

Nopal Cactus – Benefits, Dosage, Side Effects, and Dangers

[Nutrition, Superfoods](#) / Last Modified on August 11, 2022 / By Takalani Netshiomvani

For millions of people in developed countries, obesity has become a life-threatening disease. **Nopal Cactus** has been one of the exotic plants, which can increase your metabolism and help you reduce your body fat when using it wisely.

Being one of the plants growing in the wilderness, this **superfood** accumulates all the water it can absorb from the nature, to anticipate the lengthy dry season. All this water and nutrients pass on to the fruits and pads, giving you a complete food you may use in recipes or **supplements** to improve your metabolic rates and fight against inflammation and dehydration.

Nopal Cactus is available in the market in many forms and concentrations to assist you in following a more healthy way of living!

You will be also amazed by the potential benefits of nopal cactus to your health, including cholesterol and glucose blood levels. Keep on reading this article and you will not have to make another search about it!

What is Nopal?

Since the era of the Spanish invasion in Mexico, **Nopal Cactus** has been an unknown plant in Europe and other American countries. This green plant that grows in the Mexican wilderness has many uses and remains edible in Mexico and other Central American countries.

Nopal Cactus has a tender root growing up to give green thorny pads and red fruits. The main genus of nopales is the **Opuntia**. However, there are more than **300 species of nopal cactus** that grow wild in Mexico and other Mediterranean countries, as well as parts of the southern United States.

Mexican cuisine uses the nopal fresh green pads, to create tasty food, either by boiling them in hot water or broiling them over charcoal. Americans usually refer to nopal cactus fruits, like **prickly pear cactus**, taking its name from the spikes that are all over the cacti plant. Remember that nopal cactus extract exists in many **weight loss formulas** and can be a high stars **supplement for your diet**.

Where does Nopal Cactus come from?

You could find prickly pear plants across the **Mexican country** and some **central American Countries** as well. The **Mediterranean Sea countries** are also a place where you could find many Nopal Cactus plants around the year. Nopal cactus cultivations from the **Opuntia genus** and **opuntia fiscus indica** are the ones producing the famous red fruit that tastes like watermelon and bubble-gum.

It contains many fibers and lots of water, giving you more health benefits when you combine its consumption with your daily recipes. **Nopalitos** are the green pad leaves of nopal cactus, which are getting cooked and served as original Mexican food alone or with mushrooms.

Every person dealing with cutting the nopal fruit and green pads should take precautions, **wearing gloves** to ensure that sticky thorns are not going to attach their hands.

Upon cutting the pads and fruit parts, you need a peeling device to remove the bad parts, as well as, the thorns. Then rinsing with cool water would be the best way to clean them up and make them edible.

Nopal Cactus manufacturing history

Mexican people used to **boil the nopales** and **prickly pear** fruit, to get the extract added to their food for health purposes. Today, the nopales are dried and smashed to take the nopal powder.

The powder is then included in **dietary supplements** to burn fat and lower blood glucose and cholesterol levels.

Some other people prefer to consume Nopal Cactus in **capsules** or as **tea sachets** and beverages, or even in **powder form**.

No matter how you decide to consume nopales, you have to read about their dietary benefits, ensuring they have a high fiber content to relieve your gut as well.

Nopal Cactus Benefits- How does the Supplement Work?

Prickly pear, the fruit of cacti, has many health benefits for people who like to receive supplements:

1 – Weight loss

Many components in nopales can give you the invaluable benefit of weight loss, increasing your metabolism rates. The increased consumption of Mexican prickly pear gives your gut more fiber and water making you feel full.

The inhibition of **ghrelin** (an appetite hormone) in your blood, can also have beneficial effects on your diet and [help you lose weight](#). Opuntia plant contains also **less saturated fat and cholesterol**, while vitamin B6, thiamine, and riboflavin may equally increase the fat burning combined with some daily exercise.

2 – Reduces blood sugar levels

Many [studies](#) are available online about the beneficial actions of Nopal Cactus consumption, to people who suffer from **diabetes** and receive daily insulin injections. Mexican breakfasts containing nopales extracts and prickly pear can reduce the blood glucose levels to every control group.

