

## Relactation: Topic of the Month

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Relactation is the process of re-establishing lactation after having stopped for some time and can also refer to increasing milk supply after a decrease in breastfeeding or chestfeeding has occurred. Relactation may occur when someone stopped breastfeeding earlier than anticipated, an illness led to a separation from the baby, or when a parent has adopted a new baby and is choosing to breastfeed.

Whatever the reason is, parents expressing interest in relactation will likely have questions about building or rebuilding their milk supply. Below are some general guidelines and recommendations for supporting parents to be successful in relactation.

### Guidelines and recommendations

Relactation or building back a declining milk supply takes time! WIC staff and families will need to balance the feeding needs of the infant when working to relactate or build milk supply. WIC staff can help parents have realistic expectations about how relactation may look for them. Below are some tips that will help staff to support parents with relactation.

#### Tips for assisting with relactation:

- Frequent milk expression and feeding are key to relactating and increasing milk supply.
- Skin-to-skin time with nursing parents and babies can help with increasing milk supply.
- Monitoring infant weight and continuing to supplement feedings will protect the baby's growth during relactation.
- Some people will have an easier time relactating than others:
  - Parents who have breastfed a previous baby

- Less time has passed since weaning
  - Longer duration of breastfeeding with this baby or prior babies
  - History of a robust milk supply
  - Effective pumping and latch will also assist in increasing milk supply
- Not all parents will be able to establish a full milk supply after relactation. There are many benefits to offering human milk in any amount. Speak with families about their goals and expectations for breastfeeding.

## Talking to families about relactation

Breastfeeding gives the infant the best chance of health and growth. Families that are choosing to relactate or are interested in building their milk supply will benefit from the support and guidance that WIC can offer them. Offering tips, referrals, and resources will help parents to build their toolbox for a successful experience.

It may help to understand why the family is choosing to relactate. Using open-ended questions and simple reflection, we can get a better understanding of what is happening, help families to feel supported in their choice, and be better able to assist them.

## Sample conversation

Below is a conversation between a parent interested in relactation and a WIC staff member. Notice how the staff member uses a participant-centered approach ([PCS Counseling Skills](#)) to build trust and encourage open communication.

### Scenario:

Cami arrived at the front desk of the WIC office and expressed concerns about a decrease in milk supply. Cami asks if she could speak to a WIC staff member who can help her.

**CPA/DBE:** Hi Cami, my name is Linda, welcome to WIC. My co-worker tells me you are interested in working on building your milk supply. I would like to start by getting a little information so I can understand what is happening, if that is okay. (pause) Tell me a bit about what is going on with your milk supply?

**Cami:** Hi. Well, I was breastfeeding Samir for three months after his birth, but then I had to be hospitalized again after I got an infection. I was not able to pump or feed him while I was away since I was taking a medication that the doctor said was not good to breastfeed with.

**CPA/DBE:** Oh, I am so sorry to hear that happened to you. That must have been very hard for you to be away from Samir, and it is frustrating that you couldn't be there to feed him or even offer your milk in other ways.

**Cami:** Thank you. It was very upsetting. I knew that my milk supply would decrease somewhat, but it was even more frustrating to start supplementing with formula.

**CPA/DBE:** Losing your milk supply is hard, especially since you had built a routine after months of feeding. Are you still taking the medication?

**Cami:** No, I was able to stop the medication before I came home. Samir latched again right away, but he doesn't stay latched for long, and I still have to supplement.

**CPA/DBE:** What have you tried to increase your supply?

**Cami:** I read that doing skin-to-skin helps, so I am doing it every day, and I am pumping for a few minutes after each feeding to make sure my breasts are empty.

**CPA/DBE:** You are determined, and it sounds like you are on the right path! Building your milk supply can take time, and there is nothing wrong with supplementing Samir as needed. It is important to make sure he is getting enough to eat while you are building your supply. Have you noticed a change in your supply since you have been doing these things?

**Cami:** Well, when I first started this last week, I wasn't getting anything when I pumped, but now, I am getting about a ½ ounce, so it must be working, right?

**CPA/DBE:** Yes, and that is great to hear. I am betting Samir has also enjoyed the extra snuggle time while you have been working so hard.

