14 Dates: The Fruit of Paradise
J&M® halal certified meals use only wholesome ingredients and have NO MSG, NO SOY, and NO ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS OR COLORS. Each meal is fully cooked and is conveniently packaged in either 10 oz. (283 g) microwaveable serving dishes or 8 oz. (227 g) travel and camping pouches. Reheat to eat in minutes.

LAMB & LENTIL STEW: Tender lamb joins a medley of tomatoes, lentils, onions, chickpeas, zucchini and red and green sweet peppers. Aromatic herbs and spices invite all to taste and enjoy this truly delicious meal.

LAMB & BARLEY STEW: Tender lamb, combined with barley, eggplant, red and green sweet peppers, zucchini and onions, create a true culinary delight! A scrumptious meal with a variety of textures, it is deliciously seasoned with herbs and spices of the Middle East.

MY KIND OF CHICKEN®: A favorite combination of chunks of light and dark chicken meat with brown rice, peas and carrots in a mild sauce.

CHICKEN MEDITERRANEAN: A hearty chicken meal with the flavors of the Mediterranean region. It has chunks of light and dark chicken meat, tomatoes, potatoes, chickpeas, and black olives in a tangy sauce.

CHICKEN & NOODLES: A winning combination with chunks of light and dark chicken meat, homestyle Kluski noodles, peas and carrots in a lightly seasoned sauce.

CHICKEN & BLACK BEANS: A scruptious meal with chunks of light and dark chicken meat, black & kidney beans, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet peppers and corn. Simple spicing brings out its full flavor!

BEEF STEW: A satisfying and delicious stew! It has chunks of lean beef, with potatoes, sweet peppers, tomatoes, cabbage, zucchini, chickpeas and carrots in a flavorful sauce.

OLD WORLD STEW: Chunks of lean beef, with brown rice, tomatoes, zucchini and pinto beans. The sauce is seasoned with the aromatic flavors of the Middle East.

PASTA WITH GARDEN VEGETABLES: This delicious and robust meal has rotini pasta with peppers, mushrooms, zucchini and tomatoes. It is perfectly flavored with traditional Italian seasonings.

VEGETARIAN STEW: A meal fit for vegetarian and hearty eater alike! With macaroni, vegetables, potatoes, barley, lentils, peanuts and seasonings, this meal has great taste and a variety of textures.

CHEESETORTELLINI: Cheese-filled tortellini are simply delicious in a well-seasoned tomato sauce, with the added protein and texture of pinto beans.

FLORENTINE LASAGNA: A meal influenced by the tastes of Florence. Savor the combination of small lasagna noodles in a tomato sauce with Ricotta and Parmesan cheeses, spinach and pinto bean pieces which add texture and protein.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Editor’s Note</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>From the Publisher’s Desk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>FOOD TRENDS</td>
<td>Keeping up with the Ketos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>HEALTH &amp; NUTRITION</td>
<td>Prebiotics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>QURANIC &amp; PROPHETIC FOODS</td>
<td>Dates: The Fruit of Paradise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>RECIPES</td>
<td>Poached Fish with Roasted Tomato Sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>Masbhat ad-Darwish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zucchini and Date Brownies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>Savory Carrot, Leek and Sweet Potato Soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>CHEF INSIGHTS</td>
<td>Upcoming Culinary Trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>FEATURES</td>
<td>A Breath of Fresh Air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ready...Set...Ramadan!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td>Halal-Certified Product Locator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, Most Merciful
Editor’s Note

Assalaamu alaikum,

With Ramadan approaching, we wish you Ramadan Mubarak. May your fasting and prayers be accepted, may your supplications be answered, and may it bring peace and security to all.

Ramadan is a time when we divert our attention to more spiritual matters, but that doesn’t mean we should neglect our worldly activities. In “Ready…Set…Ramadan!” we get some pointers on how to make staying in shape less challenging during this blessed month.

In this issue we replace “A Closer Look at Labels” with a new section, “Chef Insights”, featuring insights from Chef Demetrios. This issue kicks off with a look at some “Upcoming Culinary Trends.” Future issues will delve into specific global cuisines attracting foodies here at home.

If winter left you overindulgent like it has me, you might consider the ketogenic diet. “Keeping Up With the Ketos” explores what it is and how to follow it. Be sure to check with your physician before starting any diet.

“Prebiotics” looks into how these elements contribute to a healthy digestive system. There’s a whole microcosm of activity in there!

Dates are the featured Quranic food this issue. “Dates: The Fruit of Paradise” discusses the various types, their health benefits, and of course, their references in the Quran and Hadith.

