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Fenugreek may help lower blood sugar and cholesterol levels, but data is limited and more studies are needed.

Fenugreek comes from the dried seeds of the plant, and has a scent and taste similar to maple syrup. It is used in Middle Eastern, African, and Indian cuisine, and in traditional medicine such as Ayurveda to treat inflammation, diabetes, and gastrointestinal disorders.

Research on this botanical is limited. Small studies in humans suggest fenugreek may help reduce blood fats and sugars, or relieve menopause symptoms, but larger-well designed studies are needed.

In vitro, fenugreek acted as an estrogen receptor modulator and stimulated breast cancer cells. Therefore, patients with hormone-sensitive cancers should consult their physician before using this product in amounts greater than typically found in food.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To treat diabetes
Small studies suggest that fenugreek can lower blood glucose levels when taken with meals. However, more research is needed.
- As a laxative
Although fenugreek seeds contain high levels of fiber, clinical data are lacking.
- To treat disorders of the digestive tract
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.
- To lower high cholesterol
A few trials support this use, but additional studies are needed.

- To fight infections
Lab studies suggest fenugreek has antibacterial properties, but this has not been studied in humans.
- To reduce inflammation
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.
- As a lactation stimulant
Although fenugreek is used in folk medicine to stimulate lactation, evidence is lacking to support this claim and side effects have been reported.
- For wound healing
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.

What are the side effects?

Case reports

- Allergic reactions: Runny nose, wheezing, shortness of breath, nausea, abdominal pain, facial swelling, hives, and fainting
- Severe clotting failure: With excessive use of fenugreek milk porridge, in a patient with cirrhosis.
- Serotonin syndrome: Nausea, anxiety, dilated pupils, sweating, rapid heartbeat, twitching, and spasms in a 38-year-old woman with postnatal depression and anxiety who was being treated with the antidepressant sertraline, but had also taken daily fenugreek supplements to aid in lactation.

What else do I need to know?

Do Not Take if:

- You are taking warfarin: Case reports indicate that fenugreek may increase bleeding risk.
- You are taking SSRI antidepressants: A case report suggests supplemental fenugreek may increase the risk for serotonin syndrome, a serious medical condition.
- You are taking cyclophosphamide: Animal studies suggest fenugreek may interfere with the actions of cyclophosphamide.
- You have a hormone-sensitive cancer: Lab studies show that fenugreek acts as an estrogenic receptor modulator and may increase growth of breast cancer cells.
- You are pregnant or breastfeeding: Fenugreek has been linked to an increased risk of birth defects and its safety in amounts greater than typically found in food are unknown.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Fenugreek - Last updated on December 7, 2023

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