



Research Article

Dates: A Natural Ally in Promoting Digestive Comfort and Heart Health

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Abstract. The date (*Phoenix dactylifera*) has been part of people's diets for thousands of years throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, where it was not only a significant source of food but also a representation of food security, perseverance, and God's grace. With the rise of modern nutritional science, dates are increasingly seen as functional foods because of their high content of dietary fibre and natural sugars as well as an array of minerals and bioactive components. This paper will provide an interdisciplinary analysis of the effects of dates on digestive comfort and cardiovascular welfare using both contemporary research in nutrition and religious texts (i.e., the Qur'an and Hadith). Using clearly specified headings that are appropriate for journal articles and providing extensive elaboration on each topic, this study illustrates how the teachings of Islam and the scientific community have converged to support dates' health benefits. This study concludes that dates exemplify a holistic approach to nutrition, integrating the spiritual, cultural, and physical aspects of human health.

Keywords: Dates; Digestive health; Cardiovascular health; Ajwa dates; Prophetic medicine; Functional foods

INTRODUCTION

Dates (*Phoenix dactylifera*) have long been some of the oldest domesticated fruits ever known to and utilized by human culture, with archaeological records from ancient Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula dating the domestication of dates to over 6,000 years ago. The date industry and its harvesting were the backbone of ancient desert cultures, as the date palm thrived in areas that would have otherwise proved adverse to the survival of most plant life. It was in such conditions that the date became a crucial article of diet that offered instant sustenance and nutrition. This resilience of date palms in adverse conditions brought about the symbolism associated with date palms.

Dates had also traditionally been of greater significance to Arabs than mere sustenance. Dates had social and cultural values in Arab societies even prior to the advent of the Islamic faith. Dates were used as a means of exchange, in the tradition of hospitality, and in joyful events. Dates' prominence was retained and amplified in the Islamic faith with references to them in the Quran and prophetic Sunnah, thereby giving them not only economic value as a crop but also religio-moral worth as a "religious food".

A distinct religious significance has become associated with dates in the Islamic civilization. The Qur'an mentions the date palm several times, stressing the significance of the date palm as a sign of the blessings of God and as a source of sustenance to mankind. Perhaps the most commonly cited instances of the significance of the date palm would be the verse in which the mother of Maryam (Mary) has been asked to eat the ripe dates when she gives birth to Maryam (Mary) because she would not give birth until she ate the dates (Qur'an 19:25). Hadiths mention the ample usage of the date palm by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in terms of consuming them or using them in acts of fasting, medical purposes, and acting as a means of *riya* [showing off].

Most of these traditional views are supported by modern nutritional studies. Dates contain high levels of simple sugars, which act as an effective source for the rapid release of energy, hence are ideal to be consumed after fasting or strenuous activities. The high fiber components in dates make them ideal for digestion purposes, in addition to other nutrient minerals such as potassium, which are required for the regulation of the cardiovascular system. The antioxidant properties in dates can effectively neutralize free radicals in the body, suggesting their ability to provide a protective measure against diseases. The classification of dates as functional foods adds to their recognition in nutritional sciences.

Today, lifestyle diseases such as metabolic syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, obese, and cardiovascular disease, among others, are on the rise in modern societies. This has stirred a revival in interest in natural diets, where foods in their raw or natural forms are preferred to their processed foods counterparts. Dates, a nutritious fruit that contains inherent compounds beneficial for cardiovascular and

gastrointestinal health, offer an excellent option for revival in nutritional models in modern society based on healthier plant-based foods and antioxidants.

The importance of dates in Islam adds an extra dimension to the significance of dates. The moderation of food and the promotion of wholesome (ṭayyib) food are highly encouraged in Islam. The prophetic medical tradition (ṭibb al-nabawī) recognizes dates as foods that sustain and protect the body. The Ajwa dates gained popularity due to the importance attributed to them in the literature of prophetic Hadiths regarding their protective and medical value. Even though there is recognition of the spiritual value of such prophetic and traditional knowledge in Islam, there has been an attempt to investigate the unique biochemical properties of Ajwa dates. Despite the historic and ongoing cultural, religious, and dietary significance of dates, the linkage between the prophetic instructions and scientific findings has yet to be investigated. A large number of studies on dates are conducted with a biomedical approach in mind, while research involving the religious values of dates is carried out without referencing the scientific literature on the subject. This study shall attempt to make up for this deficit as it performs a critical discussion of both the religious and the biomedical aspects of dates.

