FENUGREEK

Trade:

Can/Aus/UK:

Uses: Herbal spice

LRC: L3

AAP: Not reviewed

Fenugreek is commonly sold as the dried, ripe seed and extracts are used as an artificial flavor for maple syrup.[1] The seeds contain from 0.1 to 0.9% diosgenin.[2] Several coumarin compounds have been noted in the seed as well as a number of alkaloids such as trigonelline, gentianin, and carpaine. The seeds also contain approximately 8% of a foul-smelling oil. Fenugreek has been noted to reduce plasma cholesterol in animals when 50% of their diet contained fenugreek seeds.[3] The high fiber content may have accounted for this change although it may be due to the steroid saponins. A hypoglycemic effect has also been noted. When added to the diet of diabetic dogs, a decrease in insulin dose and hyperglycemia was noted.[4] It is not known if these changes are due to the fiber content of the seeds or a chemical component. Fenugreek has been reported to increase the anticoagulant effect of warfarin.[5] One case of GI bleeding in a premature infant (30 weeks) following introduction of fenugreek to the mother has been observed.[6] The implication of fenugreek in hemorrhage is speculative. In a group of 10 women (non-placebo controlled) with infants born between 24 to 38 weeks gestation (mean= 29 weeks) who ingested 3 fenugreek capsules 3 times daily (Nature's Way) for a week, the average milk production during the week increased significantly from a mean of 207 mL/day (range 57-1057 mL) to 464 mL/day (range 63-1140 mL).[8] No untoward effects were reported. When dosed in moderation, fenugreek has limited toxicity and is listed in the US as a GRAS herbal (Generally Regarded As Safe). A maple syrup odor via urine and sweat is commonly reported. Higher doses may produce hypoglycemia. A stimulant effect on the isolated uterus (guinea pig) has been reported and its use in late pregnancy may not be advisable. Fenugreek's reputation as a galactagogue is widespread but undocumented. The dose commonly employed is variable but is approximately 2-3 capsules taken three times daily. The transfer of fenugreek into milk is unknown, but untoward effects have only rarely been reported.

Pregnancy Risk Category:

Lactation Risk Category: L3

Adult Concerns: Maple syrup odor in urine and sweat. Diarrhea, hypoglycemia, dyspnea (exaggeration of asthmatic symptoms). Once case of suspected GI bleeding in a premature infant has been reported.[6] Two cases of fenugreek allergy have been reported.[7]

Pediatric Concerns: One case of suspected GI bleeding in a premature infant has been reported.[6]

Drug Interactions:

Theoretical Infant Dose:

Relative Infant Dose:

Adult Dose:

Alternatives: Metoclopramide, domperidone

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References:
1. Review of Natural Products Facts and Comparisons, St Louis, MO 1996.