As Spring brings warmer weather and longer days, air quality may improve, but we can still do better. “A Breath of Fresh Air” looks into the impacts of air pollution and what we can do to improve the quality of the air we breathe.

Finally, be sure to try out the recipes and share your comments with us via email, Facebook, or Twitter.

Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Roger Othman editor
Assalaamu alaikum,

For the entire month of March, we have had an overload of information about Coronavirus COVID-19, and I don’t wish to add to the overload by preaching the importance of hygiene.

I know that you, all of you, are taking special precautions and heeding the stay-at-home orders to stay safe and keep your family, friends, and colleagues safe. We at IFANCA thank you for following the guidelines from federal, state, and local governments and the advice of medical professionals to take care of yourself and your loved ones. We are proud of our community and our Halal Consumer™ Magazine readers.

COVID-19 isn’t the first such disease affecting mankind. Many others, like bubonic plague, smallpox, the Third Plague, Asian flu, HIV, Ebola, Zika, and others have played havoc in the cities, countries, and regions. Some of them vanished, others still exist in one form or another. We are living through this new one, Novel Coronavirus, 2019.

May God give us the wisdom, the patience, and the restraint, to deal with this calamity and to submit to His Will.

Sincerely,

Muhammad Munir Chaudry president

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Keeping up with the Ketos

By Husna T. Ghani
At restaurants, your friends are ordering bunless burgers with a side of avocado smothered in cheese. At the local coffee shop, they are drinking sugarless lattes made with heavy cream. At home, they are eating cheddar and mozzarella omelets. What new eating trend is this? Welcome to the world of ketogenic dieting. What is a ketogenic diet, keto for short? It is a diet that consists of eating high fat, low carb/low sugar foods.

According to The Cleveland Clinic, the average American diet consists of more than 50% carbohydrates. In the body, carbohydrates break down into smaller molecules of glucose (a simple sugar). The body’s cells, in turn, burn the glucose molecules for energy. While the macronutrient percentages may fluctuate, for a healthy person, the ketogenic diet generally follows the following pattern:

- Approximately 75 percent of daily calories from fats
- Approximately 20 percent of daily calories from proteins
- Approximately 5 percent of daily calories from low carbohydrate foods

When you drastically cut out carbohydrates, the body depends upon the burning of fats for energy. And because we all paid attention in chemistry class, you remember that fats break down into fatty acids and ketones in a process called ketosis. It takes most people one to three weeks for the body to enter ketosis, which is the time frame when many people start to see a difference in their weight.

I know what you’re thinking. Why would anyone consider a ketogenic lifestyle? Well, the number one reason is rapid weight loss. Keto diets allow the dieter to feel full longer because fatty food takes longer to digest. Keto diets have found success despite the plethora of diets because, as Americans, we generally love fatty foods. Eating fat to burn fat makes us excited about this diet versus all the other restrictive diets (remember the torturous grapefruit diet?). Dr. Alvia Siddiqi, vice president of population health at Advocate Aurora Health, weighs in on the reasons for keto’s mass appeal. “There are many health benefits to a ketogenic and low carb diet. Several studies have shown that it reduces triglycerides, improves the good cholesterol (HDL), helps with weight management, and reduces visceral fat surrounding the internal organs.”

Because a ketogenic diet exhibits weight loss results faster than most other diets, it may be effective in helping to treat Type-2 diabetes as well as patients who have a body mass index (BMI) in the obese to morbidly obese range (generally a BMI over 40). Aside from rapid weight loss, a ketogenic diet may be beneficial for other reasons. According to the Mayo Clinic, endurance athletes, such as triathletes and marathon runners, can benefit because the energy lasts longer. The National Institutes of Health states that ketogenic diets have been used since the 1920s as a type of treatment for epilepsy. Epilepsy is a metabolic disease. The breakdown of fats to produce ketones alters the metabolism to utilize fats as energy. Research conducted by Dr. Cobb and Dr. Lennox of Harvard Medical School showed that the effects of starvation could be used as a treatment for epilepsy. Because the ketogenic diet mimics “fasting” (lack of sugar), it has been used to treat certain types of epilepsy. Research is still being done on whether or not a keto diet may help with treating patients with other neurological disorders such as Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s diseases.

Some conditions may become worse under a keto diet. Dr. Kameswari Maganti of Northwestern Memorial Hospital states, “Patients with kidney disease have an increased risk of requiring dialysis on the keto diet due to the additional ketones that their renal system has to process.” According to the National Institutes of Health, people with diabetes are at risk of getting ketoacidosis, excess ketones in the bloodstream, which causes the blood to become highly acidic. This is a very dangerous condition and may be fatal.

