

The Benefits and Harms of Foods Mentioned in the Quran through a Scientific Perspective

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Abstract

Within the Holy Book of Islam, the Quran, there is mention of many foods in multiple contexts. These foods are described as prohibited or permissible as well as either beneficial or harmful to humans. Data from scientific research has also found these foods to be harmful and beneficial to humans in support of the claims found within the Quran. Properties contained within the substances either lead to a betterment or an adverse effect on human health. Many of these foods affect the human body in a multitude of ways and can cure or cause various ailments.

The Benefits and Harms of Foods Mentioned in the Quran through a Scientific Perspective

Several foods in the Quran are mentioned as beneficial such as honey, olive oil, dates, ginger, and figs; others, such as alcohol and pork, are said to be harmful (Halal and Haram Foods in Quran, n.d.). Many of the claims made by the Quran have been substantiated in modern science. The general public should be educated about the beneficial foods mentioned in the Quran and encouraged to eat them as both the Quran as well as scientific evidence support their consumption. In contrast, foods mentioned in the Quran and supported by scientific research as having adverse effects on the body should be avoided. Each of these foods have unique benefits and harms to the human body.

Honey

Honey is defined as the nectar collected from flowers by bees. This nectar is taken to the bees' home: the hive. The nectar is left to sit in honeycombs within the hive and slowly transforms into honey through evaporation assisted by the fanning of the bees' wings (How Honey Is Made, 2019). The honey made from bees is directly referenced in the Quran where it states, "there emerges from their bellies, varying in colors, in which there is healing for people" (Ch 16: 69). In the Quran, honey is said to cure the body. Scientific literature depicts honey as an excellent source of general and medicinal uses. Honey can also be consumed with little to no side effects and can delay aging for those who are older. In addition, honey has many natural cures for several common afflictions (Kumar, Bhowmik, Ciranjib, Biswajit, & Chandira, 2010). Scientific research supports the claim that honey can heal the human body internally and externally. According to Kumar, Bhowmik, Ciranjib, Biswajit & Chandira (2010), its internal

benefits include curing colds, whether it be common or severe. It can also aid the immune and digestive system. Honey even goes as far as soothing toothaches as well. Externally, it helps decrease the effects of acne, skin burns, and skin infections. Uses of honey to reap these benefits are mentioned according to each ailment such as:

- Indigestion: Cinnamon powder sprinkled on tablespoons of honey before a meal can help the digestion of a heavy meal and decreases gastric acidity.
- Colds: One tablespoon of lukewarm honey and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of cinnamon powder taken once daily for 3 days can cure colds, chronic coughs, and clear sinuses.
- Toothaches: A mixture of 1 teaspoon of cinnamon powder and 5 teaspoons of honey can be applied upon an aching tooth. This process can be repeated 3 times a day until the aching subsides.
- Acne: Mixing three tablespoons of honey and 1 teaspoon of cinnamon powder will help decrease acne. Repeating the application of this paste on the acne at night and washing it with water the next morning should remove the acne from its roots.
- Skin infections: Applying cinnamon and honey helps cure several types of skin infections. Two examples of these skin infections are eczema and ringworm. Eczema is an infection resulting from old, broken, skin which typically occurs in people of older age. Ringworm is an infection that comes from the fungi that lives in the dead tissue of skin.

Olive Oil

Olive oil contains natural properties that benefit human health (El & Karakaya, 2009). Olive oil is mentioned in the Quran in chapter 24 verse 35, chapter 6 verse 141, and chapter 23 verse 20 as a food source for people's enjoyment (Webadmin, 2018). Olive oil comes from crushing olives and stirring the resulting paste to remove the oil droplets. The paste is then spun in a centrifuge to extract the water. When the water is removed the oil is the only remaining substance (All About Olive Oil, n.d.) According to El & Karakaya (2009), olive oil has certain properties that prove beneficial to treat ailments such as:

- Hypertension: Hypertension is when a person's blood pressure is too high which can be caused by increased stress (Lexico, n.d.). Olive oil helps decrease blood pressure which decreases the chance of having hypertension.
- Cardiovascular diseases: Olive oil lowers the levels of cholesterol in the blood and prevents fatty patches from forming. This helps decrease the chance of being affected by heart disease.
- Type 2 Diabetes: Type 2 diabetes is a condition in which the body cannot break down glucose (sugar) because it cannot produce insulin. Without insulin, increased levels of glucose in the blood can cause damage to the eyes, nerves, and kidneys (Lexico, 2016). Diabetes can also double the chance of a heart attack or stroke. Olive oil helps decrease the chance of getting diabetes and the risks associated with it.
- Hyperlipidemia: This disease is characterized by an excess amount of fats in blood which can increase the chances of cardiovascular disease and strokes (Overview of Hyperlipidemia (High Blood Cholesterol), n.d.). Olive oil decreases the chances of having hyperlipidemia and the risks that are associated with it.

Alcohol

Alcohol is a substance that is proven by scientific literature to be detrimental to a person's health and this is reflected in the Quran as well. In Chapter 5 verse 90, it is stated that intoxicants like alcohol are forbidden to consume. This prohibition is in place in order to protect a person's body from its dangerous effects. In chapter 2 verse 219, alcohol is mentioned to have some benefits but its harm greatly outweighs the benefits. Alcohol affects the mind, liver, pancreas, central nervous system, cardiovascular health, and bones (Moghadam & Moradi, 2011). Alcohol comes from the fermentation of yeast, sugars, and starches. Alcohol usually is derived from fermented grapes, wheat, and barley. This fermentation transforms carbohydrates into carbon dioxide and ethyl alcohol ("How is Alcohol Made", n.d.). According to Moghadam & Moradi (2011), some of the harms of alcohol to bodily organs and functions are:

- **Liver:** Through excessive alcohol consumption, the liver becomes inflamed and scarred. Furthermore, there is an increased risk of having liver disease and liver cancer.
- **Pancreas:** Alcohol causes the pancreas to create harmful substances which can then lead to pancreatitis, or inflammation of the pancreas, hindering digestion.
- **Central nervous system:** Alcohol can cause impaired coordination, learning issues, as well as hearing problems. Alcohol can also directly harm the mind such as by causing sleep differences, changes in mood and personality, depression, and anxiety. Too much alcohol can also decrease the effectiveness of brain cell growth.
- **Cardiovascular health:** If the use of alcohol is abused, it can cause increased blood pressure, irregular heart beat, blood clots, and strokes.

- Bones: Alcohol can decrease the amount of calcium present in the body which maintains bone health. A lack of calcium can lead to osteoporosis and an increased chance of bone fractures. An increased chance of bone fracture can cause great pain and disabilities.

Dates

In the Quran, it is written, “and shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates” (Chapter 19, verse 25). Dates come from date palms, which commonly grow in dry and hot climates. They are known in the scientific world to have countless benefits. Dates contain carbohydrates which supply the body with energy. They also contain fiber, protein, and many vitamins such as vitamin C, vitamin B, thiamine, B riboflavin, nicotinic acid, and vitamin A (Jain, n.d.). The recent discoveries of the properties of dates and the components found within them has led to many studies which uncovered numerous benefits. Some of these benefits, as listed in *Health Benefits of Date Palm: Phytochemicals and Their Functions* by Jain (n.d.), are:

- Oral and epithelial health: The moderate amount of vitamin A contained within dates helps sharpen vision as well as maintain healthy mucus membranes and skin. This helps prevent lung cancer and oral cavities.
- Heart rate and blood pressure: Dates are a great source of potassium. This potassium helps regulate blood pressure and blood flow. This can therefore decrease the chances of strokes or heart diseases.
- Digestion: Dates also aid the digestive system which can help prevent diarrhea.

- Bones and blood: The calcium present in dates helps strengthen the bones and the manganese helps with the process of bone growth. Dates also contain copper, a required substance for producing red blood cells.