The need for **short-acting insulin** injections to the diabetes control group has also decreased, showing the fast onset of action nopales have in lowering [your blood glucose levels](#).

3 – Enhances your digestion process

Nopal cactus and its green pads, as well as the opuntia fruit extracts, are rich in fiber, which in turn helps your gut to **digest food faster** and easier. Nopalitos, except for being delicious, can increase the mobility of your intestine and **relieve the symptoms of constipation**, not depending on your diet profile.

Finally, there is a strong correlation between **low blood cholesterol** levels and high fiber consumption, which is another benefit of consuming Nopal Cactus supplements regularly.

4 – Improved skincare action

Nopal fruit can also be the defensive shield against free radicals, that destroy your skin structure. Prickly pear can offer antioxidant effects to people adding it to their diet, reducing wrinkles and age spots on their facial skin.

Additionally, nopales high water concentration can rehydrate **your skin** and make it look younger and fresher.

5 – Anticancer abilities

Prickly pear contains high levels of polyphenols, which have a proven anticancer function against all types of tumors. [Studies](#) conducted in mice show that nopal cactus extracts contain **gallic acid**, which is a powerful tumor non-proliferation factor against cancer cells involved in leukemia, lung and prostate cancers.

6 – Improves strong bones creation

Cactus green pads and nopal fruit, can be a great source of **minerals and calcium** taking part in bone formation. Magnesium, iron, and phosphorus are all bone creating minerals, which are present in the nopales and absorbed by your body when adding nopal cactus in your diet.

7 – Makes you sleep better

Nopal cactus extracts have a tremendous effect on producing more **serotonin** in your brain, giving you a better and longer night sleep. It seems like melatonin (the sleep-inducing compound of our body) secretes more often when nopales are present in your food, or you receive a prickly pear supplement treatment.

8 – Fights against inflammation

Prickly pear juice from nopal plant green pads is a popular treatment for **chronic inflammation** in Mexico. People who increase the consumption of nopal fruit and pads can get rid of the inflammation phenomena due to arthritis, lupus, and Crohn's disease.

9 – Assists you in ulcers treatment

Mexican nopales have a big **fiber and mucilage** concentration, helping **gastric ulcers** to heal quicker in persons suffering from alcohol abuse. People who regularly add prickly pear extract and pads to their diet, usually have an ulcer-free stomach and a better function of their gastrointestinal system.

Nopales Nutrition Facts

Many people would wonder to have a detailed look at the minerals, nutrients, and calories they take with every 100 gr. of nopales serving. Here is the complete guide:

Ingredient	Quantity	Benefits
Water	94.12 gr	Rehydrates your body tissues and makes you feel younger
Plant Protein	1.32 gr	It may feed your body and muscles and is a great source of amino acids for a vegan diet
Total Fat	0.09 gr	These fats are saturated and unsaturated, giving you the essential fatty acids like linoleic oil, which your body cannot make by itself
Ash	1.14 gr	It contains all minerals and assists in your digestion
Total Dietary Fiber	1.19 gr	The fibers have zero carb concentration, giving you a better shield against constipation
Glucose	0.99gr	You can have glucose to feed your brain when exercising

Calcium	141mg	One of the most important elements for healthy bone creation
Magnesium	44.72 mg	The basic substance of many vitamins. It helps you to build a healthy musculoskeletal system
Iron	0.51 mg	The number one mineral for your red blood cell formation
Phosphorus	13.76 mg	Another great element present in your bones, helps you with night vision, being the basic substance of your retina
Manganese	0.40 mg	Healing woods and reduces blood sugar
Potassium	221 mg	The best shield for your heart and an essential mineral for neuronal function
Sodium	18 mg	Being low helps your circulatory system to work better
Zinc	0.21 mg	Assists in wound healing and fertility
Copper	0.04 mg	A fundamental intermediate to collagen production and neuron signaling
Selenium	0.6 µg	An important factor for thyroid function, immune system, and

