

## Karela (Bitter Gourd)



It is often the awful tasting foods that hold the best nutrition. Bitter gourd (*Momordica charantia*) is one such fruit which has been prescribed and recommended by Ayurvedic Doctors for a number of years. It is also known as bitter melon, karela, karavellaka and balsam pear.

It is a rich source of phytonutrients such as iron, fibre, calcium, phosphorus, potassium, Vitamins A, B and C etc. The beta-carotene content present in bitter gourd helps in controlling eye disorders and enhancing eyesight especially in cases of macular degeneration. It has also been used for treating respiratory issues such as asthma as well as ulcers, malaria and constipation.

The fruit, stems, leaves and roots have all been used in traditional medicine to help treat ailments such as hyperlipidaemia, digestive disorders, microbial infections and menstrual problems. It has also been shown to possess powerful antiviral properties that can stimulate the immune system and activate the body's natural killer cells to help fight off viruses such as white spot syndrome virus and human immunodeficiency virus hence why it is very useful in cancer prevention fever and infections.

However, most clinical research supports the use of this fruit in treating Diabetes because it contains polypeptide-p which is used to control diabetes naturally. Polypeptide-p or p-insulin is an insulin-like hypoglycaemic protein, shown to lower blood glucose levels. It works by mimicking the action of human insulin in the body and thus may be used as plant-based insulin replacement in patients with type-1 diabetes.

Although the use of bitter gourd has a number of benefits it is also important to remember like any medicine or herb that it should be used safely. Therefore, you should always check with your doctor how the use of bitter gourd can affect your blood sugar levels as if its drops too low it can be dangerous. It should also be avoided by pregnant women as it can stimulate excess menstrual bleeding. Furthermore the seeds of the bitter gourd contain a molecule called Vicine which can bring about favism which is a disease where red blood cells break down when exposed to different medications.

### Health Tips:

1. Fresh Karela Juice helps detoxify the liver, purify the blood and treat intestinal worms
2. The paste of the leaf of *Momordica charantia* is applied over the affected area to treat eczema.
3. The fruit is cut and used for treating fever
4. Curries can be prepared with this fruit; it can also be baked or boiled.

Please consult an Ayurvedic Physician before taking any prescribed medication that has been discussed.