

Test Weighing Your Baby

What is test weighing?

When you weigh your baby before and after a feed you can measure the amount of milk the baby has taken in by measuring the weight change of the baby before and after the feed. This is called test weighing.

Test weighing is very helpful in situations such as:

- Mom has had a breast reduction and is not sure how much milk she will make
- Mom has breasts that have reduced glandular tissue, are widely spaced or are very asymmetrical
- Baby was born preterm and you are transitioning to feeds just at the breast
- Baby was born late preterm (35 – 37 weeks) and could be less effective at taking milk from the breast
- Baby is not gaining as much weight as they should be and you need to figure out why

Why would you test weigh your baby?

Sometimes you and your care provider are not certain if your baby is getting enough milk at the breast. If your baby is not gaining enough it is important to try to understand the reason for this. Understanding the reason for your baby's slow weight gain will give you the information to address the issue.

Weighing your baby before and after breastfeeds will help you to know how much milk the baby is drinking from the breast. It is still possible that you are making enough milk but that the baby is not able to get enough milk from you. It is important to work with a caregiver who is experienced providing breastfeeding support to help you determine the reason for this.

How to test weigh your baby

Summary: You will weigh your baby before a feed and then again immediately after a feed. Your baby does not need to be naked for these weights. However, it is very important that you weigh your baby both times in exactly the same clothes, blankets and diaper. **DO NOT** change your baby's diaper in the middle of a feed and do not remove wet bibs, clothes or blankets.

If your baby has taken enough milk at the breast and appears satisfied (calm, hands relaxed, comes off breast on their own) or falls asleep, the feeding session is complete. If your baby has fed on both breasts, has breastfed for an hour in total, and is not satisfied nor falls asleep complete your post feed weight at this time.

Equipment: A very accurate scale. You need to use a scale that will tell you your baby's weight in grams – not pounds or kilograms. As an example an accurate scale would read 3347g. Not 3.3 kg or 7.3 pounds. Baby scales in hospitals will be accurate enough to do test weights. There are also accurate scales at many care provider clinics or available to rent.

Step by Step Instructions

1. Place your scale on a firm and flat surface.
2. Ensure that any blankets you have on the scale do not hang over the edges of the scale tray.
3. Press the On/Zero button
4. Place your baby on the scale and hold one hand above the baby
5. Wait for the weight to be final. You will hear a beep
6. Write down the weight – this is your pre-feed weight
7. Remove your baby from the scale
8. Feed your baby at the breast
9. Weigh your baby when done feeding
10. Write down the weight – this is your post-feed weight
11. Calculate how much milk the baby took from the breast

Caution: Never leave your baby alone on a change pad or on a scale. Even newborns can roll and fall off of these surfaces.

Calculation example:

Post feed weight – pre feed weight =
How much milk the baby took

$3360\text{g} - 3345\text{g} = 15\text{ ml}$
(note that one gram = one millilitre of milk)

If your baby is in hospital

Babies in hospital can have many tubes as well as wires to monitor them. This can make it difficult to get accurate weights. Check with your nurse if monitoring wires can be removed just before weighing. Make a bundle of the rest of the tubes and hold in the same place for both the pre- and post-weighing. Have the scale in the same place as well.

Getting enough milk

Your baby's care provider, dietician or lactation consultant will know how much milk your baby needs. The amount will depend on your baby's size, age, and medical condition.

If your baby does not take enough milk from the breast, you will need additional support to help the baby remove more milk from the breast and supplement the baby with expressed breast milk or formula.

KEYPOINTS

- Not all babies need to be test weighed.
- A single test weigh does not provide you with the whole picture. It is often necessary to do test weighs for a whole day (24 hours) to get a fuller picture.
- Test weighing can only be done on a scale that can weigh to the nearest gram
- One gram of weight is equal to one millilitre (ml) or one cubic centimetre (cc) of milk.
- DO NOT change your baby or remove any clothes or blankets that you weighed the baby with originally during a test weigh (between the first and second weight).
- Test weighing does not determine how much milk there is but instead determines how much milk the baby takes from the breast.
- You can supplement at the breast and still complete a test weigh. You will need to track how much milk the baby took from the supplemental nursing system and subtract that from your total.