

MILK SUPPLY CHALLENGES: A COLLECTION OF STORIES FROM LLC FAMILIES



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"When Shaina was a newborn, my milk supply was more than abundant. I would drip milk copiously in the morning and whenever I took a shower. When I nursed on one side, the other leaked. But as early as Shaina's sixth month, I noticed my right breast was producing significantly less milk than my left. I noticed that Shaina would get restless on the right breast quickly. I suspect the reason for this was my favouring the left breast when we co-slept. I discussed the challenge with my LLL Leader and other Group members, who suggested I use the right breast during the day and the left at night. It was also recommended to start each feed with the right breast - no improvement. By 10 months, Shaina and I became accustomed to having one breast be the main supplier. Now, I use the right one when I want to give Shaina comfort but not a meal, and I save the left one for when I know she'll need more milk – like before bed and in the morning. My right breast is a full cup size smaller than my left!"

Judy, Millbrook, ON



*"I had breast reduction surgery back in 1991 and gave birth to my first baby, a daughter, in 2005. Some mothers who have breast reduction surgery have full supplies nonetheless, but I was not one of them. By day 5, a visit to the lactation consultant confirmed the worst—I would have to supplement. Luckily, I had read LLL's book, *Defining Your Own Success: Breastfeeding After Breast Reduction Surgery* by Diana West. Instead of supplementing with bottles, I used the Lact-aid supplemental nursing system—a little bag that hangs around your neck with a tube that goes in the baby's mouth while she is nursing. As the baby nurses, she gets all the available milk, stimulates your supply, and gets the supplement she needs at the same time. I also went on domperidone to increase my supply and joined Diana West's forum at www.bfar.org.*

It took me several months to come to terms with my inadequate supply. I beat myself up, felt guilt and regret, and wasted her best moments on the pump. Finally, I decided that I was giving my daughter the best that I could, and it would have to be enough. I started focusing on enjoying our breastfeeding relationship for what it was, not what it might have been.



My daughter is now 9 months old and still nursing. This is one of my proudest accomplishments. "

Christy, Ottawa, ON

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*"Milk supply was never a concern with my first two boys, now 4 and 2. However, I had twins - a girl and a boy - in October and faced a few challenges. Each weighed over 8 pounds and latched well in the hospital but it was discovered that Tom had a tongue-tie so he didn't have an effective latch. He had it snipped at 10 days old but it didn't solve all his problems right away. I rented a hospital grade breast pump at 8 days and wish I had even sooner. I needed my body to realize it had twins to nurse. With great support from my sister (a nurse who had breastfed all three of her now grown girls), mother and husband, we were able to syringe feed him, then advance to a bottle and finally he became a great nurser before 2 months (his sister Emma hasn't had a problem). Perseverance paid off!! The LLL book *Mothering Multiples* by Karen Kerkhoff Gromada became my 'bible' and gave me confidence in my ability to produce enough milk for two babies. My doctor's wife, a lactation consultant, was a big help as well as another public health nurse."*

Nancy, Belmont, ON

"At eight months pregnant, I stood in a hot shower, expressing colostrum and crying. I had been afraid I could never produce milk, and seeing physical evidence of at least one working duct on each side was overwhelming. My child could have milk!

A dozen years earlier, I had had breast reduction surgery. At the time, my doctor could tell me very little about my chance for future lactation. When I became pregnant, I sought out every piece of advice I could find on breastfeeding after reduction and obsessed over every possibility. When my daughter Sophia was born, I was able to breastfeed her exclusively for two weeks. Intellectually, I knew this was a triumph, but it tore me up when Mike brought home that first can of formula. However, she didn't mind the supplementary tube on my nipple, and, fully fed, her disposition improved amazingly. A prescription for Domperidone and an industrial pump soon followed. When I began my final pumping marathon, with the goal of increasing my supply to meet Sophia's needs, I understood that it might not work.

That was fine – I had become adept with the demand tube and just wanted to know I had tried.



To my delight, within 48 hours I was pumping enough to replace the formula in the supplementer. With my midwife's blessing, I phased out the supplementation, and Sophia, then nearly six weeks old, continued to thrive. I eased off the drug regimen after she began to eat solids, and it has been smooth sailing! Sophia is 26 months now and still loves her 'nurnie'."

