

strengthens the nerves, and magnesium, which is very important for the kidneys. A person can meet their magnesium requirement by eating just 2-3 grains of date a day.

The vitamin B1 in dates facilitates the health of the nervous system, assists the transformation of the carbohydrates in the body into energy & the use of protein and fats to meet the body's needs. Vitamin B2 assists in the burning of protein, carbohydrates and fats for the provision of bodily energy and cell renewal.

The body's vitamin A requirement rises during pregnancy. Thanks to the vitamin A it contains, the date improves vision & bodily resistance & strengthens the teeth & bones. Dates are also rich in beta-carotene which helps prevent cancer by controlling molecules that attack the cells.

In addition, unlike dates, other fruits are generally lacking in protein. Thanks to this feature, dates enable the body to protect itself against illness & infection, to renew cells & ensure fluid balance. Meat is also a useful foodstuff but maybe not as much as the date, which is a fresh fruit, especially at such a time. Indeed, excessive consumption of meat during pregnancy can actually lead to toxicity in the body. It is better for pregnant women to choose fruit & vegetables, which are light & easily digested.

All these facts about dates reveal Allah's infinite knowledge & compassion for humans. The benefits of the date, especially during pregnancy & recently established by modern medical science, were indicated in the Quran many years ago.

The date fruit is an essential part of Ramadan & is historically linked to the Islamic culture. Muslims around the world follow the Sunnah of Muhammad (p) by breaking their fast with a date. It's a centuries old tradition honoured by millions to take a bite of date at sundown. Today, it is often used to end the daily fast during Ramadan.

One of the many physical benefits of breaking the fast with dates is that our body benefits from the date's high level of natural sugars. Sugars travel most quickly to the liver, where they are converted into energy more quickly than any other nutrient. Muslims have an immediate need for this energy to consume the iftar meal. When a person eats, the body uses energy to digest the food. Eating large quantities of food immediately after fasting is

not healthy for the body, which is in a weakened condition. Eating a date first helps the body start its digestive process & gives it the energy to deal with the secondary, more complex foods, eaten during iftar.

Prophet Muhammad (p) said, "If anyone of you is fasting, then break your fast with dates. If you do not have dates, then with water. Verily water is a purifier." Before offering Maghrib prayers, the Prophet (p) broke his fast by eating dates. If ripe dates were not available, he substituted them with some dried grapes. When they too were not available, he had a few sips of water.

Later, science proved that dates are an essential part of a healthy diet, as they contain sugar, fat & proteins as well as important vitamins. They are also rich in natural fibres. Modern medicine has shown that dates are effective in preventing abdominal cancer. They surpass other fruits in the sheer variety of their constituents that include oil, calcium, sulphur, iron, potassium, phosphorous, manganese, copper & magnesium.

In other words, one date satisfies the minimum requirements of a balanced & healthy diet. When the level of trace elements falls in the body, the health of blood vessels is affected, leading to an increased heart rate & a consequent inability to perform its functions with normal efficiency.

As dates are also rich in calcium, they help in strengthening the bones. When the calcium content in the body decreases, children are affected with rickets & the bones of adults become brittle & weak. Dates are also important in keeping up the health of eyes. It is quite effective in guarding against night-blindness. Dates are nature's answer to our sweet tooth. They provide food energy in the form of invert sugars, important for persons who cannot tolerate sucrose.

We have learnt that dates are necessary for women in childbirth. It's also necessary for men & the birthing of a child. A **not-well-kept** secret in Islamic folk medicine is the aphrodisiac potency of the date. Grooms are advised to eat many dates (one pound) on the day of their wedding to ensure that the wedding night goes, shall we say, smoothly.

There's an Arab proverb: "A good housewife may furnish her husband every day for a month with a dish of dates differently prepared." This would work well beyond the wedding night. Make a date shake with vanilla icecream & milk & cinnamon...OMG.

Global hunger, fasting hunger, a hunger for each other...give or reach for a date.



The Prophet (p) likened a good Muslim to the date palm, saying, "Among trees, there is a tree like a Muslim. Its leaves do **not** fall."

The date tree is unique – a tall & beautiful palm with evergreen feathery leaves radiating like sun rays from the top of its single stem. It is both impressively bountiful & versatile. The tree flourishes in arid areas where other trees will not survive. The word

Date Palm is mentioned in the Quran 20 times. One of the most striking is in Surah

Maryam: "The pains of labour drove her to the trunk of a date-palm. Maryam said, 'O if only I had died before this time & was something discarded & forgotten!' A voice called out to her from under her, 'Do not grieve! Your Lord has placed a small stream at your feet. Shake the trunk of the palm towards you & fresh, ripe dates will drop down onto you. Eat & drink & delight your eyes...' (19:23-26) The date is an excellent

choice of food for pregnant women & for those who have just given birth. This is a widely accepted scientific fact. Maryam was inspired to understand this point, in order to make her own labour easier. The date has one of the highest sugar levels, 60-65%, of all fruits. Doctors recommend that pregnant women be given foods containing fruit sugar on the day they give birth. The aim behind this is to energise & revitalise the mother's weakened body & at the same time to stimulate the milk hormones & increase the levels of mother's milk essential to the newborn baby. Give the gift of dates to a new mother... you'll be following God Who presented Maryam with that which is BEST.

