



Fenugreek

Fenugreek is an herb that is known for increasing milk supply.

What is fenugreek?

Fenugreek is an herb. It is sold as dry seeds or capsules. The greens and seeds are often used in East Indian cooking. It is also used as an artificial maple flavoring. Fenugreek can be made into a tea, and it is one of the ingredients in “Mother’s Milk Tea.” It is a member of the legume family (soybeans, peanuts, and garbanzo beans). It is known for increasing milk supply in breastfeeding women.

When is it needed?

If your milk supply is low, we strongly advise that you talk with a lactation consultant. She will try to find out why your supply is low and will suggest treatments based on your situation. If these treatments do not work within 3 to 5 days, fenugreek may help.

Fenugreek is NOT the first choice, and perhaps not even the best way to improve milk supply. It NEVER replaces the need for emptying the breasts often by nursing or pumping at least 8 times a day.

Where do I get it?

You can buy fenugreek without a prescription in stores that sell vitamin and nutritional supplements or herbal remedies, such as General Nutrition Centers or Fresh Vitamins (800-216-1412). The closest source to University of Washington Medical Center is a vitamin shop called Super Supplements (206-633-4428) on the southeast corner of 45th and Roosevelt.

What is the dose?

To increase their milk supply, mothers usually take 2 to 3 capsules 3 times a day. The capsules are not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and they come in different strengths, from 125 to 600 mg per capsule.

Questions?

Call 206-598-4628

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Lactation Services:
206-598-4628

Weekdays:
9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Weekends and holidays:
9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

It may be best to start with the strongest dose so that you can see within 3 to 5 days if it's working for you. Most women take fenugreek only for a few weeks, but some mothers report that they need to keep using it to keep their milk supply high.

How do I take it?

Take fenugreek capsules with water 3 times a day: in the morning, at midday, and at bedtime.

Are there any side effects?

When taken in moderation, fenugreek is generally regarded as safe. No studies have been done to see if it has any effect on babies or on how much gets into breast milk.

If you take fenugreek, keep these things in mind:

- You may notice that your urine and sweat smell like maple syrup. Your baby may also smell like maple syrup.
- Some mothers get diarrhea, but this goes away when they stop taking the capsules.
- Doses of 5 grams (5,000 mg) a day have been found to lower blood sugar and cholesterol levels.
- Fenugreek has an oxytocin effect, so it is not advisable in pregnancy.
- It is possible to have an allergic reaction to fenugreek.
- Fenugreek is NOT advised if you are taking *anticoagulant* (blood-thinning) medicines.

NOTE: You should always tell your doctor and your baby's doctor about this and any other medicines you are taking while breastfeeding.

To Learn More

Medications and Mothers' Milk, by Thomas W. Hale (2008).

The Nursing Mother's Companion, by Kathleen Huggins (2005).

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
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Lactation Services

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