

# Fenugreek

By Crystal Bedard RN MN IBCLC

Fenugreek is a herb that is often used by breastfeeding mothers to increase their milk supply. Lactating mothers have used fenugreek for centuries. Although there is limited formal research to support its efficacy, an increasing amount of observational and anecdotal evidence exists. Many mothers who take fenugreek report an increase in milk production, generally within 24 to 72 hours after starting to take the herb.

Galactologues (herbs and medications to increase milk supply) should NOT be considered until a midwife or lactation consultant has evaluated if a low milk supply truly does exist and the reasons which may be causing it. Seek improvements in breastfeeding techniques and management before considering a herbal product. Fenugreek is useful in those situations in which the mother has adequate rest, good nutrition, frequent nursing and still finds that supply is a problem. Adequate milk production is usually maintained as long as sufficient breast stimulation and emptying continues. Make sure you are not doing things that can inhibit your milk supply such as:

- Excessive pacifier use
- Formula supplementation
- Infrequent breastfeeding
- Using a nipple shield
- Scheduling and/or limiting breastfeeds
- Poor latch
- Not breastfeeding at night
- Inadequate rest
- Smoking

Fenugreek is available in capsules or tea. The tea is believed to be less potent and may be bitter tasting. The capsules can be found at most vitamin and nutrition stores and at many supermarkets and health food stores. A common

dose is 2-3 capsules taken three times daily. The transfer of fenugreek into breast milk is unknown but one source has reported gastrointestinal disturbances in the breastfed infant. Few women report adverse effects while taking fenugreek, however a maple-syrup odour in urine and sweat is commonly noted.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provides only general guidelines on natural herbs. When taken in moderation, fenugreek has limited toxicity and is listed in the United States as a GRAS herbal (Generally Regarded As Safe). However, Fenugreek may not be right for everyone. The herb may cause diarrhoea, can aggravate asthma symptoms and may lower blood glucose levels in diabetics. Women with an allergy to peanuts should avoid Fenugreek. Fenugreek should not be used during pregnancy due to its stimulant effect on the uterus.

#### References;

Hale, T.W. (1999). *Medications and Mothers' Milk*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Amarillo. Tex: Pharmasoft Medical Publishing.

[http://www.breastfeeding.com/all\\_about/all\\_about\\_fenugreek.html](http://www.breastfeeding.com/all_about/all_about_fenugreek.html)

[http://www.breastfeeding.com/reading\\_room/herbs.html](http://www.breastfeeding.com/reading_room/herbs.html)

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