The date is honoured as one of the blessings of Paradise in a vivid kaleidoscope of Divine words. (55:68-69) **In them will be fruits & dates & pomegranates. Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?** When this fruit is examined, it can be seen to have many important features. One of the oldest known species of plant, the date is today a food of preference not only for its delicious taste but also for its nutritious properties. The date palm might be a hardy tree but it needs a lot of care if it is to deliver as expected. The first rule of thumb is to keep it well watered & in a sunny spot. As the Arabs say: A date palm is at its happiest when its feet is in water & its head in heaven's fire.

There are more than 300 types of dates in Arabia with each having its own different taste & texture. *Ajwa is a dark & sweet date from Medina. It was the Prophet's favourite.* The *khalasa* date has a complex taste which can only be appreciated by keeping the date in your mouth & letting it slowly release its magic of "flavours of honey, sweet potatoes, sugarcane & caramel," soon to be joined by "a more subtle, slightly nutty flavour infused with a rich note of taffy."

New benefits imparted by the date are being discovered & has come to be used as a medicine as well as a food. Loss of blood during birth leads to a fall in body sugar levels. Dates are important from the point of view of enabling sugar to enter the body & prevent blood pressure from dropping. Their high calorific value strengthens people weakened by illness or suffering from extreme fatigue.

These facts reveal the wisdom why Allah recommended Maryam to eat dates, designed to energize & invigorate the woman & ensure the emergence of milk, the only food for a baby. The date contains more than ten elements of vital importance if the body is to remain healthy. Modern-day scientists state that humans can actually live for years on nothing more than dates & water. V. Dowson, a recognized expert in this field, says that one date & a glass of milk are enough to meet all of a person's daily nutritional requirements.

The substance oxytocin, which is present in the date, is used in modern medicine to facilitate birth. Oxytocin means "rapid birth." Oxytocin is actually a hormone released by the pituitary gland which stimulates contractions of the womb during childbirth. All the pre-birth preparations in the body take place thanks to this hormone. The effects of the hormone can be seen in the muscles that form the mother's womb and in cells in the muscular structure that enables the secretion of mother's milk. The effective contraction of the womb is essential if birth is to take place. Oxytocin enables the muscles that comprise the womb to contract in a very powerful manner. Moreover, oxytocin also initiates the secretion of mother's milk. This feature of the date alone – the way it contains oxytocin is important evidence that the Quran is the revelation of Allah. The medical identification of the benefits of the date only became possible in recent times. Yet it was set out fourteen centuries ago in the Quran that Allah revealed to Maryam that she should eat dates.

Dates also contain a form of sugar that gives the body high levels of mobility & heat energy & which can be easily broken down in the body. Furthermore, this sugar is not glucose, which rapidly raises the level of blood sugar but the fruit sugar fructose. A rapid rise in blood sugar levels in diabetics in particular has a damaging effect on a great many organs & systems, especially the eyes, kidneys, heart and circulatory system and nervous system. High blood sugar is one of the main causes of disorders as serious as loss of sight, heart attacks and kidney insufficiency.

Dates contain many vitamins & minerals. They are very rich in fibre, fat & proteins. They also contain sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium, iron, sulphur, phosphorus and chlorine, as well as vitamins A, beta-carotene, B1, B2, B3 and B6. Some of the benefits of the vitamins and minerals in dates to the normal human body and especially during pregnancy can be summarised as follows:

The nutritional value of dates stems from the appropriate mineral balance within them. The date is exceedingly rich in folic acid, a B vitamin of great importance to pregnant women. Folic acid (B9) is a vitamin which serves crucial functions in the construction of new blood cells & of amino acids, the body's building

blocks, and in cell renewal. The need for folic acid rises significantly during pregnancy & the daily requirement doubles. When folic acid levels are insufficient, red blood cells that are larger than normal but with lower functionality emerge, along with the symptoms of anaemia, appear. Folic acid plays a particularly important role in cell division and in the formation of the genetic structure of the cell and is the only substance daily requirements of which double during pregnancy.

On the other hand, the long-term nausea & physical reactions that appear during pregnancy do so because of a lack of potassium. Levels therefore need to be reinforced. In the same way that the large quantities of potassium in dates are of great importance in this regard, they are also important in regulating the water balance in the body. Moreover, by helping oxygen to reach the brain potassium enables one to think clearly. In addition, it provides the appropriate alkaloidal features for body fluids and stimulates the kidneys to expel toxic bodily wastes. It helps bring down high blood pressure and the formation of healthy skin.

The iron contained in dates controls the synthesis of haemoglobin in the red blood cells and ensures an appropriate level of red cells in the blood. This is of vital importance in preventing anaemia during pregnancy and the development of the baby. Red blood cells play a role in keeping cells alive by carrying oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood. Due to dates' high iron levels, a human being can meet their iron requirements by eating just 15 dates a day & will thus be protected from disorders arising from iron deficiency.

The calcium & phosphate in dates are important elements for skeletal growth & balancing the body's bone structure. The high levels of phosphorus & calcium in dates protect the body against bone weakness & help reduce such disorders.

Scientists also emphasise the way in which dates reduce stress & tension. Research by Berkeley University experts has revealed that dates contain high levels of vitamin B6, which

If a person has some dates in his house then he is **not** poor.

Prophet Muhammad (p)

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