

Fenugreek

Fenugreek seed has been used to increase milk production since biblical times. The herb contains phytoestrogens, which are plant chemicals similar to the female sex hormone oestrogen. A key compound, diosgenin, has been shown experimentally to increase milk flow.

What is Fenugreek?

Fenugreek is an herb (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) native to southern Europe and Asia. Undoubtedly one of the oldest cultivated medicinal plants, fenugreek is widely grown today in the Mediterranean countries, Argentina, France, India, North Africa, and the United States as a food, condiment; medicinal, dye, and forage plant

Fenugreek and breast feeding

Fenugreek seeds contain hormone precursors that increase milk supply. Scientists do not know for sure how this happens. Some believe it is possible because breasts are modified sweat glands, and fenugreek stimulates sweat production. It has been found that fenugreek can increase a nursing mother's milk supply within 24 to 72 hours after first taking the herb. Once an adequate level of milk production is reached, most women can discontinue the fenugreek and maintain the milk supply with adequate breast stimulation. Many women today take fenugreek in a pill form (ground seeds placed in capsules). The pills can be found at most vitamin and health foods stores.

Fenugreek can also be "taken" in tea form; although the tea is believed to be less potent than the pills and the tea has a bitter taste that can be hard to stomach. Fenugreek is not right for everyone.

How much do I take?

Fenugreek Capsules:

- **580-610 mg tablet strength 2-4 capsules; 3 times per day = 6-12 capsules** (total) per day
- **1200-2400mg tablet strength**, 3 times per day (3.5-7.3 grams/day)

Safety

Fenugreek is considered safe for nursing mothers when used in moderation and is on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's "GRAS" (Generally Recognized As Safe).

As with all medications and herbs, various side effects have been noted; (see the potential side effects and safety information below as per "Thomas Hale PhD, Medications and Mothers Milk" 2012). "The transfer of fenugreek into milk is unknown, but untoward effects have not been reported." Hale classifies it in Lactation Risk Category L3 (moderately safe).

Potential side effects

- Sweat and urine smells like maple syrup (this is common and often a sign that you have reached the right dose).
- Hypoglycemia (lowering of blood glucose levels) in some mothers- Diabetic mothers should use caution with fenugreek.
- Loose stools in some women, which goes away when fenugreek is discontinued
- May aggravate asthma symptoms