

Prescription drugs used for increasing milk supply

By Kelly Bonyata, IBCLC

There are several prescription drugs that have been used to increase milk supply: Metoclopramide (Reglan), Domperidone (Motilium), and sulpiride (Eglonyl, Dolmatil, Sulpitol, Sulparex, Equemote).

The presence of an appropriate level of the hormone prolactin permits lactation to proceed normally. When a mother has low prolactin levels, milk supply may be affected. Prolactin levels are primarily regulated by *inhibition*: the presence of prolactin-inhibiting factors (dopamine is the principal one) keep prolactin levels in check. The drugs used for increasing milk supply work by blocking dopamine, which results in an increase in prolactin levels. These drugs do not work in all women and would not be expected to increase milk production in a woman who already has normal (high) prolactin levels.

Reglan has often been used in the U.S. One major side-effect of Reglan is severe depression; it is contraindicated in moms with a history of depression, and all moms who take this should keep an eye out for signs of depression. One of my sources advises all adoptive mothers to stay away from Reglan, since it has caused serious depression/anxiety in moms regardless of previous history. This depression side effect usually develops over 3-4 weeks, and goes away if mom discontinues the Reglan. Other side effects include diarrhea, sedation, gastric upset, nausea, seizures and extrapyramidal effects (twitching, etc.)

Domperidone has been used successfully in Canada and other areas of the world, and has significantly fewer side effects than Reglan. It was [approved by the American Academy of Pediatrics for use in breastfeeding mothers](#) (this list is no longer maintained), and has been given [Lactation Risk Category L1](#) ("safest") in the 2012 edition of *Medications and Mothers' Milk*. It is not available in the U.S. because the FDA issued a warning against it in 2004. See the links below for more info.

Sulpiride is commonly used in various countries including Zimbabwe, South Africa and Chile. The primary use for sulpiride is for schizophrenia (it is an antipsychotic and antidepressant), but it also increases serum prolactin levels and thus can enhance breast milk yield.

Prescription drugs that stimulate lactation	
Name of medication	Lactation Risk Category **
Domperidone (Motilium, Motilidone)	L1 (safest)
Metoclopramide (Reglan)†	L2 (safer)
Sulpiride (Dolmatil, Sulparex, Sulpitol, Eglonyl, Equemote)	L2 (safer)

** Per [Medications and Mothers' Milk](#) by Thomas Hale, PhD (2012 edition)
† Hale reports results of a number of studies and indicates that domperidone is preferred but not available in the US. He notes that no pediatric concerns have been reported via milk, and that this drug is commonly used in pediatrics.