Successful Breastfeeding: It’s About Supply and Demand

It’s no surprise that a majority of pregnant women want to breastfeed. However, after baby is born, the rates of successful breastfeeding are disappointing. In Wisconsin for 2013, 75.5% of women initiated breastfeeding but only 55.5% of women were still breastfeeding at six months. There are numerous reasons that women give for discontinuing breastfeeding. One of the most commonly given reasons is low milk supply or the mother feeling as though she does not have enough milk. The reality is that most women can make plenty of milk for their baby, even multiples. However, many of the current practices in our community and healthcare institutions have a negative impact on breastmilk supply.

Milk production is all about supply and demand, what the baby takes out, the mother will make again. The two main hormones that influence milk supply are Prolactin and Oxytocin. Both of these hormones increase when the baby nurses. Their increased levels cause milk production to increase.

It is recommended that breastfed babies nurse frequently, on demand. There is no magic time frame that they follow. When the infant shows early feeding cues, the mother should offer the breast. These early feeding cues include: rooting, mouth movements, sucking on hands and restlessness. Baby should not go too long without feeding because frequent feeds stimulate more milk production!  
 The best ways to assure a good milk supply include:

* Appropriate breastfeeding assessment- Problems with latch lead to problems with supply!
* Appropriate pediatric follow-up
* Universal understanding of how breastfeeding works
* Early initiation and adequate breastfeeding (8-12x per day!)
* No formula or bottle supplementation

Mothers who have concerns about milk supply can be reassured with assistance from a lactation consultant. Some signs that baby is getting plenty of milk include having at least six wet diapers per day and adequate weight gain. In the first few weeks, a regular stooling pattern is also a good indicator. Some common things that mothers view as indicators but are actually not include:

* Baby crying after feeds- Babies cry for a number of reasons
* Mother being unable to pump much milk- Pumps take out milk much differently than a baby does. Mom probably has plenty of milk for baby. A lactation consultant can help!
* Baby eating more liquid from a bottle after a feed- Babies will often take more liquid, especially from a bottle, even after they are already full.

Health professionals should utilize lactation consultants to assist breastfeeding women. There are a number of consultants in Wood County. Call 715-421-8911 or e-mail [wcbc@outlook.com](mailto:wcbc@outlook.com). There is also a nationwide initiative for hospitals to become breastfeeding friendly (baby-friendly), for more information visit: <http://www.babyfriendlyusa.org/>