		mental disorders regulation
Vitamin C	8 mg	A strong antioxidant, fighting inflammation and flu
Thiamine	0.01 mg	Involved in electrolytes entrance and exit from your muscles. It has a possible anticancer action
Riboflavin	0.03 mg	Acts against blood disorders, migraine headaches, and degenerative eye conditions
Niacin	0.35 mg	A basic catalyst for metabolism and energy creation. Gives an extra shield to your brain function
Pantothenic Acid	0.15 mg	Fights against chronic inflammation, neuronal disease, and prostate enlargement
Vitamin B-6	0.06 mg	Prevents anemia and protects your cognitive functions
Choline	6.28 mg	It defines cell structure and boosts your metabolism.
Vitamin A	19.78 µg	It protects your eyes, this food also supports your immune system , and lowers the risks of certain cancers
Carotene	215 µg	It promotes good skin health and reduces macular

degeneration protecting your vision.

Who is the Nopal Cactus for?

Nopal cactus pads and prickly fruit are suitable for adults who wish to regulate their blood sugar and increase their metabolism function to lose weight. It is not likely that they will face any potential problems with the raw fruit or the supplement, however, we strongly recommend that you always get your physician's opinion about Nopal Cactus extracts.

It would be wise to keep them away from children, especially the raw fruit that is full in thin spikes, which may easily penetrate their sensitive skin and be painful. People with known allergies to any of the substances contained in nopales should avoid their consumption as well as the intake of supplements containing nopal cactus.

Pros and Cons of Nopal Cactus

Pros	Cons
Reduces blood cholesterol levels	Hard to collect from nature, since it is usually found on cliffs and has sharp thorns
Regulates the glucose in diabetic patients	May cause gastrointestinal dysfunction and distress to people that consume lots of nopal pads and prickly pear fruit

Rehydrates your skin and tissues

Promotes weight loss
and boosts your
metabolism

Easy to find in great
quantities especially
during summer

Relatively affordable
compared to other
weight loss supplements

It has a great taste and
can be added to your
regular food, or create
new recipes with nopales

How do you cook nopal cactus?

There are many ways to cook nopal cactus. The most popular one in Mexico is to steer fry them with mushrooms, cut in thin slices.

Effectiveness of Nopal Cactus

There are numerous studies and reviews for *Opuntia* and its benefits for your health. A literature review published in *Molecules* journal in 2014, showed that Nopal Cactus has a strong anti-inflammatory action. Additionally, nopal cactus supplements can offer you antioxidant, hypoglycemic, antimicrobial and neuroprotective properties that create a natural shield for your body.

Another study in rats has proven that nopal cactus extracts can lower the glucose levels in the bloodstream and help rats deal with diabetes type 2. This [study](#) gives hopes to the further investigation of the same

beneficiary action in humans, suffering from diabetes and taking insulin as a treatment.

Here are some of the most recent reviews for Nopal Cactus supplements drafted from major sellers like Amazon and eBay:

Dosage: How to Use Nopal Cactus?

Since prickly pear consumption has increased through the years, it would be useful to know the recommended daily dosage.

When to start and when to stop

Most of the users start taking nopal cactus supplements when they feel like they need a natural booster to their weight loss efforts. Others also start taking it to reduce their blood cholesterol and lipids levels. The best time to start consuming nopales would be right after exercise when your body needs nutrients and has a high metabolic rate.

However, you should better stop taking nopal cactus extracts when you feel dizzy or have digestive issues. For most of the people, prickly pear intake is useful and harmless.

What are the dosages to respect?

The only dosage that has undergone scientific research is the **300 grams of steamed nopal** fruits or pads or **500 grams of broiled stems**. This dosage is safe for consumption and many diabetics study groups have successfully received it without any implications or side effects. Opuntia supplements usually come in **tablets or capsules** and contain **650mg of pure nopales** extract. The dosage for these is one per day with your meal.

What to do if you forget any dose?

You simply go on to the next one. Skipping a dose would not harm your body or have any influence on your metabolic rate.

What to do in case of overdose?

If you feel that you had too much prickly pear fruits or nopales pads, you simply need to drink some more water and wait for your body to digest them. Some intestinal dysfunction may occur, but there is nothing to worry about.