If there is no preexisting condition and a person is generally healthy, a ketogenic diet sounds great. Who doesn’t love cream and cheese? Is it everything we have hoped and dreamed about? Not exactly. Everything has a cost (welcome to adulthood). There are pros and cons to a keto diet, even for healthy people. Ayesha Fiaz, clinical trial coordinator for the Neurosciences Institute at Alexian Brothers Hospital, has been an avid fan, researcher, and follower of ketogenic dieting for a year. “You need to do your research and talk to your doctor. There are pros and cons. The pros include seeing weight loss results within a short amount of time while feeling energized, many more options for meals than other diets, and the fats keep you satisfied. The cons include not being able to have a “cheat day” because once you are in ketosis, a cheat day could ruin your progress. It is usually not recommended to continue ketogenic dieting long term without breaks, so be sure to consult with your doctor. You miss out on certain vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Also, you need to keep an eye on your cardiovascular health. High amounts of saturated fats from the wrong foods can negatively affect your bad cholesterol (LDL) levels. So make sure to
It takes most people one to three weeks for the body to enter ketosis, which is the time frame when many people start to see a difference in their weight.

eat quality fats such as avocado, nuts, olive oil, coconut products, seeds, etc.”

So what exactly does one eat on a ketogenic diet? Let’s take a look at what can and cannot be consumed on a ketogenic diet:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keto-Friendly</th>
<th>Not Keto-Friendly</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nuts, seeds, avocados</td>
<td>Bread, pasta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full fat milk, cheese, plain Greek yogurt</td>
<td>Cereals, desserts, anything with sugar added</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-starchy and fibrous vegetables, leafy greens,</td>
<td>Starchy vegetables (potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, peas, carrots, beets, squash, pears, turnips)</td>
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<tr>
<td>cruciferous vegetables, low carb berries (blackberries, raspberries, strawberries)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal protein such as meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs</td>
<td>Beans, lentils, most legumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oils, butter, ghee</td>
<td>Sugary drinks and fruit juices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water, sparkling water, unsweetened drinks such as</td>
<td>Fruits (except low carb berries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tea and coffee</td>
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The ketogenic diet emphasizes eating 75% of total calories as fat, which includes quality fats such as avocado, nuts, olive oil, coconut products, seeds, etc.
So, is a ketogenic diet right for you? Maybe. The very first and most important step you must take before starting any diet is to consult with your physician about your total health panel and the ideal healthy weight for you. Do your research. Make sure you understand what you can and cannot eat and keep in mind your weekly schedule. Meal planning in advance is a must. Also, understand that it takes time to get used to a ketogenic diet and any dietary changes can cause initial discomfort such as headaches, tiredness, nausea, constipation, bad breath, and sleep problems. The Cleveland Clinic states that the amount of time a person can be on a ketogenic diet varies. It is advised to take breaks in between stretches of the diet because you need to replenish your body with the nutrients that are missing on the diet. According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), it is not recommended to be on the ketogenic diet for more than 12 month stretches even if you are in optimal health. They caution that one should closely monitor kidney functions while on the diet. There is not enough conclusive data to pinpoint the exact amount of time for a person to remain on a ketogenic diet because individual health situations need to be taken into consideration. It is also easy to get sidetracked into unhealthy ketogenic eating. In fact, U.S. News and World Reports named the ketogenic diet as “one of the worst diets.” This is because most individuals do not follow the diet as recommended by doctors by eating whole and unprocessed foods, monitoring water intake, eating quality fat, quality protein, and quality carbohydrates, keeping micronutrients in check, and following the plan under the care of a licensed healthcare professional. Understand that most dietary changes that are extreme need to be monitored closely and regularly checked by your doctor. Also, make sure you understand the difference between a diet change and a lifestyle change. Happy eating!!

HUSNA T. GHANI has an MSEd and an MBA. She has taught health and science for years. When she’s not working, she reads, writes, sketches, and tries to save the world (or something like that).
Many of us have heard of probiotics and their associated health benefits, but what are prebiotics? Prebiotics are elements contained in certain foods that help feed and nourish the growth or activity of beneficial microorganisms such as bacteria, yeast, and fungi. They are the non-digestible carbohydrate components of foods, such as inulin from chicory root. Prebiotics are often used as ingredients in functional foods, conventional, or modified foods that provide an added benefit beyond basic nutrition.

