

The use of galactagogues and their perceived effect on milk supply

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Background

- Galactagogues are medicines, herbals and foods used by breastfeeding women to **increase their milk supply or milk flow**.
- They may be prescribed (like domperidone and oxytocin) or bought over-the-counter (OTC) in a drugstore. **Data on the effectiveness of galactagogues is often limited.**
- Many women worry about insufficient milk supply, while their production is objectively sufficient. Furthermore, the placebo effect may play an important role in the effectiveness of galactagogues.
- The **objective** of this study was to determine the **self-perceived effectiveness of galactagogues** and to compare it between OTC galactagogues and prescribed galactagogues.

Methods

- Participants of the **Dutch Pregnancy Drug Register** self-report on their medication use, their health and the health of their (unborn) child(ren) during pregnancy and the first-year post-partum.
- **Breastfeeding women are asked whether they use a medicine to increase their milk supply.** Women who answered 'yes' to this question were included for analysis.
- We analyzed data on the galactagogues including **timing and duration of use and the perceived effectiveness.** Baseline characteristics of the galactagogue users were compared to those of the general breastfeeding cohort.
- **The yes/no perceived effectiveness on the milk supply was compared between domperidone and OTC products.** Oxytocin was excluded for this analysis because its positive effect mainly concerns the milk ejection reflex.
- Lastly, we analyzed reported effects of the galactagogues on breastfed infants.

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Results

- A total of **455 galactagogues** (28 different products) were used by **381 women** (5.8% of the breastfeeding cohort).
- Women using a galactagogue were more likely to be breastfeeding for the first time compared to the general breastfeeding cohort. They also more often had a twin pregnancy or a premature birth.
- The most used prescribed galactagogues were **oxytocin** (37.8%) and **domperidone** (24.9%). The most used OTC galactagogue was '**Boezemvriendjes**' (25.7%), a Dutch brand containing a combination of herbals. All OTC galactagogues contained herbal ingredients.
- Most galactagogues (61.1%) were initiated in the first month after birth and discontinued within two weeks after start (53.0%).
- Overall, **the majority of women (69.2%) perceived an effect of the galactagogue on their milk**; 41.0% mentioned an increase in milk supply and 14.1% an improvement of the milk ejection reflex. For 15.5% the nature of the effect was not specified.

