

Fenugreek, An Herb To Increase Milk Supply



Mothers who wish to build their milk supplies may consider using Fenugreek. Fenugreek is an herb that has long been used by healers as medicine, and as a galactagogue (to boost milk supply). Historically, fenugreek is an herb, *trigonella foenum-graecum* L, and is grown in various countries around the world including Argentina, France, India, and North Africa, and in the Mediterranean countries. The dried ripe seed of the plant is used, with one active ingredient being diosgenin. Fenugreek is used as a ground seed (high in fiber) in capsule form, or in tea, to increase milk production. The tea is weaker than the capsule form.



The dose is 2-3 capsules (580-610 mg each), taken by mouth 3 times/day. Taking a lesser dose may not increase supply. Results are often noticed in 1-3 days, although some mothers report no improvement. A bottle of 100 capsules can cost between \$6-8 US, and it is available in health food stores and natural food stores. There is no reliable clinical research that supports the use of this herb, although many practitioners do use it with breastfeeding mothers with good success. Fenugreek is used in artificial maple flavorings, and also has a food product. If used to build milk supply, Fenugreek can generally be discontinued after milk supply is increased, as long as a mother can regularly breastfeed or pump.

The use of Fenugreek may cause a maple-syrup odor in a mother or baby's sweat. It can have effects such as lowering blood sugar, and may cause allergy in some sensitive people with a history of asthma. Diabetic or asthmatic or allergic mothers should consult health care providers before using Fenugreek. Use of this herb may cause diarrhea. The FDA generally regards fenugreek as safe, but should not be used by pregnant mothers.



Tips:

- Use brand name herbal preparations with expiration dates and capsule strength printed on the label.
- Consult your doctor and lactation consultant (BNN) if you have milk supply issues. Herbs will not solve all milk supply problems.
- Check with your doctor before taking any herbal remedy, especially if you have other health concerns.
- Consult your doctor if you notice side effects of herbal remedies.
- Check the label, making sure that no other substances are combined with the chosen herb.
- Watch for diarrhea, aggravation in asthmatic or diabetic conditions.
- Do not exceed recommended dose, as serious side effects may occur.

References:

1. Review of Natural Products. Facts and Comparisons, St. Louis, Mo. 1996
2. Sauvaire Y. Baccou JC. Extraction of diosgenin, (25R)-spirost-5-ene-3beta-ol; problems of the hydrolysis of the saponins. *Lloydia* 41:247, 1978
3. Valette G, et al. Hypocholesterolaemic effect of fenugreek seeds in dogs. *Atherosclerosis* 50(1):105, 1984.
4. Ribes G. et al. Effects of fenugreek seeds on endocrine pancreatic secretions in dogs. *Ann Nutr Metab* 28(1):37, 1984
5. Dugue P, Bel J, Figueredo M. Fenugreek causing a new type of occupational asthma. *Presse Medicale* 22(19):922, 1993."
6. Huggins, K. Fenugreek: One Remedy for Low Milk Production
7. Lawrence, RA, Lawrence RM, *Breastfeeding: A Guide for the Medical Profession*, 2000.376.
8. Hale, T. Medications and Mothers' Milk. 2000. 260-261