Prebiotic fibers are not digested, rather they ferment in the colon. This fermentation process feeds beneficial bacteria colonies (including probiotic bacteria). It helps to increase the number of desirable bacteria in our gastrointestinal (GI) systems (also known as the gut), which may help to improve GI health and reduced the risk of disease. (www.ecronicon.com)

Consistently including prebiotics can help boost your overall health because prebiotics contain anti-inflammatory properties and can assist with reducing chronic systemic inflammation in the body, which in turn reduces the risk for heart disease. Additional health benefits include improved calcium absorption and decreased allergy risk.

Prebiotics aren’t hard to find and there’s a good chance that you are already eating them. They are contained in high-fiber foods, including fruit, vegetables, whole grains, onions, garlic, legumes (beans, chickpeas, lentils, and soybeans), nuts (cashews and pistachios), Jerusalem...
artichoke, and chicory root. Many of us consume prebiotics from grains such as breads, cereals, and pastas. Eating a balanced nutrient-dense diet will ensure that you get the prebiotics that you need and help to improve overall gut health. “Lentil soup, hummus, dried fruits, nuts, and seeds provide a source of prebiotics and are popular snack ideas considered staples during Ramadan,” says Registered Dietitian Nutritionist Hiba Hamadeh, MMedSci, RDN, LD.

The body is an ecosystem and needs to remain in balance. Including prebiotics consistently as part of your regular gut health regime can help to restore balance after a bout of diarrhea or a yeast infection and can also ward off harmful bacteria in the gut and improve immune system defense. Consistent consumption of prebiotics can also positively impact your lipid levels by lowering total blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels. Certain prebiotic fibers can increase your feeling of fullness or ‘satiety’ and thus help with healthy weight management.

Prebiotic sources are also available in supplement form, including powders, tablets, and capsules. They are beneficial for those who may not be able to tolerate natural food sources or have limited time to buy and prepare foods. Prebiotic powders can be added to cereals, smoothies, and other beverages. The powders can easily boost your daily intake. A common supplemental prebiotic is the inulin from chicory root. Inulin is used as a food additive commonly added to snacks, high-fiber granola bars, cereals, and other foods to increase fiber content as well as flavor. In identifying supplement options, there are certain terms identifying the prebiotics contained in the product. Commonly consumed prebiotics include:

• Fructans (inulin and fructooligosaccharides)
• Galacto-oligosaccharides (GOS)
• Oligofructose (fructose)
• Resistant Starch

In choosing a supplement, there are a few things to consider. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommends looking for a Supplement Facts label that will contain essential information including the amount of fiber per serving, and other added ingredients including fillers, binders, and flavorings. Also, be sure that the supplement chosen is a high-quality supple-

Consistently including prebiotics can help boost your overall health because prebiotics contain anti-inflammatory properties and can assist with reducing chronic systemic inflammation in the body, which in turn reduces the risk for heart disease.
HAILAND certainly has the potential to increase its global trading base in the world halal market – which is worth more than a colossal US$ 1 trillion (THB 32.5 trillion) per year – in terms of standards, quality and market promotion to pave the way for Thai halal producers as they aim to tread a firm growth path in the international market.

THAI HALAL PRODUCTS & SERVICES

Thailand possesses the fine standards and inherent capability in producing halal products and services that are accepted worldwide under the supervision of the Department of International Trade Promotion. This is part of the National Strategy to Support and Develop the Business Potential of Halal Products. It helps promote the image of these products and services in order to increase both the volume and value of exports while expanding to new international markets, with the ultimate goal of Thailand ascending to the ranks of the world’s top five countries with the largest halal exports by the year 2020.

KEY HALAL PRODUCTS FROM THAILAND

Prebiotics can be consumed in either food or supplement form and most people will get enough prebiotics by setting a goal to consume the recommended daily intake for fiber, which is 25 grams for females and 38 grams for males. Many prebiotic supplements provide a dose of between 4 and 5 grams per day. Commonly, people will also consume a combination of both prebiotic and probiotic sources resulting in “symbiotic therapy” in order to maximize the overall benefit.

“IFANCA certifies many products under dietary or nutritional supplements that contain prebiotics. Look for products manufactured by Abbott, 4Life Research, and other companies,” says food scientist Saeed Hayek, PhD. He further states, “Prebiotics are safe, there is no risk from [an] overdose. These are natural oligosaccharide fibers that have no legal or health limitations.”

There are some cases where abdominal discomfort, bloating, and gas can result as your digestive system adjusts to increased intake. If you suffer from irritable bowel syndrome or another gastrointestinal disorder, be sure to consult with your healthcare provider and Registered Dietitian Nutritionist to develop a personalized plan for including prebiotics in your meal planning.

