

Fat Content in Breastmilk

Sometimes, when a baby is not gaining weight well, parents wonder about the quality of the breastmilk the baby is eating. Unfortunately, this concern can also come from the baby's provider, who recommends adding powdered formula to pumped breastmilk to help with gain. We have even had parents ask if we can have their milk "tested" to see if there are enough calories in it.

YOUR MILK IS PERFECT!

Human babies have evolved to eat human milk- and at the same time human milk has evolved to be the perfect food for them. If your baby is not gaining weight well, most of the time it is simply that they are not taking in enough ounces of your wonderful milk in a day. There are MANY reasons for this, and we are here to help you figure out what is going on!

The components of breastmilk that give it calories are sugar, fat and protein. The sugar (lactose) and protein content are highly regulated by the cells making the milk – everyone has close to the same amounts in their milk when it exits the breast. The amount of fat IS somewhat variable – depending on many factors. How full is the breast? What is the storage capacity? How long has it been since it was drained?

Do I need to worry about the amount of fat in my milk?

- No. There is no evidence breastmilk can be "too low" in fat.

What can I do to improve weight gain if my baby is not gaining well?

- The most common situation we see is that your baby is simply not eating enough ounces of your milk each day. See an IBCLC for a thorough evaluation of the situation! We can send a scale home with you if it looks like that would help document how many ounces a day your baby is eating.

Why not add formula powder to breastmilk?

- 1 tsp of powdered formula added to a bottle of breastmilk **adds about 6 calories**. Formula is made to mimic the caloric content of breastmilk, which is HIGHLY variable, but averages about 21 cals/oz. So... **you can give your baby about 7 "extra" calories by feeding them about 2 teaspoons more of breastmilk instead!** Formula is not better than your milk.
- Formula **powder is not sterile** and can introduce undesirable bacteria into your milk.



- You are **forced to express milk** to add the powder. Sometimes all you need is help with a deeper latch or learning how to use breast compressions while feeding.
- Formula was created to mimic breastmilk as much as possible, when mixed with the appropriate amount of water. **We recommend you mix powdered formula to full strength** and feed if needed. If your baby is under 2 months of age or born prematurely, please see these directions: <https://www.cdc.gov/cronobacter/pdf/Cronobacter-prevention-infographic-html.pdf> or use ready-to-feed formula rather than powder.
- If your baby is not removing milk well from your breasts, adding powdered formula to your milk instead of improving removal of milk from your breasts puts **your milk production at risk of decreasing further**.

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