

Domperidone, or Motilium, is a medication that is used for nausea and vomiting; however, it also has an effect on breast milk production. One of its side effects is to increase the hormone prolactin. Prolactin is the hormone that makes milk.

Milk production is driven by frequent effective drainage of the breasts, as well as the hormone prolactin. It is vitally important that women are draining their breasts around 8-12 times a day in order to maximise their milk production. The breast should be offered flexibly and frequently according to the baby's cues. Milk transfer needs to be optimised to ensure good drainage, and this is best achieved by appropriate fit and hold. The GPs at Adelaide Mums and Babies Clinic can assist you with this.

If, despite good fit and hold and frequent feeds, mum's milk supply is still not matching the baby's needs, then Domperidone can be considered to try and increase supply. The evidence suggests that Domperidone is effective for many women, is well tolerated and is safe for the baby. The usual starting dose is 1 tablet (10 mg) three times a day, which can be increased to 2 tablets 3 times a day if the response is not sufficient. Maximum dosage is 8 tablets a day. It can take time for the medication to work, and maximum effect can be seen at 2 weeks. Side effects, if present, are mild. Some patients complain of increased appetite, weight gain, abdominal cramping, nausea, diarrhoea, dry mouth, headache, dizziness, or mood changes.

The evidence is less clear about how long to take Domperidone for, or how to wean off. Trials have studied Domperidone for up to 4 weeks only, with most trials only assessing its use over 2 weeks. The course of treatment is best discussed with your treating doctor, depending on your individual needs. When the time comes to wean the medication, it is best done slowly to reduce the chance of side effects for mum as well as not risking the milk supply. A conservative approach is removing 1 tablet of domperidone every 3 days. For any uneven number of tablets, loading up the lunchtime and evening doses is beneficial as this is when naturally-secreted prolactin is at its lowest.

Domperidone is not safe for everyone. It must not be taken by people who have a past or family history of specific cardiac arrhythmias such as long QT syndrome. You must tell your treating doctor if you are taking any other medications before starting Domperidone. Caution needs to be used when taking it with certain types of antibiotics, antifungals (oral) and antidepressants. If your doctor is concerned, an ECG (electrocardiogram) can be done before and/or just after commencing Domperidone to make sure there is no electrical disturbance in the heart (QT interval prolongation).