YAQUTULLAH IBRAHEEM MUHAMMAD is an Atlanta based Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and owner of Nutrition Prescriptions, LLC, a consulting practice specializing in weight management, recipe development and analysis, nutrition education. She empowers women to learn and apply healthy, mindful nutrition strategies while understanding the connection between food, faith, and health. Find her on Instagram @yaqutu_nutritionprescriptions.
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KEY HALAL PRODUCTS FROM THAILAND

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GARMENTS
COSMETICS, SKIN CARE AND SPA PRODUCTS

THINK TRUSTED HALAL PRODUCTS

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Thai halal standards are certified by the Central Islamic Council of Thailand, a longstanding internationally recognized institute with support from Chulalongkorn University’s Halal Science Center, a leading entity that continuously develops and tests halal products. This contributes to confidence in the Thai Halal symbol, ensuring strict quality and exacting standards in accordance with Islamic principles and regulations.

Halal certification has been sought for more than 150,000 products in Thailand, while over 5,000 factories across the country have requested the requisite certification. This is one of the reasons why consumers around the world are assured that the Thai Halal symbol exemplifies high quality production and stringent standards as indicated by Islamic principle.

Department of International Trade Promotion, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand
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www.thaitrade.com
www.thaihalalcenter.com
www.facebook.com/ThaiHalalProducts
Dates: The Fruit of Paradise

By Kelly Izdihar Crosby
We’re all familiar with dates; that famous fruit that becomes more popular around the month of Ramadan. Dates are an integral part of Middle East cuisine and a blessed fruit in Islam. They have been a staple food of the Middle East and Southeast Asia for millennia. Whether you enjoy them during the holy month or year-round, dates are nature’s gift to satisfy even the sweetest tooth. Their exact origin is unknown, but archeologists suspect that they originated from the region between ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. There is evidence of date cultivation in Arabia from the 6th millennium BCE.

Dates grow on palm trees, which can grow as high as seventy-five feet tall. They grow singly or forming a clump with several stems from a single root system. Dates are wind-pollinated but can be pollinated manually by skilled farmers or using wind machines. Date palm leaves are also big, measuring thirteen to twenty feet long, with a long spine sprouting as much as 150 leaflets. The date fruit is oval-cylindrical shaped and can be 1.2 to 2.8 inches long. They contain one single, slender stone. When ripe, their colors range from red to bright yellow and when dry, from amber to dark brown or almost black. Of course, they are famous for their sweetness, containing as much as 75% sugar when dried. Dates are a naturally dried fruit, similar to raisins. They remain safe to eat for up to a year in your cupboard or pantry. Frozen, they can keep indefinitely.

Most dates are sold dried, but fresh dates are available during the August/September harvest season. A wrinkled skin indicates they’re dried and a smooth skin means they’re fresh. In America, the most consumed dates are the Medjool date and Deglet Noor date.

There is a dizzying array of date types, at least 3,000, but they are classified into three groups: soft, semi-dry, and dry. Some examples of soft dates are Barhi, Halawy, Medjool, and Khadrawy. Barhi dates have a thin, crackling skin and chewy flesh that tastes like butterscotch candy. Halawy are firm and chewy with a thick, soft golden flesh and a sweet, caramel-candy flavor. Medjools are considered the king of dates! They are deep amber-brown with a soft crinkly skin and rich sweet flavor. Date lovers are always excited to see Medjool dates passed around moments before breaking the Ramadan fast. Medjools are expensive because their cultivation is a complex and labor-intensive process. After hand pollination, the trees must be covered in nets to protect them from dust and rain. The crop must be thinned and hand-harvested again and again because the dates, even on one tree, all ripen at different times. Khadrawy dates are a smaller date with a high moisture content, less sugar, and a milder flavor than Medjool dates.

Semi-dry types of dates are Deglet Noor, Zahdi, Dayri, and Ajwa. These dates have many fans as some prefer
the lightly sweet taste of semi-dry dates compared to the richer, bolder taste of soft dates. If the Medjool is considered the king of dates, Deglet Noor is the queen. They are more fibrous and have a firmer flesh and a sweet, delicate flavor. Both Deglet Noor and Zahdi dates are golden brown, whereas Dayri dates are dark brown to black. Ajwa dates are from Saudi Arabia and are considered the favorite date of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him [PBUH]). They are smaller, wrinkly, and almost black with a soft, fruiter taste. They have a melt-in-your-mouth quality and being a favorite of the Prophet (PBUH), ajwa dates are quite popular.

