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FAQ-FENUGREEK INFORMATION

Fenugreek Seed for Increasing Milk Supply

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EFFECT ON MILK PRODUCTION

Fenugreek (Trigonella foenum-graecum L.) appears to be the herb that is most often used to increase milk supply. It has been reported to be an excellent galactagogue for some mothers, and has been used as such for centuries. The few studies that have been done have had mixed results [Swafford 2000, Reeder 2011, Turkyılmaz 2011] . Keep in mind that in almost all cases, non-pharmaceutical methods of increasing milk supply should be tried first, as there can be significant side effects from both herbal remedies and prescription medications used to increase milk supply. See the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine's protocol #9 on the use of galactogogues.

Mothers generally notice an increase in production 24-72 hours after starting the herb, but it can take two weeks for others to see a change. Some mothers do not see a change in milk production when taking fenugreek.

Dosages of less than 3500 mg per DAY have been reported to produce no effect in many women. One way reported to determine if you're taking the correct dosage is to slowly increase the amount of fenugreek until your sweat and urine begin to smell like maple syrup. If you're having problems with any side effects, discontinue use and consider alternative methods of increasing milk supply.

Fenugreek has been used either short-term to boost milk supply or long-term to augment supply and/or pumping yields. There are no studies indicating problems with long-term usage. Per Kathleen Huggins "Most mothers have found that the herb can be discontinued once milk production is stimulated to an appropriate level. Adequate production is usually maintained as long as sufficient breast stimulation and emptying continues" [Huggins].

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DOSAGES OFTEN SUGGESTED:

(check with your medical care provider for information specific to your individual circumstances)

capsules (580-610 mg)	• 2-4 capsules, 3 times per day • 6-12 capsules (total) per day • ~1200-2400 mg, 3 times per day (3.5-7.3 grams/day) • German Commission E recommends a daily intake of 6 grams
capsules (500 mg)	• 7-14 capsules (total) per day
powder or seeds	• 1/2 – 1 teaspoon, 3 times per day • 1 capsule = 1/4 teaspoon • can be mixed with a little water or juice
tincture	1-2 mL, 3 times per day (see package directions)
tea	one cup of tea, 2-3 times per day

SAFETY

Fenugreek is used to flavor artificial maple syrup, and is used as a common food ingredient (curries, chutneys, etc.) and traditional medicine in many parts of the world, including India, Greece, China, north Africa and the Middle East. It is a basic ingredient of curry powder (often used in Indian cooking) and the Five Spice mixtures (used in Asian cooking). It is also eaten as a salad and sprouted.
Fenugreek is considered safe for nursing moms when used in moderation and is on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's GRAS list (Generally Recognized As Safe). As with most medications and herbs, various side effects have been noted; see the side effects and safety information below.

Per Hale [Hale 2012], "The transfer of fenugreek into milk is unknown, untoward effects have only rarely been reported." Hale classifies it in Lactation Risk Category L3 (moderately safe).

Possible side effects and cautions

■Sweat and urine smells like maple syrup; milk and/or breastfed baby may smell like maple syrup.
■Occasionally causes loose stools, which go away when fenugreek is discontinued.
■Use of more than 100 grams of fenugreek seeds daily can cause intestinal distress and nausea (recommended dose is less than 8 grams per day).
■Repeated external applications can result in undesirable skin reactions [Wichtl 1994].
■Ingestion of fenugreek seeds or tea in infants or late-term pregnant women can lead to false diagnosis of maple syrup urine disease in the infant due to presence of sotolone in the urine. See [Korman 2001] and other studies on fenugreek and maple syrup urine smell.

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USE WITH CAUTION OR AVOID IF YOU HAVE A HISTORY OF:

■Peanut or chickpea allergy: Fenugreek is in the same family with peanuts and chickpeas, and may cause an allergic reaction in moms who are allergic to these things. Two cases of fenugreek allergy have been reported in the literature. [Patil 1997, Ohnuma 1998, Lawrence 1999]

■Diabetes or hypoglycemia: Fenugreek reduces blood glucose levels, and in the few studies using it as a hypoglycemic, also reduces blood cholesterol. Dosages higher than the recommended one (given above) may result in hypoglycemia in some mothers [Heller]. If you're diabetic (IDDM), use fenugreek only if you have good control of your blood glucose levels. While taking this, closely monitor your fasting levels and post-prandial (after meals) levels. Mothers with hypoglycemia should also use fenugreek with caution. For more on fenugreek and glucose levels, see the references below.

■Asthma: Fenugreek is often cited as a natural remedy for asthma. However, inhalation of the powder can cause asthma and allergic symptoms. Some mothers have reported that it worsened their asthma symptoms. [Dugue 1993, Huggins, Lawrence 1999].

DRUG INTERACTIONS

■Oral drugs or herbs taken at the same time as fenugreek may have delayed absorption due to the mucilage content of fenugreek. [Wichtl 1994]

■Glipizide and other antidiabetic drugs

Fenugreek reduces blood glucose levels and may enhance the effects of these drugs.

■Insulin

Fenugreek reduces blood glucose levels, so insulin dosage may need to be adjusted.

■Heparin, Warfarin and other anticoagulants

Ticlopidine and other platelet inhibitors

The fenugreek plant contains several coumarin compounds. Although studies have not shown any problems, it potentially could cause bleeding if combined with these types of drugs.

■MAOIs

Fenugreek contains amine and has the potential to augment the effect of these drugs.