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## HEALTHY CHOICES FOR MIND AND BODY

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### **HERB OF THE MONTH – ‘SUGAR DESTROYER’ GYMNEMA SYLVESTRE (05/2007)**

**Bottom Line At the Top:** Gymnema sylvestre probably lowers blood sugar and has few known side effects. When the leaf or powder comes in contact with the tongue, it makes food, especially sweets, taste horrible, thereby reducing calorie consumption.

Gymnema sylvestre has been used as a naturopathic and ayurvedic treatment for diabetes for nearly two millennia. Some use it for weight control. You might find it under other names - Gurmari, Gurmarbooti, Gurmar, periploca of the woods, meshasing or mesbasringi, all referring to a plant found in tropical forests and bushland of India, China, SE Asia, South Africa. The [Hindi](#) word gur-mar literally means sugar destroyer.

Scientists believe that a component of Gymnema, gurnemic acid, which has a structure similar to saccharose, is the active ingredient. How it affects sugar metabolism, when taken internally, is still a matter of debate. Gymnema alters the taste of sugar to a disgusting sand flavor when the leaf is chewed or the powder comes in contact with the tongue. The effect lasts only 15 minutes, but serves as a strong disincentive to continue eating even the tastiest sweet. In this way it might lead to weight loss. It is not clear if taking the herb internally has the same effect.

A number of controlled trials in both Type I (insulin-dependent) and Type II (insulin resistant) diabetics yielded promising improvement of blood sugar control. Both fasting and post-meal glucose levels decreased 11-35%, allowing some patients to reduce their doses of prescription medications. Some individuals' cholesterol and triglyceride levels fell also. No long-term studies have verified safety when Gymnema is consumed for prolonged times.

The herb comes in capsules of dried leaf or as a liquid extract. It is commonly added to many different combination herbal products, but the majority of studies used GS4, a standardized product that contains only gymnema sylvestre. By convention, capsules should contain 25% gymnemic and gurnemic acids to be considered active.

The typical dose is 400 mg, once or twice a day. Since Gymnema lowers blood sugar, hypoglycemia (low sugar level) may occur, particularly if taken with other diabetic medications. It is not recommended in pregnancy, small children or lactating women.