Meghan, Toronto, ON



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"I am a mother of 1 year old twins. They were born 7 weeks early and delivered by C-Section and I am proud to say that I was able to provide them both with breast milk, nearly exclusively for the first 6 months, and as required for the next 6 months. I began by pumping every 2 hours in the day and every 4 hours at night. My daytime pumping would start at 6 am and end at 10 pm. I woke every night at 2 am to pump. I was pumping 20 minute sessions, 10 times a day. My breasts were usually empty after the first 10 minutes or so but I kept pumping to continue stimulating the glands. Often times after the 16 minute mark, more milk would come out. I was recovering from preeclampsia and taking the maximum dose of labetalol four times a day which slows breast milk production. It took about 2 weeks until I was producing enough milk for them to both have breast milk exclusively. Being preemie though, that was not a large amount; about 16 oz a day between them. I took fenugreek and blessed thistle to help bring in my milk. I was so proud of myself when I was finally able to provide for them. Having had limited contact with them in the NICU, it was one of the only things that was exclusively mine and made me feel like a mother. Everything else was determined by the doctors and nurses; when I could hold them, bathe them, feed them, but not this. I and I alone could provide my babies the nourishment they needed to grow strong and healthy to come home.

I tried to put my twins to breast once they were old enough and found it to be too time consuming to breastfeed, then top them up with a bottle, then pump. By the time I finished it was time to start again. They were still too small to have the strength and stamina they needed to empty the breast and meet all of their nutritional requirements. They were just barely 5 lbs when they came home after only 31 days in the hospital. They needed to eat every 2 - 2.5 hours and often not at the same time. I was only averaging about 2 hours of broken sleep a day when I was trying to put them to breast. I was just too exhausted to be the only one that could feed them. I needed help. Pumping on my schedule allowed me to sleep and have other people feed them. They got all of the benefits of breast milk and I got to sleep. I tried again to put them to breast when they were about 10 lbs thinking that they were more than big enough to empty the breast now but by then they were use to the bottle and I was use to pumping. I was still exhausted and did not feel up to the challenge of exclusive breastfeeding and no bottle. It was a difficult decision for me to make to exclusively pump. I really wanted the bonding aspect of breastfeeding but was too overwhelmed with exhaustion and recovering from the preeclampsia to do it all on my own. Pumping was a good compromise and my husband and family got to share in the feeding/bonding experience...



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... I maintained my rigid pumping schedule for the first 8 months. When they started sleeping through the night, I was still getting up to pump. At my most, I was producing 60 oz of breast milk a day with no medications or herbal supplements. I did need to supplement with formula right before they started solids. They were each getting only 3 or 4 bottles a week of formula for about 2 months. The rest was all breast milk.

I began to tire of all of the pumping and really wanted to sleep through the night. I decided to start taking domperidone so I could maintain my supply and pump less. I was able to drop to 8 pumps per day, sleep through the night finally, and have the same volume. When they were about 10 months old, I again was able to drop 2 pumps per day and was now at only 6 pumps per day, every 3 hours instead of every 2, producing about 40 oz a day. I stuck with 6 pumps a day until they turned 1 and am now in the weaning off process which in itself opens up a whole new bag of emotions.

As I said, I really wanted to breastfeed but more importantly, I really wanted them to be breast milk fed. Breast milk was the best thing I could offer their tiny bodies and I was determined to do it. I attribute my success to a supportive family and an amazing breast pump. My family and friends were extremely supportive and together we made sure that pumping came before all else. At family and friends homes, I did not excuse myself and leave to go pump. I pumped right there amongst the conversations. At first of course, I did excuse myself but felt as though I was missing out. I hated being secluded from the action and started to resent pumping because it was so time consuming and I was stuck there sitting by myself. I decided that if I was actually breastfeeding, I would have fed the babies right there in front of my family and friends anyhow, so pumping was really no different. Everyone just accepted it as they would have if I was breastfeeding.

I could walk around the house while pumping, use the computer, sit and play with my kids, and managed to bottle feed them and burp them all while pumping. I took it everywhere. I've pumped in my car in countless parking lots, while being the passenger in a car numerous times, several doctors offices, other people's houses, hair salons, friends weddings, anywhere I was when it was time to pump. I just brought a cooler bag with an ice pack...



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...Everywhere I went, people were so supportive when I needed a place to pump. Never once did I encounter a doctor's office or any other place where I could not pump. In my mind, I was breastfeeding and if I was out with a baby whom was put to breast, I would have had to put them to breast in all of those places. It didn't matter to me where I was or who I was with.

My kids needed to eat and deserved the best I could offer. I got so many compliments and congratulations on sticking with it. I was so proud of myself. Other than the extra dishes, to me, it did not seem like that much more work than breastfeeding and actually allowed me more freedom from the babies than breastfeeding. Yes it was inconvenient at times and I wanted to take the easy rout and switch to formula but then I would think about if I were actually breastfeeding would I be quitting? The answer was always no. I wanted to breastfeed for a year and for all intents and purposes, I was breastfeeding, just not the traditional way.

My twins are now a year old and have never been sick a day in their lives. They are strong and developmentally caught up to term babies. I am so happy to share my breastfeeding story with others. Successful breastfeeding of twins is possible, even if it has to be done with a pump. It was not my ideal dream situation but we made it work with relatively little disruption to our everyday lives. The payoff was well worth any inconvenience, two healthy babies and not to mention the amount of money saved not buying formula."

Sharon



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