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. to examine the nutritional composition of dates and their physiological effects on digestive and cardiovascular health;
2. to analyze Qur'anic and Prophetic references to dates and their relevance within Islamic dietary practices;
3. to evaluate contemporary scientific literature that supports or parallels traditional Islamic teachings; and
4. to highlight the role of dates as functional foods that align with modern preventive health models.

The contents of this introductory section form the basis on which the following sections of this document will grow. Through the integrative approach to the discipline of science and the principles of Islamic tradition, the research findings demonstrate how Dates (fruits of the Date Palm tree) serve valuable contributions across the various dimensions of human experience (economic, nutritional, social/cultural, spiritual). With the increasing rates of diet-related disease in our current time, returning to the use of these traditional, nutrient-rich foods as part of one's dietary intake is an effective means of supporting a healthy lifestyle that is congruent with both ancient knowledge and modern science.

NUTRITIONAL COMPOSITION OF DATES

The health-promoting properties of dates are rooted in their rich and diverse nutritional profile. Dates contain mainly Simple Carbohydrates (Like Glucose and Fructose) and thus contain instant energy with a very fast absorption rate compared to Regular Sugars. In addition to Simple Sugars, Dates include Fiber, B-Vitamins, Vitamins A-D, Antioxidants and Minerals. Thus, due to the unique combination of all these nutrients, the traditional use of Dates after fasting, illness or exercise to replenish energy is clear.

Dates are an excellent source of many nutrient Micronutrients (Potassium, Magnesium and Calcium). Potassium, found in large amounts, is very important in maintaining a normal heartbeat, controlling fluid balance and assisting the way the body coordinates nerve and muscle function. Magnesium helps the body perform the vast majority of the functions of various enzymes and helps the body relax its muscles. Calcium is a major mineral for the health of bones and blood vessels. Iron is a Minor Mineral That Aids with Making Haemoglobin and moving oxygen within the body. Dates contain low amounts of B-complex vitamins, which support the metabolism and health of the nervous system.

In addition to being an excellent source of energy for endurance exercise, dates also contain a number of bioactive compounds, including polyphenols, flavonoids, and carotenoids. These compounds have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, helping to protect the body from the damaging effects of free radicals. Because of these bioactive compounds, dates fall under the classification of functional foods—foods that offer additional health benefits in addition to nutrition and serve a role in preventing some diseases.

Role of Dates in Digestive Comfort

Fruits contain fibres, including two kinds of fibre that support the process of digestion: Soluble and Insoluble. These two kinds of fibre are different yet synergistic in their function in your G.I. system, as regards their size and how they work. On the other hand, Insoluble fibre expands the size of stools for easier passage through the intestines, hence improving constipation and decreasing the length of time food stays within the intestines; this is crucial for people who consume a low fibre diet.

The second form of fibre in Dates is Soluble fibre. Soluble fibre absorbs liquid, producing gel-like material in the intestines; this decreases how quickly food item(s) is/are digested and is absorbed inside the intestines, increases how much nutrients are absorbed and creates a sense of satiety. Further, Soluble fibre plays a role in managing one's blood sugar levels by reducing the amount of sugar entering the bloodstream. Therefore, consuming Dates would be beneficial to those who need to manage their overall metabolic health but should still consume Dates in moderation.

In addition to being a source of fiber, Dates help to promote Comfort of Digestion through the healthy growth and development of the Gut Microbiome. Dates contain prebiotic fibre which serves as food for the Good Bacteria living in the intestines. The Good Bacteria, through their many functions, play a vital role not just in digestion but also in controlling inflammation, regulating Immunity and maintaining balance in All Metabolic Processes. Through the promotion of Good Bacteria, the regular consumption of Dates can reduce fulminant Gastrointestinal Inflammation and Improve Digestive Resilience.

