

Low Milk Supply and a Happy Ending

By Emily H.

Here's my nursing saga. It has a happy ending! Yours will too. Before I go any further, let me assure you new mamas that you WILL get through your breastfeeding issues! And if you're struggling with low milk supply, you will have lots and lots of happy nursing regardless of supplementation. My own nursing experience began with a happy, easy homebirth. I naively assumed that things would just progress easily from there, but my breasts never really got full and it was hard to tell if my milk had come in. My baby nursed all day long and never made any gains. I mean, really, we sat on the couch each day and nursed for 12-16 hours straight for weeks. No one knew what was going on with my breasts, so we all just kept waiting and waiting for the milk to come in and taking my baby to cranio-sacral people, naturopaths, homeopaths, etc., etc. She dropped 11 oz below her birth weight and never budged for EIGHT WEEKS. (Have you ever seen a skeletal 8 week-old? It's horrible. I can't even look at her pictures from that time, so don't beat yourself up about supplementing if you have to.) Turns out I have breast hypoplasia, meaning my breasts don't have enough glandular tissue to make milk. (So that was another layer of sadness for me. I always hated my boobs, but assumed that they were utilitarian, if not aesthetic. Turns out they're not so much of either. So in addition to feeling bad about not making enough milk, I got to go back and re-enjoy my adolescent feelings of body embarrassment. AWESOME!)

In the early days, I spent a good portion of each day pumping, weeping and grieving for the nursing relationship that I thought was being ripped from me. Every little detail was another heartbreak: How will we go camping if I have to bring the SNS or bottles and formula? How will we go for a walk around town? Do I have to bring a stupid cooler everywhere we go? How will we travel? Does this mean I can't co-sleep since I'm not exclusively nursing? Formula or goat's milk? Where can I find a milk donor?? Weep, weep, weep. Oh, that sucked so bad. So I supplemented reluctantly with the SNS, giving her a few ounces at a time until I took her to a pediatrician who basically scared me into supplementing in earnest.

Then, I got to experience the joy of an infant who wasn't ravenous! My babe has always been mellow, and even when she was terribly skinny she never acted distressed. However, after she drank her first proper meal, she was practically glowing. All smiles and animated gestures. It was so worth it. And watching her climb back up the weight chart was like winning the lottery every day.

At 12 months, I can honestly say that our nursing relationship is great. My girl gets so excited when it's time to nurse and the way she squeals when she sees my boob coming makes me so happy! So just know that you can have a totally awesome, fulfilling nursing partnership despite a rocky start, or having to supplement. You may hit some rough patches where it seems like babe prefers the bottle or SNS to your breast, but with Melissa's support you will be able to move through that and keep on truckin' down Booby Lane.

Now, on to YOU, new mama! You are in that special window of time where you can make big strides in milk supply and breast tissue building, so please, keep working hard with pumping and herb-ing yourself. Get help EVERY time you have a question. Your best opportunity for

improvement is now. At the same time, don't feel disheartened if you've passed the magical 8 week mark. I saw ongoing gains in my breast tissue for almost 9 months, which I attribute to herbs and frequent nursing. There's no research on long-term breast tissue building, but I'm here to tell you it's possible. I've gone from barely making a drop of milk to being able to regularly pump 1.5-2.5oz. Which I think is major. Even though other moms may easily pump 5+ oz, I'm still proud of my gains. And my mom is still nice enough to cheer me on when I send her text pictures of how much I can pump. Support is key here!

Bottom line- if you read none of the rest of this: **YOU CAN DO IT!** Low milk supply sucks, but you are not alone, and you can still create a wonderful nursing relationship together. Good luck and go mama!

(Note from Melissa Cole of Luna Lactation: I first met Emily and her baby after they had been struggling for a couple of months. Coping with glandular tissue issues and low supply is very emotional and intense. We did a lot of deep supply work to support their unique needs. Emily and her baby were open and willing to try many things. It can be challenging when your breastfeeding reality is different from what your expectations were. I am always honored to witness the strength and perseverance of mothers!)