Precautions to take when taking Nopal Cactus

Make sure you are not eating prickly pears before surgery since it can interfere with your blood clotting mechanisms. Also, it is not safe to give edible nopales or opuntia supplements to children or pregnant, or even women who are in the breastfeeding period.

Under no circumstances should you keep on consuming nopal pads or fruits if you feel:

- Dizzy
- Stomachache
- Headache
- [Diarrhea](#)

How to keep Nopal Cactus?

When you have **fresh green pads** or **prickly pear fruits**, you need to keep them in your **refrigerator**. However, all the other forms of opuntia supplements (**tablets, powders or capsules**) are kept in **room temperature** away from the direct sunlight.

Risks, Hazards, and Side Effects of Nopal Cactus

As with any substance, prickly pears consumption may be risky for those who have **juvenile diabetes** and undergo treatment with **short-acting insulin**. Nopal Cactus can significantly lower the glucose levels in your blood and with the presence of the acute acting insulin could cause **hypoglycemic episodes** to these persons.

Another risk would be the consumption of nopales fruits and pads from people with known **allergies** to one or more of the ingredients, who can develop Knidos, a rare reaction that needs immediate hospitalization.

However, all these conditions are extremely rare and do not apply for the vast majority of the Nopal Cactus supplements and raw fruit users.

Side Effects of Nopal Cactus

Some minor side effects may occur upon consumption of Nopal Cactus:

- Upset stomach and aches in your intestinal area
 - Mild dizziness which most of the times recovers by itself
 - Belly gases and fullness feeling
 - Diarrhea may occur as a result of overconsumption of fresh nopales
- All these side effects are known to your physician who is the only responsible to identify them and give you the right to use or discard any Nopal Cactus product or supplement.

Contraindications

You should ask your doctor or consider not taking Nopal Cactus extracts and supplements if you belong to the following categories:

- Pregnant women
- Breastfeeding women
- Children and teenagers below the age of 16
- Patients who are about to undergo a massive surgery in the foreseeable future
- People who have severe diabetes implications and unregulated blood glucose levels

Drug interactions not recommended

Although Nopal Cactus has only moderate interaction with other drugs, you should be always cautious with the combinations shown below:

- **Metformin (Glucophage):** It is the most common drug taken as diabetes medications in its early stages and motivates the pancreas to produce insulin and lower blood glucose levels. However, the consumption of Nopal Cactus can lower the sugar levels a lot more than usual. Consider lowering the dose of metformin when taking Nopal Cactus.

- **Mainstream antidiabetic drugs (insulin-like drugs):** People who are diagnosed with diabetes mellitus usually take **glimepiride (Amaryl)**, insulin, **pioglitazone (Actos)**, **rosiglitazone (Avandia)**, **glipizide (Glucotrol)**, **tolbutamide (Orinase)**. Try to avoid consuming prickly pear supplements when these drugs are prescribed to you.
- **Warfarin anticoagulant agents (Coumadin, Jantoven, Apowarfarin):** Should you take these drugs to prevent blood clotting then it would be better to minimize your exposure to cactus opuntia supplements and raw fruits, since you may experience unprecedented bleeding episodes.

Apart from these drugs, there are no other known interactions of Nopal Cactus extracts with other agents and in most cases, their consumption is safe and healthy for you.

Our final opinion on Nopal Cactus: Reviews

Nopal Cactus as a fruit and as a supplement **works best for people who follow a balanced diet** and adopt some daily exercise through their busy daily schedule.

The consumption of nopales and the related supplements could also support their **weight loss efforts** and make them look younger and fresher than their actual age.

In our opinion, nopal cactus in all its forms can help you feel better and [improve your immune system](#) shields, as well as help you get fit and **regulate your blood sugar** levels when you take it regularly at the right portions.

How to buy Nopal Cactus Supplement: The complete guide

In case you live in Mexico or the Southwestern United States and the Mediterranean Countries, you have many chances to buy fresh nopal pads and prickly pears during the summer season when they are abundant and their prices are as low as **\$0.50 for the fruit** and **\$0.20 for the freshly cut green pads**. You may find such fruits in the delicatessen supermarkets across the world with elevated prices.

