

But do they work? Researchers investigate effectiveness of lactation cookies on human milk production

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They sell worldwide, often retailing for more than \$2.50 per two-ounce bag: Lactation cookies, which manufacturers purport to increase milk in

people who breastfeed. Many claim they work—but what does the science say?

Several esteemed nutrition researchers collaborated on "Effectiveness of Lactation Cookies on Human Milk Production Rates: A Randomized Controlled Trial," recently published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

David B. Allison, Ph.D., dean of the Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington (SPH-B), is among the researchers who conducted a one-month, [randomized controlled trial](#) of lactating parents of healthy babies in the same age range. Their findings revealed no evidence for an effect of consuming lactation cookies on human milk production.

"Too often in the field of nutrition and food, strong beliefs—sometimes even well-reasoned conjectures based upon some [scientific knowledge](#)—are mistaken for demonstrated facts," Allison said. "Conjecture is good, but knowing is better. We come to know about the effects of nutrition and [dietary supplements](#) through rigorous, randomized, controlled trials. Having conducted such a study on lactation cookies, we found no evidence for their effectiveness.

"This does not mean that it is impossible for any lactation cookie to affect human milk production," he continues. "This study does suggest that the cookies we studied—under the conditions we studied them—have no discernible effect. The burden of proof seems to now be on those who claim there *is* an effect."

The study followed 176 U.S. parents who were exclusively breastfeeding healthy two-month-old babies. One group of parents was provided a serving of commercially available lactation cookies to consume daily for a month; the other group of parents ate a serving of conventional cookies not designed to increase lactation, each day for a month. Through a

weekly survey, parents reported the quantity of milk they produced after following a validated milk expression protocol using a hospital-grade breast pump, providing data that were analyzed by both the study authors and an independent statistician. These data demonstrated that the impact of consuming lactation cookies did not have a significant effect on how much milk was actually produced or perceived to be produced by the lactating parents.

The authors assert that consumers should be cautious when considering the potential effect of this product, or any food and/or supplement that promotes health-promoting benefits without published, peer-reviewed scientific evidence to support its claims. As the researchers noted, these lactation cookies can contain substantial calories and sugars, which could affect postpartum weight loss efforts and related health issues.

"Despite being a physician and nutrition scientist focused on early-life [nutrition](#), I still remember how difficult breastfeeding was for me with both of my children," said study lead author Ana M. Palacios, MD, Ph.D., assistant professor, Department of Health Policy and Community Health, Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health at Georgia Southern University.

"Our research highlights that lactation cookies, which include added sugars and saturated fat, may not have the said purported benefits of increasing milk production. Purchasing [lactation](#) cookies to increase milk production may pose an unnecessary cost and may have additional implications for parents, such as limiting post-pregnancy weight loss and reducing consumption of healthier foods. More research is needed to better understand what foods and nutrients can best help increase [milk](#) supply in diverse populations."

More information: Ana M. Palacios et al, Effectiveness of lactation cookies on human milk production rates: a randomized controlled trial,

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