Dry dates are not as plentiful as semi-dry or soft date cultivars. They are devoid of moisture, which makes them appear shriveled and hard. These have not been deliberately dried. Thoory dates, or bread dates, are called that because of their dry, firm, pastry-like texture, which makes them suitable for baking. They have a semi-sweet, nutty flavor.

Dates are mentioned at least twenty times in the Quran. While Mary (Peace Be Upon Her) is in labor, she is commanded by God to “…shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates.” (Quran 19:25) Dates are also described as one of the many fruits of paradise. “…And from the palm trees—of its emerging fruit are clusters hanging low…” (Quran 6:99) The Prophet (PBUH) said, “If somebody takes some Ajwa dates every morning, he will not be affected by poison or magic on that day till night.”—Sahih al-Bukhari 5768, Book 76, Hadith 82. Anas bin Malik (may God be pleased with him) narrated: “The Messenger of God (PBUH) would break the fast with fresh dates before performing Salat. If there were no fresh dates then (he would break the fast) with dried dates, and if there were no dried dates then he would take a few sips of water.”—Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 696: Book 8, Hadith 15.

The study The Effect of Dates in Late Pregnancy on the Duration of Labor in Nulliparous Women, published by the National Institutes of Health, found that “According to the results of this study, consuming dates in late pregnancy was effective in decreasing the length of labor processes and reducing the need to oxytocin for labor acceleration. Moreover, it is recommended to consume dates in women without contraindications.”

Dates have a myriad of uses in cuisine and non-consumable products. Dry or soft dates are eaten out-of-hand. They may be pitted and stuffed with such tasty fillings such as almonds, pecans, walnuts, pistachios, or tahini. They can also be filled with candied orange, candied ginger, and candied lemon peel. And if that’s not tempting enough, chocolate-covered dates are a recent phenomenon making sales of decadent desserts all around the world.

Dates are also used in sweet, savory dishes like Moroccan tajine and in Arabic cookies called ka’ak. Date syrup is used as a substitute for honey. Dates can also be used to make molasses, mustard, marmalade, and jams. Sparkling date drink is a non-alcoholic drink used for celebrations. Date balsamic vinegar is great as a salad dressing or to marinate vegetables and meats.

Besides eating them, dates can be dried, ground, and mixed with grain to form a nutritious stock feed for animals and in Pakistan they even use the syrup from ripe dates to coat leather bags and pipes to prevent them from leaking.

**“The health benefits of dates include providing an energy boost as well as [being] a good source of iron and fiber. Dates are rich in nutrients, including fiber and antioxidants. Those essential nutrients include vitamin B-6, magnesium, and potassium.”**

**Kelly Izdihar Crosby** is an artist and writer in Atlanta, Georgia. You can find her work at www.wagingbeauty.com.
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Poached Fish with Roasted Tomato Sauce

By: YaQutullah Ibraheem Muhammad MS, RD, LD

Servings: 4

INGREDIENTS

1 medium yellow onion, chopped
1 garlic clove, minced
½ inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and grated
1 can (15 ounces) roasted chopped tomatoes, no added salt
½ teaspoon Himalayan pink salt
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
¼ teaspoon black pepper
½ teaspoon curry powder (optional)
½ teaspoon rosemary (optional)
1½ pounds fresh white fish (cod, halibut, haddock), cut into 2-inch pieces
½ cup chopped fresh parsley, for garnish
1 lemon, sliced for garnish (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium-low heat.
2. Sauté the onion until soft and translucent, 5–7 minutes.
3. Add the garlic, ginger, tomatoes (with juices), Himalayan pink salt, pepper, and curry powder. Simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Place the fish in the sauce, cover and cook for about 8–10 minutes. Be careful not to overcook. The fish will add its own liquid to the dish.
5. Serve sprinkled with fresh parsley and freshly squeezed lemon.

This fish entrée can be served over a bed of lightly sautéed kale. 🍎
Masbhat ad-Darwish
From the Archives of Fatima Zein Annan

Servings: 6-8

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound halal lamb shoulder, cut into filbert-sized pieces
- 2 large potatoes
- 2 small eggplants or 1 large one
- 3 tomatoes
- 2 zucchini
- 2 medium onions
- 2 medium carrots
- 2 green peppers
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- salt and pepper to taste
- water

DIRECTIONS

1. Sauté lamb until lightly browned.
2. Peel potatoes and eggplant and rinse.
3. Slice all vegetables in ½-inch slices (lengthwise), then cut into ½-inch pieces.
4. Arrange all ingredients in alternating layers in a 9 x 12 inch pan, beginning with potatoes, followed by zucchini, meat, eggplant, tomatoes, onions, carrots, and green peppers on top.
5. Sprinkle seasoning on top.
6. Barely cover with water.
7. Cover and bake at 375°F for 60 minutes.
8. Uncover the last 10 minutes for browning.

