



## Barley

Revised: May 15, 2024.

## Drug Levels and Effects

### Summary of Use during Lactation

Barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) contains starch, dietary fiber such as beta-glucan, and the enzyme diastase. Barley is a purported galactagogue and is used by mothers in many cultures to increase their milk supply.[1-6] Some animal evidence indicates that a polysaccharide in barley can increase serum prolactin,[5,7,8] and one human study supports some galactagogue activity of barley malt and lemon balm in mothers of preterm infants.[9] Galactagogues should never replace evaluation and counseling on modifiable factors that affect milk production.[10,11] No data exist on the excretion of any components of barley into breastmilk or on the safety and efficacy of barley in nursing mothers or infants. Barley is safe to be consumed during breastfeeding, except by persons with celiac disease. Allergy to barley occurs rarely.

Dietary supplements do not require extensive pre-marketing approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Manufacturers are responsible to ensure the safety, but do not need to *prove* the safety and effectiveness of dietary supplements before they are marketed. Dietary supplements may contain multiple ingredients, and differences are often found between labeled and actual ingredients or their amounts. A manufacturer may contract with an independent organization to verify the quality of a product or its ingredients, but that does *not* certify the safety or effectiveness of a product. Because of the above issues, clinical testing results on one product may not be applicable to other products. More detailed information [about dietary supplements](#) is available elsewhere on the LactMed Web site.

### Drug Levels

*Maternal Levels.* Relevant published information was not found as of the revision date.

*Infant Levels.* Relevant published information was not found as of the revision date.

### Effects in Breastfed Infants

Relevant published information was not found as of the revision date.

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## Effects on Lactation and Breastmilk

Studies in animals indicate that a polysaccharide found in barley is apparently responsible for an increase in prolactin after beer ingestion.[5,7,8] Refer to the LactMed record on [Alcohol](#) for details.

A double-blind study compared a commercial galactagogue product (Femaltiker, Nutropharma Llc., Poland) containing barley malt, 70% barley glucan and powdered lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) leaves to an identical placebo in the mothers of preterm infants. Mothers took one packet twice a day for 2 weeks, starting within 3 days of delivery. Milk volume was measured by mothers after extraction using an electric breast pump. Forty mothers in each group completed the study. On day 14 of the study the mothers in the barley group produced more milk than the mothers taking placebo (average 62.5 mL vs 95 mL). The total milk volume over the 2-week period was also greater in the active group compared to the placebo group (average 6036 mL vs 4209 mL).[9] The study had a rather high dropout rate and the results were not subjected to intention-to-treat analysis.

## References

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## Substance Identification

### Substance Name

Barley

### Scientific Name

*Hordeum vulgare*; *Hordeum distyichum*

### Drug Class

Breast Feeding

Lactation

Milk, Human

Complementary Therapies

Food

Galactogogues

Phytotherapy

Plants, Medicinal