

Ask Leyla: Is yacon syrup a good sugar substitute?

Q: I recently read about yacon syrup as a sugar substitute.

What are your thoughts on it versus other sweeteners? Does it have a high glycemic index like agave?



yacon root syrup

A: Agave is akin to high fructose corn syrup. And please be aware that most sweeteners adversely impact blood sugar and insulin. Best to avoid it if you have such issues and especially if you have a sweet tooth because continued consumption will only keep you in the vicious cycle of cravings.

Yacon (*Smallanthus sonchifolius*) is a tuber vegetable native to South America with a texture and flavor similar to jicama and pear but looks like a sweet potato. It is composed of water and the prebiotic FOS (fructooligosaccharides). FOS has been found to be helpful in feeding the beneficial bacteria in the gut, given its prebiotic nature, but this can be a double-edged sword.

Frequent use of yacon syrup (more than two teaspoons a day) can cause gastrointestinal distress such as nausea, bloating and diarrhea. Too much FOS may be the culprit because it also feeds bad bacteria, if present. Therefore, FOS should be avoided if you have SIBO as it is a FODMAP, and taken with caution in the presence of candida overgrowth because it can feed candida in the same way.

A small study found yacon syrup to be helpful as a weight loss aid. But the results were confounded by the lower calorie diet the participants were required to follow. In addition, 15 of the 55 participants (all women) dropped out of the study due to the unpleasant GI symptoms reported from taking yacon syrup. It was noted however, that FOS may have an appetite-suppressing effect, likely because it decreases intestinal transit time.

To your health!