Usually served with rice 🌽
Zucchini and Date Brownies
By: YaQutullah Ibraheem Muhammad MS, RDN, LD

Servings: 16

INGREDIENTS

- 5 ounces dark chocolate, min 72% cocoa
- 1/4 cup coconut oil
- 2 eggs
- 1/4 cup raw honey
- 2 teaspoons vanilla powder
- 1/4 teaspoon almond extract
- 1 cup blanched almond flour
- 4-6 dates
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups shredded zucchini

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Grease an 8 x 8 inch pan with coconut oil, then dust with blanched almond flour. Set aside.
3. In a double boiler, gently melt the chocolate. (If you don’t have a double boiler then fill a skillet with a few inches of water and set a small pot in the water, place over very low heat.) Add the coconut oil and honey, mix until fully combined. Remove from heat and set aside to cool.
4. In a small bowl combine the eggs, vanilla, and almond extracts. Add the cooled chocolate mixture.
5. In a medium bowl combine almond flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, and salt. Pour in the wet ingredients and mix until fully combined.
6. Using a food processor, pulse the zucchini and the dates into tiny shredded pieces. Having very tiny pieces of zucchini is the key to making this recipe work.
7. Fold the zucchini and dates into the batter. Pour into prepared pan and bake for 25 minutes, or until fully set. Allow to cool in the pan for at least 30 minutes before cutting.

*Tip: Use a serrated, plastic knife to cut your brownies — this makes it less likely to crumble.
Savory Carrot, Leek and Sweet Potato Soup
By: YaQutullah Ibraheem Muhammad MS, RD, LD

Servings: 2

INGREDIENTS
1. sweet potato, peeled and cubed
2. carrots, peeled and chopped
3. leek, washed and chopped (remove green ends)
4. onion, peeled and chopped
5. cloves of garlic, minced
6. teaspoon mixed dried herbs
7. teaspoon turmeric, ground
8. cup vegetable stock
9. pinch nutmeg
10. stalk parsley
11. cups water

DIRECTIONS
1. Boil 3 cups water in the kettle (enough to fill a saucepan). Wash, peel, and prep your vegetables.
2. Place all vegetables and garlic in a large saucepan and cover with water and vegetable stock.
3. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to simmer for 10 to 15 minutes.
4. Add the herbs, nutmeg, and turmeric. Remove from the heat and let cool for a couple of minutes. Puree to a smooth soup with a multi-blade blender.
5. Garnish with parsley (optional).
6. Serve hot with Naan or rustic bread, and a dollop of sour cream.
Upcoming Culinary Trends

By Chef Demetrios Haralambatos
As old-world traders and travelers discovered new territories, they brought back to their home countries, spices as well as recipes and other goods from their travels. With modern transportation methods, our world became known as a “small world,” but actually, it has become a “larger neighborhood,” and as this neighborhood continues to grow, so does diversity in dining.

In America we find an abundance of Chinese, Italian, Mexican, and regional American (Southern and Tex Mex) cuisines. Greek, Indian, Jamaican, Japanese, and Thai cuisines have gained popularity as well.

Many Culinarians are predicting that over the next five years, Egyptian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Palestinian, Persian, and Turkish cuisines will be increasing in popularity. While these cuisines are currently available in select demographic areas, more restaurants featuring them are opening and it is anticipated that they will also become mainstream.

Look at what has happened over the last ten years—hummus, baba ghanoush, falafel, gyros, lebneh (pressed or strained yogurt), shawarma, and shish taouk have gained distinction and are found in restaurants, supermarkets, and among street vendors. These cuisines will be introducing a host of herbs, spices, and spice mixtures that, up to now, have only been available through mail order and a few ethnic markets. Duqqa, pomegranate molasses, and za’atar are found today, in select supermarkets, like Trader Joes and Whole Foods.

