



## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Forskolin

This information describes the common uses of Forskolin, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

## What is it?

Forskolin is used in Ayurvedic medicine for various conditions, but clinical studies that demonstrate its safety and effectiveness are lacking.

Forskolin is a root extract of the Indian plant *Coleus forskohlii*. It has been used for centuries in Ayurvedic medicine to treat various diseases such as underactive thyroid, heart disease, and respiratory disorders. Although anti-inflammatory and blood-pressure lowering effects have been shown in the laboratory setting, very few clinical trials have been conducted. In addition, only a few studies actually use forskolin as an oral supplement. More studies are needed to determine safety and effectiveness for various conditions in humans.

## What are the potential uses and benefits?

- **To treat asthma**  
Forskolin may cause cellular changes that stimulate the dilation of airways.
- **To treat heart disease**  
Two clinical trials found positive effects with intravenous forskolin, but

overall support for this use is not strong. In addition, oral forms of this herb have not been tested in humans.

- **To treat glaucoma**

Studies in humans have conflicting results.

- **To lower high blood pressure**

Forskolin is known to cause cellular changes that lead to blood vessel dilation, which should lower blood pressure, but there is no proof from clinical trials that this effect occurs in humans.

- **For weight loss**

A small clinical study suggests forskolin may have benefits in obese men.

## What are the side effects?

- Low blood pressure
- Slow heart rate
- Diarrhea, gastrointestinal symptoms

## What else do I need to know?

### Patient Warnings:

- Forskolin formulations that are not designed for use in the eye, such as topical creams or extracts meant to be taken by mouth, should not be placed directly in the eye.
- Forskolin preparations should not be used by patients with polycystic kidney disease.

### Do Not Take if:

- You are taking medication for high blood pressure such as beta-blockers, vasodilators, ACE inhibitors, or calcium channel blockers: Laboratory studies show that forskolin may also lower blood pressure. Therefore it may have added effects, although clinical relevance has yet to be determined.
- You are taking warfarin or other blood thinners: Laboratory studies show

that forskolin may have similar effects. Therefore, it may have added effects with these medications, increasing the risk of bleeding or bruising. However, clinical relevance has yet to be determined.

### Special Point:

- Although forskolin is used to reduce intraocular pressure in glaucoma, no sterile eye drop formulation is available.
- The intravenous form of forskolin is not available in the United States.

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](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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