

Second Edition

Edited by
Victor R. Preedy
Ronald Ross Watson

NUTS AND SEEDS

in Health and
Disease Prevention



ACADEMIC
PRESS

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Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum*) Seeds in Health and Nutrition

Dilipkumar Pal, Souvik Mukherjee

Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya (A Central University), Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

Introduction

Trigonella foenum-graecum L (fenugreek), commonly known as *methi* (in Hindi), has been used as a culinary spice and flavoring agent and as a medicinal plant from ancient times. Fenugreek is a leguminous, herbaceous, rain-fed crop included among the seed spices. It is about 30–60 cm tall. The leaflets are about 2–2.5 cm long and the flowers are 1–2 cm long, axillary, and sessile. It is cultivated throughout the country. Among the spices, fenugreek is used as an esoteric food to enhance the flavor and color of food; it is also used to modify the texture of food. Therapeutic utility indicates fenugreek as a medicinal plant.¹ Medicinal plants are employed in pharmaceuticals, nutraceutical, cosmetics, food supplements, and so on. They are also used as traditional sources of medicine. Among the list of important medicinal plants may be found fenugreek. The seeds and plants are basically hot and dry; they are also suppurative, aperient, and diuretic. They have some useful aspects for dropsy, chronic cough, and enlargement of the liver and spleen.² The leaves of fenugreek are beneficial for both internal and external swelling and burns and also applied to prevent the hair from falling out. The seeds are considered to be carminative, tonic, and aphrodisiac. Fenugreek is employed to ease childbirth; moreover, it increases the milk flow of mothers. Egyptian women take fenugreek for menstrual pain and tourists use it as a *hilba* tea for stomach problems. Not only that, the plant is recommended for use in dyspepsia for loss of appetite, for diarrhea of puerperal women, and for rheumatism.³ An infusion of seeds is given to smallpox patients as a cooling drink. Fenugreek seed contains various bioactive compounds such as flavonoids (quercetin, rutin, and vitexin), saponins (graecunin, fenugrin B, and fenugreekine), and amino acids (isoleucine, 4-hydroxyisoleucine, histidine, leucine, and lysine). As a medicinal plant it shows activity against allergies, appetite or loss of catarrh, bronchial problems, cholesterol, diabetic retinopathy, gas, gastric disorders, lung infections, excessive