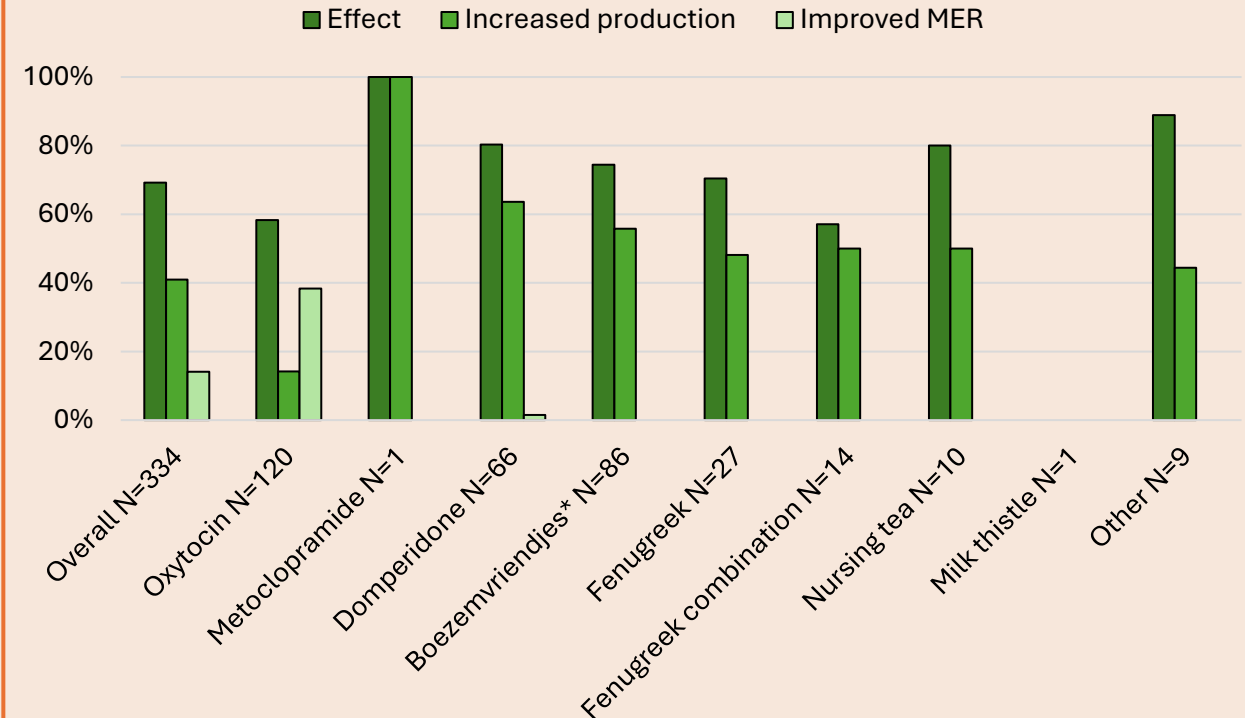


Figure 1. Percentage of women perceiving an effect of the galactagogue. Only single exposures were included for this figure; women using multiple galactagogues at the same time were excluded. MER; milk ejection reflex.
* a Dutch brand containing a combination of herbals

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Results

- The comparison of domperidone with OTC products showed **no significant difference in the number of women** perceiving an **increase in milk supply**.
- **No major adverse effects** on infants were reported.

Conclusion

- There is a wide variety in medicines and products that breastfeeding women use to increase their milk supply or milk flow.
- The majority of women perceived a positive effect of the used galactagogue on their milk supply.
- We did **not find a difference in the perceived effectiveness of domperidone compared to OTC galactagogues**.

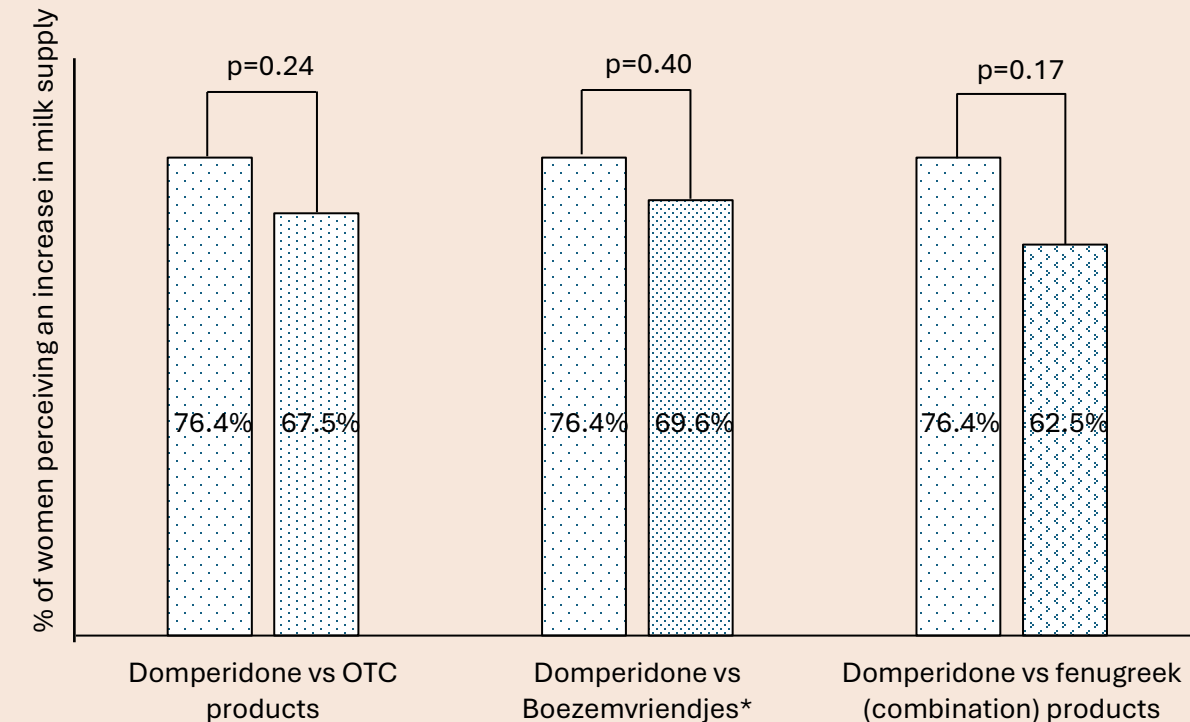


Figure 2. Comparison of the percentage of women experiencing an increase in milk supply after using domperidone or over-the-counter products.

* a Dutch brand containing a combination of herbals