However, most of the people buy Nopal Cactus from local pharmacy stores or online from Amazon and eBay. They can find nopal cactus extracts in many forms like:

Tablets and capsules

They come in **60-tab** or **120-tab** containers varying from **600mg** to **1000mg** of nopal cactus active ingredient per tablet.

The prices start from as low as **\$9.99 for the 60-tab** container and can come up to **\$24.99 for the 120-tab** container which is sufficient for at least 4 months.

Powder

Nopal Cactus powder is available in **100 grams** sachets and you can use it externally as a dermal patch for wounds and rashes, or as a baking ingredient for your cakes and spice for your food.

The prices start from **\$19.99 for the 100 grams** sachet.

Nopal Cactus water and Shots

An online company called **Nochtli** presented shots and nopal cactus water made with more than 99% cactus ingredients. They sell **fruit concentrates** starting from **\$35.95 per 1 liter** and **cactus water** starting from **\$5.70 per 300 ml**. You may also find **cactus powder** there at the price of **\$24.95 for the 16 oz.** package.

PhenQ weight loss supplement

PhenQ is also a source of nopal cactus, giving it extra thermogenic abilities to improve the metabolic reactions in your fat cells and burn more calories when you work out.

Prices start from **\$69.95 per 60-tabs** container.

=> See our [complete PhenQ Weigh-Loss supplement review](#)

FAQs

Here are some of the most popular questions consumers ask online for Nopal Cactus:

Is prickly pear and nopal cactus the same?

Prickly pear is the fruit of the Nopal Cactus. However, when we refer to Nopal Cactus we include its green pads as well, which are edible too. In many cases, prickly pear and nopal cactus refer to the same plant.

Do nopales make you poop?

Nopales have a lot of fibers, meaning that they can motivate your intestine and deal with your constipation issues. Remember that your body cannot digest these fibers so their only use is to increase the mobility of your gut.

Are nopales Keto-friendly?

Nopales contain a tiny fraction of sugar and lots of fibers. So they are **ideal for the [Keto diet](#)** since they have zero carbs inside. In the Keto diet, the fibers are not included in the carbs since they cannot be absorbed by the body.

Can you eat a raw cactus?

You can't eat a raw cactus since it has thorns and spikes and it doesn't taste that good either. Prickly pears may be eaten raw after you wash them thoroughly and remove their outer skin part. Nopal pads are usually broiled or boiled to become edible.

Is cactus good for cancer?

Numerous studies show that cactus may be stopping the proliferation and reproduction of cancer cells in the human body. However, this has

not been proved yet in large scale double-blind placebo studies, so we have to be careful when suggesting its consumption to people dealing with cancer.

What does nopal cactus taste like?

Nopal cacti are slightly tart with an even slighter citrusy flavor.

Are nopales a Superfood?

Yes, they are, but not in their raw form. Their powder form gives them that superfood status.

Is nopales good for high blood pressure?

Yes it is. It is used to treat and even manage high blood pressure, as well as diabetes and even cancer.

Are nopales good for weight loss?

Nopales are great for weight loss. They can boost your metabolism and [make your fat cells burn a lot more fatty acids](#) especially when you exercise. That is why many fat burners like **PhenQ**, have decided to include nopal cactus extract to their ingredients.

Conclusion

Nopal cactus is the number one substance to keep a **healthy balance** in your body, **lose weight** and fight **against chronic inflammation**.

Prickly pears and nopal pads are tasty and can offer you many amazing recipes to share with friends and family.

You better think about taking Nopal Cactus supplements to:

- Activate your metabolism
- Shield your immune system
- Make yourself look younger and fresher

Nopales are easy to find everywhere these days and can improve your foods should you include them in your recipe. Consume them wisely and you shall receive all their beneficial actions for your body.

About The Author

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Takalani has a BSc in Nutrition degree acquired in 2006 at the University of Venda. She worked in prisons and hospital kitchens assisting with training the staff and patients on : basic, therapeutic nutrition, weight balance, and employee wellness programs. For over 4 years, I developed the training material and facilitated training in a culinary program provided to offenders in prison where the graduates were awarded with the City&Guilds endorsed certificates.