**Cami:** Oh, he is such a ham. That is the one good thing about all this! So, is there anything else I should be doing?

**CPA/DBE:** I'm glad you asked. It really sounds like you are on your way. As I said before, it will just take a little time to get there. Have you been able to decrease the formula now that you are pumping a little bit each time?

**Cami:** No, I have been saving my pumped milk. I wasn't sure if I should mix it or what.

**CPA/DBE:** You want Samir to be safe with what you are offering. Have you been using a bottle to offer the formula?

**Cami:** Yeah, I make sure to pace-feed him, so he doesn't take too much or get gassy.

**CPA/DBE:** You really are doing a great job. Would you consider offering the pumped milk first and then a small amount of formula if Samir still seems hungry after?

**Cami:** Sure, I can do that. I look forward to not having to mix that formula at all!

**CPA/DBE:** Perfect. Since you are already doing skin-to-skin and pumping, I think decreasing the formula slowly is your next step while your milk supply is building. Just remember it will take a little time, so be patient with your body as it ramps up your supply. You should be proud of yourself for being so proactive! Samir loves all this extra time with you, so you are both winning!

**Cami:** Thank you so much. It is good to know that I am on the right path. I'm so glad I came in today.

**CPA/DBE:** We are here to help anytime. If you'd like, we could schedule a time for you to check in next month just to see how things are going. It could be a quick phone call, or we could have to go back to you if you want to check Samir's growth. Would that work for you?

**Cami:** I think a phone call would work best for me. It is good to know I can schedule to check his growth as well, so thank you.

**CPA/DBE:** Great, let's get that scheduled, and please feel free to stop back or call if you have any additional questions before then. Take care, Cami!

**NOTE:** Be sure to add a note to the participant's chart describing what was discussed. This will make the return visit and discussion much smoother.

Below are some resources that may be shared with WIC families, followed by skill-building resources for WIC staff.

## Resources for families

[Supporting Mothers with Relactation](#) (Center of Disease Control and Prevention)

[Relactation and Adoptive Breastfeeding: The Basics](#) (KellyMom.com)

[Increasing Low Milk Supply](#) (KellyMom.com)

[Setting Your Supply](#) (Breastmilk Every ounce Counts)

[WIC Breastfeeding Resources](#) (MDH WIC)

## Resources for staff

[WIC Staff Breastfeeding Resources](#) (MDH WIC)

[Maine WIC Relactation in Postpartum Birthing Parents](#) (Maine WIC Program)

[The Magical Process of Relactation](#) (California Breastfeeding Coalition)

## Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[PCS Counseling Skills](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/skills/counseling.html>)

[Supporting Mothers with Relactation](#) ([https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/hcp/relactation/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/supporting-families-with-relactation.html](https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/hcp/relactation/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/supporting-families-with-relactation.html))

[Relactation and Adoptive Breastfeeding: The Basics](#) (<https://kellymom.com/bf/got-milk/relactation/>)

[Increasing Low Milk Supply](#) (<https://kellymom.com/hot-topics/low-supply/>)

[Setting Your Supply](#) (<https://www.breastmilkcounts.com/breastfeeding-basics/setting-your-supply/>)

[WIC Breastfeeding Resources](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/bf/morebflinks.html>)

WIC Staff Breastfeeding Resources

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/bf/index.html>)

Maine WIC Relactation in Postpartum Birthing Parents

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltTqxZVfHnk>)

The Magical Process of Relactation

([https://vimeo.com/831249698/97fbf255cd?share=copy&turnstile=0.KGv\\_avLHxndxIB1GIY8iIK\\_NQ1yrmjMnOWfyolcs7EHrswYMRXq67HKSIzSbOpPk04N9iWIkEBRDOau3FW298IPe8LY5VbmN-](https://vimeo.com/831249698/97fbf255cd?share=copy&turnstile=0.KGv_avLHxndxIB1GIY8iIK_NQ1yrmjMnOWfyolcs7EHrswYMRXq67HKSIzSbOpPk04N9iWIkEBRDOau3FW298IPe8LY5VbmN-)

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*Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, [health.wic@state.mn.us](mailto:health.wic@state.mn.us), [www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us); to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.*

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