Ginger

Ginger is another food mentioned in the Quran. This mention is found in chapter 76, verse 16. In Arabic, ginger is ”زنجبيل”, or zinjabeel. In the Quran, this is described as the flavor of drinks in paradise. Ginger is also mentioned as something of great health benefit (Thanking Allah for Ginger “Zanjabeel”, n.d.). Ginger is the rhizome root of a plant. This type of root grows horizontally within the ground. Horizontal stems of the plant connect the ginger plant’s many roots. Ginger is grown in Asia and other tropical areas and is used as a spice, food, or for medicinal purposes. Ginger has been known as a medicine for many years providing relief from nausea, vomiting, arthritis and many more afflictions (White, 2007). According to *Ginger: An Overview* (White, 2007), the various benefits of ginger are:

- Motion Sickness: Ginger helps with motion sickness. One example of this is reflected in a study on naval cadets dealing with sea sickness. Ginger was found to decrease the effects of motion sickness on them.
- Nausea and vomiting: Ginger helps decrease the effects of nausea, especially for those who are pregnant. Ginger also has the same benefits as vitamin B6 which is known to be effective for relieving pregnancy-induced nausea and vomiting.
- Digestion: Ginger helps the process of digestion and improves appetite.

- Blood pressure: Ginger helps decrease blood pressure, reducing the chances for the development of hypertension. Ginger improves blood circulation as well.

Figs

Of the beneficial foods in the Quran, figs are no exception. Figs are mentioned in the Quran in chapter 95, verse 1. Figs have no fat and contain a low amount of calories. Figs contain fiber, helping to relieve constipation. This fiber also helps decrease cholesterol and maintains healthy blood sugar levels. Including figs in a diet can have profound benefits as they contain many antioxidants, decreasing the chances of cell damage to the body (McDermott, 2016). According to McDermott (2016), the benefits of figs include aiding in the treatment of ailments such as:

- Diabetes and cancer: The leaves which come from the fig shrub contain properties that help decrease the symptoms of cancer. Scientists found that ficusin, fig leaf extract, helps increase insulin sensitivity (meaning that the human body can use glucose more effectively) and decrease blood sugar (Natural ways to improve insulin sensitivity, n.d.)
- Poor skin health: Figs can also be used to cure several skin issues. Figs can help remove warts, providing a natural medicine with no side effects. Figs can also be used as a face mask because of their richness in antioxidants. To do this, the figs must be mashed together and a tablespoon of yogurt added to them. This paste is then applied to the face for ten to fifteen minutes.
- Poor hair health: Figs are commonly used in shampoos. They are believed to contain properties that strengthen and moisturize hair as well as improve hair growth.

Pork

In the Quran, pork, the meat of domestic pigs, is forbidden according to chapter 16, verse 115. Pork is forbidden because of the harms it has on the human body. Pork is considered impure and should be avoided because of the tendency of pigs to take part in certain actions that are impure such as rolling in mud containing their own excrement. This can cause adverse effects on the meat such as attracting parasites like trichinellosis. Pork also contains fats, bacteria, and toxins that can harm the body. This can increase the chances of heart disease, and bladder cancer (Thompson, n.d.). According to Denise Minger in *4 Hidden Danger of Pork* (2017) and Caroline Thompson in *The Disadvantages of Pork* (n.d.) the harms of pork include:

- Heart disease: The saturated fats contained in pork can greatly increase cholesterol levels. This saturated fat can increase chances of becoming obese which has adverse effects on the heart and other organs.
- Bladder cancer: Eating pork can increase the chances of getting bladder cancer especially if heated too much. This especially applies to well-done and burnt pork.
- Hepatitis E: Pork liver is a dangerous transmitter of hepatitis E. This causes acute pain and other issues such as, fever, fatigue, jaundice, vomiting, joint pain, and stomach pain. It can also cause an enlarged liver and in the worst case, death.
- Liver cancer: Certain compounds within pork prove as risks to the liver. One of these compounds are known as nitrosamines which harm the liver and other organs. These compounds are found in pâté, bacon, sausage, ham and other cured meats.

- Yersinia: Eating pork invites a disease known as yersiniosis. This infection causes 35 deaths and 117,000 cases of food poisoning in the US. Yersinia's short-term effects include fever, pain, and bloody diarrhea. The long-term effects are chronic joint problems such as rheumatoid arthritis. Rheumatoid arthritis is the inflammation in the joints causing immobility, pain, and deformity (Lexico, n.d.).

Conclusion

Even though many people may have not been exposed to the Quran, the beneficial foods and harmful foods in it can be applicable to their lifestyle. Scientific findings have determined the effects of these consumables on the human body, whether beneficial or detrimental, supporting what the Quran says about these foods. The foods that prove to be beneficial to human health should be implemented into a diet, while those that are harmful should be consumed less or avoided entirely.

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