

BITTER MELON FOR BETTER BLOOD SUGAR

If you have diabetes or pre-diabetes, a nutritious yet ugly, wart-covered, fluorescent green “fruit” could help you lower your blood sugar level and improve insulin resistance.

its benefits

Bitter melon (*Momordica Charantia*), also known as bitter gourd or bitter wild cucumber, has traditionally been used as medicine for diabetes in Asia, India, Pakistan, South America and East Africa.

Abundant animal and biochemical studies show it has anti-diabetic and blood sugar lowering properties, earning it the nickname “vegetable insulin.” However, existing clinical studies are limited and suffer from poor design, so more research is required before official guidelines can recommend a dose for use in diabetes management.

Bitter melon also provides a good source of vitamin C and folate, and contains various phytonutrients with antioxidant properties. It is considered a longevity food by popular wisdom. The Department of Health in the Philippines has approved it as one of the 10 scientifically proven medicinal plants.

how to use it

Loved and used by indigenous populations for centuries, bitter melon is usually chopped and salted, then allowed to sit before rinsing and using, to extract some of its bitterness. It works well in tomato-based dishes, stir-frys, curries and burgers. Incorporating it with other ingredients helps reduce perceived bitterness. You can also juice bitter melon or puree it with water in a blender (add some lemon juice to improve flavour) and drink a shot after meals.

Years of traditional use support that the fruit is safe to eat. However, care should be taken with extracts and teas due to potentially high doses. There are some isolated reports of hypoglycaemic comas in children after drinking bitter melon tea. People with diabetes should monitor their blood glucose levels to make sure these don't drop too low as some research indicates bitter melon can improve the efficacy of some hypoglycaemic medications.



BITTER MELON FRITTERS

While the flavour of bitter melon can be a challenge, it's worth consuming for its blood sugar-lowering effects. Warm spices in this recipe balance out the bitterness.

PREPARATION TIME: 15 MINUTES + 30 MINUTES DRAINING
COOKING TIME: 18 MINUTES **MAKES 6 LARGE FRITTERS**

Ingredients:

- 2 bitter melons, washed
- 1½ tsp salt
- ½ cup chickpea (besan) flour
- 2 tbsp brown rice flour
- ½ tsp turmeric
- ½ tsp cumin
- ½ tsp garam masala
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Method:

1. Slice the bitter melons in half lengthwise. Remove the seeds using a metal spoon and coarsely grate the melons. Place the grated melons into a colander and mix in 1 tsp of the salt. Sit the colander over a bowl for about 30–60 minutes to extract some of the bitter juices.
2. Prepare the batter by mixing the remainder of the salt, flours and spices in a bowl. Set aside.
3. Squeeze excess moisture, using your hand, from the grated bitter melon in the colander, then rinse under tap water. Take handfuls of bitter melon and squeeze dry, then add to the dry batter mixture.
4. Add the garlic to the mixture and gradually combine everything, drizzling in ¼ to ½ cup of water until you form a thick paste. (The amount of water required will depend on the size of the bitter melons you use and how much moisture has been extracted from them.)
5. Heat the oil in a medium frypan. Divide the mixture into six and using two metal spoons, form round patties and slide each into the pan. Flatten slightly, then cook until golden brown, turning over once.
6. Place cooked fritters on a paper towel to absorb excess oil. Serve hot as part of a main meal or in a burger bun. (Tangy yoghurt dipping sauce can further mask any remaining bitterness.)

PER SERVE: 541 kJ (129 cal). Protein 3g. Total fat 10g. Saturated fat 2g. Carbohydrate 5g. Cholesterol 0mg. Calcium 22mg. Iron 1.2mg. Fibre 3g.

