When Low Supply Persists – Insufficient Glandular Tissue?

Most new mothers anticipate that breastfeeding problems will be limited to perhaps some sore nipples and engorgement problems in the first week or two. They do not expect to have too little milk. When low supply strikes, friends and family assure them that more milk will come if they continue with frequent breastfeeding, start pumping, and add herbal remedies and lactogenic foods plus drinking lots of water. All this advice leaves mothers even more concerned when their milk remains short of what their babies need. What are they doing wrong they wonder.

Not all mothers can make a full milk supply

Mothers feel much pressure to breastfeed exclusively, and yet we know that some women (5-10% perhaps) will be unable to make a full supply. It does these mothers a disservice to suggest that they just need to try harder. You may be thinking that 10% sounds too high – we're mammals after all so breasts should work. Research suggests there's an increase in low supply which might be a result of environmental contaminants: endocrine dysruptors.

Lack of sufficient breast emptying – a secondary problem

When all is working well, hormonal changes triggered by the delivery of the placenta cause a jump to copious milk production in the first week. If milk is not then taken out the supply may dwindle. If this happens then the advice to breastfeed more often and add some pump sessions is appropriate and likely to have good results. Note: a long, stressful delivery, perhaps complicated by excessive blood loss, may result in a delay in full milk onset.

Insufficient glandular tissue (IGT) – a primary problem

However, for some mothers that jump to full production in the first week does not happen. Often these mothers will have noticed minimal first-trimester breast changes (tenderness, growth). Since giving birth they have pumped, hydrated, taken herbal supplements and yet supply persists short of demand. In this case the low supply is **not** a result of some failure on their part, some lack of action. It is most likely due to unresponsive or insufficient glandular tissue. Just as the thyroid gland can be underactive, breasts can too.

Breast tissue can continue to develop

Sometimes it can take 6 to 8 weeks for breasts to reach their full capacity so it's well worthwhile to maintain good breast stimulation, and try some herbal supplements (e.g. goat's rue) and lactogenic foods.

Resources

mobimotherhood.org
lowmilksupply.org
facebook.com/groups/IGTmamas
facebook.com/supportive.community.breastfeeding.loss
noteveryonecanbreastfeed.com
lowmilksupplyfoundation.org
Finding Sufficiency, by Diana Cassar-Uhl
Making More Milk, 2nd edition