Through centuries of Traditional Medicine System, many Ancient Cultures have referred to Date and the beneficial effect of Digestion with Dates. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) often ate Dates and recommended them as nutritious and sustaining. In an Arabic version of a well-known Hadith, It is said, "A household with Dates will Never Experience Starvation." This speaks volumes about the Nutritional Value and Ease of Digestion, and Sustaining Health over long periods

that Date provide, while also mirroring Modern Nutritional Guidelines that especially encourage Whole/Fiber-Rich Foods for Improving Digestive Health.

Qur'anic and Prophetic Perspectives on Dates

The Qur'an contains numerous passages referencing dates, date palms, and related themes (i.e., food, comfort, and God's provision). Perhaps one of the most quoted verses is an account of Maryam (Arabic for "Mary") telling her to eat fresh dates when she gave birth: *"And shake towards you the trunk of the date palm; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates"* (Qur'an 19:25). Classical Qur'anic commentators (mufasssirun) have explained this verse as a reflection of God's care for Mary, and of God's wisdom in that He provided her dates to help her endure difficult physical labor and regain energy.

Examining this Qur'anic guidance through contemporary scientific means corroborates the exegeses by classical scholars regarding this verse of the Qur'an. Dates are a rich source of easily digestible carbohydrates; the full collection of minerals found in dates provides dehydration resistance; and the compounds found in dates have muscle contraction benefits and aid in restoring energy levels. The link between Qur'anic dietary recommendations and the corresponding physiological benefits of dates during labour and recovery serves to highlight the extraordinary insight embodied in Qur'anic references to health and food.

Islamic hadith literature demonstrates the importance of the consumption of dates in daily life and for maintaining good health. In the hadith literature, records show that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) has a habit of breaking his fast with dates and water. *"The Messenger of Allah used to break his fast with fresh dates before praying."* (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī)

From a nutritional perspective, this practice is scientifically sound:

- fasting reduces blood glucose levels
- dates provide rapid glucose replenishment
- potassium and magnesium support neuromuscular function
- fiber prevents digestive shock

Prophetic guidance thus aligns with modern dietary recommendations for post-fasting nutrition.

Prophetic medicine literature (ṭibb al-nabawī) highlights dates not only as foods but as sources of healing. The narration concerning Ajwa dates states: *"Whoever eats seven Ajwa dates in the morning will not be harmed by poison or witchcraft on that day."* (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī)

While scholars emphasize the spiritual nature of this protection, contemporary research suggests Ajwa dates possess a higher concentration of antioxidants, phenolics, and anti-inflammatory compounds compared to other varieties.

Thus, the spiritual and medicinal dimensions complement rather than contradict each other.

The modern understanding of nutrition supports this practice as being effective in returning the body's blood glucose level to normal and re-hydrating it after prolonged fasting. In addition, the hadith literature advises moderation and

simplicity when it comes to eating and will serve as a reminder of the principles that health advisory agencies are presently emphasizing.

Role of Dates in Cardiovascular Health

The potassium found in dates is the primary means by which dates support cardiovascular health, although there are other physiologic mechanisms (e.g., nitrate, magnesium, calcium, and flavonoids) that also contribute to the cardiovascular protective qualities of dates. Potassium is essential for the regulation of blood pressure, maintenance of normal electrical rhythms, and the offset of sodium's effects from overconsumption. A higher intake of potassium is correlated with lower occurrences of hypertension, coronary artery disease, and stroke compared to a lower intake of potassium.

Oxidative stress on the blood vessels is one of the leading causes of atherosclerosis and cardiovascular disease; therefore, the antioxidants found in dates are also beneficial for cardiovascular health. The antioxidant compounds include polyphenols, flavonoids, and coumarins, which function to neutralize free radicals, reduce inflammation, and improve vascular elasticity.

