Fenugreek (Trigonella foenum-graecum), has been receiving more and more attention for its health properties, many of which are related to its high galactomannan (a specific type of soluble fiber) content. Clinical studies support fenugreek galactomannan for blood sugar health and for lowering the glycemic index. But fenugreek also offers other health benefits, including the potential for weight loss.

Until recently, the use of fenugreek as an herbal supplement has been limited for a few key reasons. Like garlic, fenugreek has a strong aroma and when eaten, can produce a residual body odor. In addition, large amounts of fenugreek may need to be consumed to achieve desired health benefits, making it inconvenient to take in supplement form. Raw material manufacturers have recognized these drawbacks and are introducing fenugreek ingredients that are more concentrated and deodorized. For example, FenuLife® is a patented fenugreek extract that is three times more concentrated in galactomannan than whole fenugreek seeds. FenuLife is also odorless, so it will not leave a residual body odor.

Fenugreek has been studied for its effects on blood sugar health. The galactomannan in fenugreek swells or increases in viscosity when consumed. The viscosity created in the stomach slows gastric emptying and thickens intestinal contents. As a result, the absorption of glucose is delayed, which leads to a decrease in blood sugar spikes following a meal. Instead, blood sugar absorption is more balanced. So essentially, fenugreek can lower the glycemic response to meals.

A recent study in Canada tested the effect of the standardized fenugreek extract, FenuLife, on glycemic response. Ten healthy subjects were given a glucose solution with several different doses of FenuLife. There is often confusion among health care professionals about how to distinguish the value of various types of soluble fiber for blood sugar reduction. Therefore, psyllium husk powder and oat bran concentrate were also studied to see how they compared to a fenugreek extract. The results showed that small doses of the fenugreek extract lowered the glycemic response. Similar quantities of psyllium husk powder or oat bran concentrate did not show an effect.

Another study in Japan tested the effect of the same fenugreek extract—FenuLife—on blood glucose in type II diabetics over eight weeks. One group of subjects was given a placebo for four weeks and then switched to FenuLife for the next four weeks. Results showed that four grams of FenuLife, divided into three doses per day, reduced fasting blood sugar levels compared to the placebo. Another group of subjects were given 4 grams of FenuLife a day, for the first four weeks, which was shown to lower blood sugar levels. However, these subjects were then given a reduced dose of FenuLife (2 grams) for the next four weeks. The reduced intake of FenuLife (2 grams) was shown to maintain the improved serum glucose levels.

In addition to effects on blood sugar, fenugreek galactomannan has the potential to promote weight loss by producing feelings of fullness or satiety. The slowed gastric emptying associated with galactomannan can create a feeling of fullness in the stomach, which can suppress appetite. Delayed absorption of glucose can reduce the glycemic index of food consumed. Low glycemic index meals have been associated with feelings of satiety in several studies. Individuals consuming low glycemic index versus high glycemic index meals feel full for longer periods of time—promoting decreased intake after a meal. This suggests that the galactomannan content of fenugreek can aid in compliance to weight loss diets by promoting better control of food intake.