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Can You Increase the Fat in Breast Milk?

Parents Corner

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Image: [Myllissa](#)

As if it wasn't enough to worry throughout your pregnancy (Is the baby okay? Am I really allowed to have two dinners? What will people think if I wear the same sweatpants every day?), the worrying doesn't stop once you move on to breastfeeding. In the case of the latter, we often worry that we're not eating healthy enough or that there's not enough fat in our milk.

If you're wondering if you can increase the fat content in your breast milk, the short answer is **no**, you cannot.

Read on to find out why and learn more about what you can do, which is increasing your baby's consumption of the fattiest breast milk.

Why your baby always wins when it comes to breast milk

The mammary glands in your breasts produce your milk. Those glands take the nutrients from your diet and from your body's stores of nutrients. If you're running short in the nutrient department, your glands will use what's available to produce a nutritious milk for your baby, and leave you to fend for yourself, according to [Healthy Children](#). Not the best news for you, but fantastic news for your kiddo.

What does this mean? It means that the female body is incredible (which you probably already know) and that breastmilk is kinda magical. Your body ensures that it contains exactly what your baby needs, so he gets a nutritious meal every time.



Image: [Liz Davenport](#)

Can changing your diet increase the fat content in your milk?

There's a long-held belief that changing your diet is one way to increase the fat content in your breastmilk.

However, according to [Kelly Mom](#), it's not the *amount of fat* in your milk that impacts your baby's growth but, rather, the *amount of milk* that baby consumes. Research shows that "the only thing that has been correlated with infant growth in exclusively breastfed babies" is the baby's milk intake, not the fat content in that milk.

Research also shows that what you eat does not have an impact on the amount of fat in your breastmilk. Yes, you read that right. You can't eat something and expect it to boost the fat content. What you can control, however, is the type of fat in your milk according to what you eat.

Make sure you're eating monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids, which can be found in vegetable oils, seeds and nuts. You'll also want to include omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids in your diet.

Broadly speaking, your best bet is to eat a healthy, balanced diet that includes berries, legumes, leafy greens, red meat, eggs, fish, avocado, yogurt, and cheese. This will help ensure that your baby receives healthy fats when he nurses.

What impact does unhealthy food have on your breast milk?

Can you stray from your perfect diet when nursing? Yes. In fact, no one eats healthy all the time. Will your baby still feast on nutritious milk? Yes, because that's just how the body works. Can you have a glass of wine now and again, or a cup of coffee, or a chocolate donut? Absolutely.

How can I increase my baby's intake of fatty milk?

This is the real issue. It's not about increasing the fat content in your breast milk, but increasing your baby's intake of milk in general that fosters growth. And if you want to make sure your baby's is getting the milk with the highest fat content, read on for some tips on how to make it happen.

Increase the duration of your baby's feedings

When your baby starts nursing, first she drinks the foremilk. This milk is thinner and quenches her thirst.

As she continues to nurse, the foremilk gives way to hindmilk, which is creamier, more caloric and, therefore, higher in fat. The general rule is: **the less milk in the breast, the higher the fat.**

Don't assume, however, that the longer the feeding, the fattier the milk. It's not about the duration of the breastfeeding session, it's about how empty the breast is. Remember, the **"less milk [the breast] contains, the greater the proportion of fat in the milk."**

Your best bet for getting your baby to drink the fattiest milk is to let him empty the breast. Although the breast is never technically "empty", you should be able to note the difference from a full breast and a "not full" breast.



Image: Foremilk (left) and hindmilk (right)

Express the foremilk before nursing

If you remove the initial milk produced by the breast and leave the hindmilk for baby, you can be sure that she's getting the fattiest part of your milk.

That being said, the foremilk is still important. Yes, it's more watered down, and yes, it's a thirst-quencher, but it also contains carbohydrates and proteins, both of which baby needs. And since growth is related to how much your baby drinks, it's important that he consume both the foremilk *and* the hindmilk. According to [The Truth About Breastfeeding](#), "Nutrients that are important for health and growth are contained in both components of the breast milk."

[Breastfeeding USA](#) also points out that the foremilk isn't always low in fat. The fat content actually varies throughout the day and depends on how often he's nursing.

Practice breast compression

This is a very simple exercise whereby you apply pressure to the breast while pumping or nursing. [This great article on Native Mothering](#) breaks it down for you, but essentially this is what you want to do.

Before you start nursing, cup your breast with you thumb on the top and your fingers underneath, making a "C" shape. When your baby is nibbling at the breast, squeeze it gently and hold it until he stops to take a breath. When he stops, you stop. That's all there is to it. When he starts eating again, you start again.

Keep in mind that breast compression is only useful if your baby has a proper latch.

How does this ensure that your baby gets the fatty milk? Well, putting pressure on the breast can help keep the milk flowing, and breast compression helps the fat globules move down the ducts more quickly, which means that the hindmilk arrives sooner.

Below is one of the best videos demonstrating how it's done.



Give yourself a breast massage

This approach is similar to breast compressions, and the effect is the same: the hindmilk arrives more quickly, as you help it move towards the front of the breast.

Give yourself a gentle massage before and during feedings. There are lots of ways to do this. One technique is to start with your hand near your collarbone and massage downwards, towards the nipple, in circles. Always work from top to bottom and work your way around the entire breast.

Here's a great video with a short demonstration using a slightly different technique. Although Tony's talking in the context of pumping, this is, of course, valid for breastfeeding moms as well.



Well, ladies, there you have it.

Although you can't increase the fat content in your milk, there are ways to help your baby consume the fattier milk. But remember, the key to weight gain is volume, and babies need both the fore- and the hindmilk to flourish.