Bitter Melon

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Bitter Melon  
What is it?  
Bitter melon (Momordica charantia) is a vine originally from India and other Asian countries. It has been traditionally used to treat diabetes.  
  
Bitter melon contains a chemical that acts like insulin to help reduce blood sugar levels.  
  
People commonly use bitter melon for diabetes, osteoarthritis, athletic performance, and many other conditions, but there is no good scientific evidence to support these uses.  
  
Bitter melon is sometimes called bitter gourd. Don't confuse this with Ivy gourd, which is a different plant.  
  
  
  
How effective is it?  
There is interest in using bitter melon for a number of purposes, but there isn't enough reliable information to say whether it might be helpful.  
  
  
Is it safe?  
When taken by mouth: Bitter melon is possibly safe when used for up to 4 months. Bitter melon might cause upset stomach in some people. There isn't enough reliable information to know if bitter melon is safe to use long-term.  
  
   
When applied to the skin: There isn't enough reliable information to know if bitter melon is safe. It might cause a rash.  
  
Special precautions & warnings:  
Pregnancy: Bitter melon is possibly unsafe when taken by mouth during pregnancy. Certain chemicals in bitter melon might harm the pregnancy.   
Breast-feeding: There isn't enough reliable information to know if bitter melon is safe to use when breast-feeding. Stay on the safe side and avoid use.   
Glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency: Bitter melon seeds might cause severe anemia in people who have G6PD deficiency. Until more is known, avoid bitter melon seeds if you have G6PD deficiency.  
Surgery: Bitter melon might interfere with blood sugar control during and after surgery. Stop using bitter melon at least 2 weeks before a scheduled surgery.  
  
  
Are there interactions with medications?  
ModerateBe cautious with this combination.Medications for diabetes (Antidiabetes drugs)Bitter melon might lower blood sugar levels. Taking bitter melon along with diabetes medications might cause blood sugar to drop too low. Monitor your blood sugar closely.Medications moved by pumps in cells (P-Glycoprotein Substrates)Some medications are moved in and out of cells by pumps. Bitter melon might change how these pumps work and change how much medication stays in the body. In some cases, this might change the effects and side effects of a medication.Pazopanib (Votrient)Bitter melon might increase how much pazopanib stays in the body. In some cases, this might increase the effects and side effects of pazopanib.  
  
  
Are there interactions with herbs and supplements?  
Herbs and supplements that might lower blood sugarBitter melon might lower blood sugar. Taking it with other supplements with similar effects might lower blood sugar too much. Examples of supplements with this effect include aloe, cassia cinnamon, chromium, and prickly pear cactus.  
  
  
Are there interactions with foods?  
There are no known interactions with foods.  
  
  
How is it typically used?  
Bitter melon has most often been used by adults in doses of 0.5-12 grams by mouth daily for up to 16 weeks. Speak with a healthcare provider to find out what dose might be best for a specific condition.  
  
  
Other names  
African Cucumber, Ampalaya, Balsam Pear, Balsam-Apple, Balsambirne, Balsamine, Balsamo, Bitter Apple, Bitter Cucumber, Bitter Gourd, Bittergurke, Carilla Fruit, Carilla Gourd, Cerasee, Chinli-Chih, Concombre Africain, Courge Am re, Cundeamor, Fructus Mormordicae Grosvenori, Karavella, Karela, Kareli, Kathilla, Kerala, Korolla, Kugua, Kuguazi, K'u-Kua, Lai Margose, Margose, Mel n Amargo, Melon Amer, Momordica, Momordica charantia, Momordica murcata, Momordique, Paroka, Pepino Montero, Poire Balsamique, Pomme de Merveille, P'u-T'ao, Sorosi, Sushavi, Ucche, Vegetable insulin, Wild Cucumber.  
  
  
Methodology  
  
 To learn more about how this article was written, please see the Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database methodology.   
   
  
  
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