



# Fenugreek: Herbal Support for Low Milk Supply

## CARE INSTRUCTIONS

At times, while you are breastfeeding, your milk supply may lessen. The most common reasons for low milk supply are:

- Poor latch-on
- Long intervals between feeding or pumping your breasts
- Poor nutrition and stress (such as going back to work, illness, etc.)

It is important to contact a lactation consultant if your milk supply lessens in the early weeks of your baby's life. A lactation consultant can help determine the reason for your low milk supply. Make an appointment to see a lactation consultant at your local Kaiser Permanente facility if you have sore nipples, slow infant weight gain, or discomfort during breastfeeding.

### USING HERBS

You can increase your milk supply by correcting how your baby attaches to your breast, increasing how often and how long you breastfeed your baby and/or pump, and by eating nutritious foods and drinking enough fluids. If these steps do not help increase your milk supply, you may want to try herbs. Many women have found that certain herbs can be effective.

Women from many cultures have used herbs to increase breast milk production for thousands of years. More recently, some hospitals and lactation centers in the United States have shown that herbs can aid in increasing breast milk supply. Although there is no scientific research conducted on these herbs to prove their effectiveness or safety, thousands of women have had positive results with them.

### FENUGREEK SEED

Fenugreek seed is the most common herb used in America and other countries to increase mother's milk. It also fortifies the milk with added vitamins and minerals. Fenugreek is used extensively in countries like India and Mexico to increase mother's milk supply and it is believed to have other health benefits as well. It is commonly used in cooking in these countries, too.

### BENEFITS FOR MOTHER AND INFANT

- *Stimulates breast milk production* in many women.
- *Increases milk volume within 2-3 days.* Most mothers will see an increase within 2-3 days of taking fenugreek capsules as a supplement to their diet.
- *Fortifies mother's milk* with added Vitamins C, A, B1, B2, B3, D, calcium, and iron.
- *Safe and non-toxic.* FDA included fenugreek on its list of herbs generally considered safe. All parts of this plant are believed to be safe. It is thought to be safe for both mother and infant, but has not been studied in a controlled manner like other drugs.
- *Economical and easy to obtain.* A bottle of 100 capsules costs about \$6-8. It can be purchased at most natural or health food stores.
- *Other benefits of fenugreek:* In other countries, fenugreek is thought to relieve infant colic, ease digestive disorders, calm nerves, and relieve depression. It can also help improve the mother's milk "let down" reflex by calming nervous tension from stress, anxiousness, and fatigue (not proven by scientific studies). Research studies have shown improvements in anemia by increasing red blood cell production and have also shown a reduction of cholesterol.

## SUGGESTED DOSAGE:

### Fenugreek Capsules

- Take one or two capsules three times a day. Take them with fluids at meal times or with snacks to assess your response, then increase dose as tolerated, and as needed, to a maximum of 12-15 capsules per day. For many women, the ideal dose is 3-4 capsules three times a day.
- Most brands of fenugreek come in 580mg to 610mg strength. It is important to take 3-4 capsules regularly, three times a day. The effectiveness of increasing your milk volume depends on taking the correct dosage. Capsules will be much less effective in increasing your milk supply if you skip doses and only take capsules once a day.
- Take pharmaceutical grade ground fenugreek in capsules. Capsules are preferred, over the bulk form. Grinding in the bulk form is not recommended since purity, country of origin, and pesticide content cannot be guaranteed in the bulk form.
- Purchase fenugreek capsules from reputable manufacturers sold at natural and health food stores.
- Capsules are the recommended form of the herb because of greater potency (four times stronger than the tea form). They are easier to take and taste better than the tea.

### Fenugreek Tincture

- A tincture is a solution of alcohol and water that contains the plant's ingredients. The alcohol carries the herbal properties quickly into the bloodstream, so tinctures are absorbed faster than capsules or tablets, which have to go through the digestive process. The small alcohol content acts against bacterial contamination and increases shelf life of the preparation.
- Normal tincture dosage: 1 dropperful under your tongue (sublingually) at the beginning of every breastfeeding session or three times a day according to response with milk supply.
- Tincture drops may be taken directly under the tongue or mixed with 1 - 2 ounces of water or juice.
- If you are concerned about the alcohol content, put the dosage in a small amount of hot water, which dissolves most of the alcohol in a few minutes. Then drink up.

### Fenugreek Tea

- Fenugreek comes in tea form by itself or as an ingredient in Mother's Milk Tea.
- 3-4 cups per day (or more) are needed to increase milk volume.
- It is useful to include the tea as part of your fluid intake throughout the day.
- Some mothers object to the slight curry taste of the tea.

## CAUTIONS

- Do not take fenugreek during pregnancy. It may cause uterine contractions.
- Fenugreek should be avoided by women with asthma. It can worsen asthma, especially if you are also allergic to peanuts or other legumes.
- Diabetic mothers should use caution. This herb has been shown to lower blood glucose levels in some patients. Diabetics should start slowly at lower doses and monitor blood sugars. Talk to your doctor before using fenugreek.
- Some women notice a maple odor in their urine and sweat. You may smell and taste nice and sweet.
- Initial gassiness or loose stools may occur for the first few days for both mother and baby.
- Mothers who are taking anticoagulant medication should use fenugreek with caution to reduce risk of bruising or bleeding.

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, Healthy Living classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, Healthy Living programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used. Herbs and supplements are sold over-the-counter. Kaiser Permanente carries only herb categories for which some evidence exists to show that the herbs may be effective to treat certain medical conditions.

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