Dietary fiber also contributes to the heart-healthy qualities of dates by binding to and removing cholesterol from the intestines before entering the bloodstream. Soluble fiber decreases the amount of LDL cholesterol, also known as bad cholesterol. In conclusion, the minerals, antioxidants, and dietary fiber all work together to provide the cardiovascular system with exceptional protection.

Ajwa Dates and Therapeutic Significance

Among all types of dates, Ajwa dates have a unique and special meaning in both Islamic beliefs and clinical health studies. Ajwa dates come from Madinah, and many hadiths about Ajwa dates describe how they protect and cure people. According to one hadith, people who eat Ajwa dates every morning will be protected from all harm, both spiritually and physically, from the moment they wake up. While traditional scholars were mainly concerned with the spiritual aspect of this hadith, today there is an increasing amount of scientific research being done to see if there are physiological reasons why Ajwa dates provide this protection.

Studies have shown that Ajwa dates contain high amounts of antioxidants and other beneficial nutraceuticals relative to a number of other types of dates. These compounds can help decrease inflammation, improve blood flow, and increase resistance to oxidative stressors. Though more trials must be conducted to determine whether Ajwan dates have cardioprotective or therapeutic properties, existing data indicates that Ajwan dates may provide a greater cardioprotective and therapeutic benefit than non-Ajwan varieties of dates.

Dates as a Functional Food: Moderation and Balance

According to the current scientific definition of functional foods, functional foods are defined as food products that provide additional health-promoting attributes outside basic nutrition. Examples of functional foods include dates because they have been shown to have an impact on digestion, heart health, and maintaining

a healthy balanced metabolism. Given that dates are naturally occurring foods, they also provide an excellent means of promoting the prevention of chronic disease through a nutritional approach.

Although dates offer many health benefits, they are calorically dense foods that are naturally high in sugar, so moderation must be recognised by individuals who consume them. Muslim dietary laws advocate moderation, balance, and awareness of what we eat and how much, which parallels the guidelines of modern nutrition. When consumed in moderation, dates can easily fit into the daily routine of most people, thereby supporting optimal health and wellness

CONCLUSION

Dates (*Phoenix dactylifera*) are no less than a spectacular example of a food that acted as a bridge between the knowledge of old and the knowledge of the modern era. They have, as a food product, played a crucial role as a means of subsistence in the desert. The dates also acquired a special place under the teachings of the Islamic faith as a representation of God's grace, comfort, and remedy.

The following traditional uses have been scientifically confirmed in recent years:

- The high fiber content serves a functional role in maintaining gastrointestinal functions, providing regularity in defecation, and satisfying the diet of the gut microbiota.
- The mineral composition, especially potassium and magnesium, plays a crucial role in maintaining heart regularity and blood pressure.
- The antioxidants in dates can combat oxidation, inflammation, and possibly diseases caused by chronic conditions associated with increased levels of these compounds in the body.

Ajwa dates, renowned in hadith for their protective properties, have particularly drawn scientific attentions because of their relative richness in antioxidants. Although their meanings in spirituality are most important, some preliminary work has indicated biochemical reasons for their alleged properties.

Both the theological and nutritional angles come together to make dates functional foods that have the potential to improve the comfort of digestion, the health of the cardiovascular system, and the arena of preventative medicine. Moderation in the diet of dates will lead to a holistic nutritional approach which aligns with the ethics of Islam and contemporary nutritional recommendations.

In today's world, with lifestyle diseases on the increase, this blending of traditional eating habits with scientific knowledge presents a practical approach to ensuring lasting health. Dates, for instance, represent this approach in that they have their bases in tradition but allow for scientific input in enhancing physical, spiritual, and cultural lives.

In this paper, the integration of Faith-Based knowledge and scientific evidence has demonstrated that dates offer more than just a symbolic or traditional food. They are important, functional elements of a Healthy Diet. In our modern society, where many diseases result from unhealthy lifestyles and processed foods, the continuing

use of dates highlights the importance of holistic Health, moderation and general overall Well-Being.

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