

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*)

Parts used and where grown: Although originally from southeastern Europe and western Asia, fenugreek grows today in many parts of the world, including India, northern Africa, and the United States. The seeds of fenugreek contain the most potent medicinal effects of the plant.

Historical or traditional use (may or may not be supported by scientific studies): A wide range of uses were found for fenugreek in ancient times. Medicinally it was used for the treatment of wounds, abscesses, arthritis, bronchitis, and digestive problems. Traditional Chinese herbalists used it for kidney problems and conditions affecting the male reproductive tract.¹ Fenugreek was, and remains, a food and a spice commonly eaten in many parts of the world.

Active constituents: The steroidal saponins account for many of the beneficial effects of fenugreek, particularly the inhibition of cholesterol absorption and synthesis.² The seeds are rich in dietary fiber, which may be the main reason they can lower blood sugar levels in diabetes.³ One human study found that fenugreek can help lower cholesterol and blood sugar levels in persons with moderate atherosclerosis and non-insulin-dependent diabetes.⁴ Randomized and uncontrolled studies have confirmed fenugreek helps stabilize blood sugar control in patients with insulin-dependent and non-insulin-dependent

diabetes.^{5 6 7} It helps lower elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels in the blood,⁸ including in those with diabetes,⁹ according to several controlled studies. Generally fenugreek does not lower high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol levels. This type of cholesterol is believed to be beneficial.

How much is usually taken? Due to the somewhat bitter taste of fenugreek seeds, debitterized seeds or encapsulated products are preferred. The German Commission E monograph recommends a daily intake of 6 grams.¹⁰ The typical range of intake for diabetes or cholesterol-lowering is 5–30 grams with each meal or 15–90 grams all at once with one meal. As a tincture, 3–4 ml of fenugreek can be taken up to three times per day.

Are there any side effects or interactions? Use of more than 100 grams of fenugreek seeds daily can cause intestinal upset and nausea. Otherwise, fenugreek is extremely safe.

References:

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