel” Tea)

16. If you’re planning on starting birth control pills, even the progesterone-only “mini-pill”, that may take care of the problem for you.

Over-Active Let-Down—

17. Sometimes oversupply leads to a milk-ejection reflex or “let-down” that is brisk enough that the baby coughs, gags, or chokes.

18. Some babies bite down to try to slow the flow.

19. Others let go, and you can see your milk spurting several inches! If he does this, just keep a burp cloth or bra pad handy to catch the spurt until it slows down before putting him back on.

20. Holding that breast in a “scissor-hold” may help slow the flow enough for baby to handle it.

21. Leaning back far enough that baby’s head is higher than your breast may also help. Gravity will help Baby feel more like he can drink from a water fountain (and let some milk go by) than if he’s under your fast flow and it seems like he’s getting overwhelmed.
22. Be sure baby is burping well after feedings. Swallowing fast and gulping to keep up with a fast flow may increase the amount of air baby is swallowing.

23. Even if you do nothing, over-active let-down problems are self-limited. As baby gets older and grows larger, his mouth will be able to take larger swallows of breastmilk and keep up. Eventually.

24. Don’t worry if baby lets go and gets squirted in the eye or nose. Breastmilk is good for preventing / treating pinkeye and for use as a nose drop anyway. 😊

25. You may need to wear double bra pads to keep milk from soaking through. But DON’T wear the ones with “leak-proof” plastic barriers. Those cause even more problems, like yeast infections of the nipple.

26. If you feel yourself having a let-down at some inconvenient time, cross your arms over your chest and press down to stop it.

27. If you’re prone to leaking, wearing floral or geometric (big polka dots!) patterned shirts or blouses can help disguise wet spots. Solid black is another option.

Medical Concerns—

28. If the above measures don’t work, you may need to see a Breastfeeding Medicine Specialist for assistance.

29. Some types of hormone imbalance may cause oversupply, including thyroid imbalance.

30. You may be more prone to plugged ducts and mastitis. See Tips From the Trenches on that topic.

31. You may be more prone to nipple yeast infections, if you have continual leaking.

Other Resources:

La Leche League International. Website at www.llli.org – then search “oversupply” or “over-active let-down” – lots of good info there!