The following is a ‘dictionary’ of culinary treasures and spices that are anticipated to become prominent:

**Baharat** is a spice blend of black pepper, cardamom pods, cinnamon, clove, coriander seeds, cumin seeds, nutmeg, and paprika. Used to season beef, chicken, fish, lamb, as well as soups, it is also used as a condiment. In Turkey, it will include mint, in the Persian Gulf Loomi (Limu Omari) and saffron are added to make Kebsa and it is referred to as Gulf Baharat, while in Tunisia, they use a simple blend of black pepper, ground cinnamon, and dried rosebuds.

**Baklava** or **Baklawa** is a rich, sweet dessert pastry, made with filo or kataifi dough, butter or ghee, a variety of
chopped nuts (almonds, walnuts, cashews, hazelnuts, or pistachios), and a sweet syrup (made from honey, orange blossom water, rosewater, and sugar). Some have saffron (with eggs) brushed on top. Some are layered, others rolled. Baklava is usually served at room temperature, often garnished with ground nuts.

**Booza** (stretchy ice cream) is an Arabic ice cream which is very resistant to melting. It is made with cream, *mastic* (a plant resin), milk, *sahlab*, and sugar. It has a consistency similar to Mozzarella cheese and is produced through a process of pounding and stretching within a freezer drum. *Booza* has Syrian origins.

**Bisbas, Sahawiq, or Zhug** is a hot sauce originating in the Yemeni cuisine.

**Cardamom** or **Cardamum** is a small seed pod used as a flavoring and cooking spice, and in some cases, a medicine. Green cardamom is one of the most expensive spices by weight, but only a small amount is needed to impart flavor. Black cardamom, which some consider similar to mint, has a distinctly more smoky, though not bitter taste. In some Middle Eastern countries, cardamom and coffee are often ground together. Cardamom-flavored tea, also flavored with cinnamon, is consumed as a hot beverage in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan. Cardamom is used to a wide extent in savory dishes. Green cardamom is often used in traditional Indian sweets, in *Masala Chai* (spiced tea), and as a garnish in basmati rice and other dishes. Many restaurants would offer a bowl of cardamom pods as one is leaving. These are chewed and used in the same way as chewing gum to cleanse the palate, as they neutralize the toughest breath odors.

**Duqqa** or **Dukkha** is an Egyptian condiment consisting of a mixture of herbs, nuts (usually hazelnut), and spices. It is typically used as a dip with bread (along with olive oil), or fresh vegetables for an hors d’oeuvre. There are variations of *duqqa* that do not contain nuts and have parched wheat flour. In Jordan, caraway and cumin are added.

**Fatayer** are meat pies wrapped in filo dough that can alternatively be stuffed with *akkawi* cheese (such as feta), mushrooms, spinach, or a blend of spinach and rice. They are popular in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria.

**Dibs Rumman** (Pomegranate Molasses or Pomegranate Juice) is made from the fruit of the pomegranate. It is used in cooking, both as a fresh juice and as a concentrated syrup. It is a reduction from the juice of a tart variety of pomegranate, evaporated to form a thick, dark red liquid. Used in Iranian *Fesenjān*, and Turkish Pilaf and *Çoban salatası*. It is called *Dibs Rumman* in Arabic, *Nar Eksisi* in Turkish, and *Naşarab* in Azerbaijani.

**Haloumi** or **Haloumi** is a semi-hard, unripened, brined cheese, with a distinctive layered texture and salty flavor. It is made with unpasteurized sheep and goat milk and is commonly garnished with mint. *Haloumi* has a very high-melting-point and can be easily fried or grilled.

**Halva** or **Halvah** (also *Halwa*, and other spellings) is a dense, sweet confection, sweetened with sugar or honey, originating in the Middle East and South Central Asia. In some Indian cultures, the dish is known as a soup-based sweet. The texture varies; for example, semolina-based halva is gelatinous and translucent, while sesame-based halva is drier and crumblier.

**Harissa** is a North African hot chili pepper paste, the main ingredients of which are roasted bkalouti peppers
with spices and herbs such as caraway seeds, coriander seeds, cumin, garlic paste, and olive oil. Rose *harissa* has rose petals.

**Jallab** is a type of fruit syrup, made mainly of grape molasses, grenadine syrup, and rosewater, although carob and dates may be added. It is then smoked with Arabic incense. **Jallab** is very popular in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria. As a beverage, it is usually sold with crushed ice and floating pine nuts and raisins.

**Kashe Bademjan** or **Kashk e Bademjan** is an Iranian dish that literally translates in Persian as ‘kashk and eggplant.’ It can be considered either an appetizer or a main dish. There are various recipes for this dish involving caramelized onions, roasted nuts, herbs, and spices.

**Khachapur** is a traditional dish of cheese-filled bread. The bread is leavened, allowed to rise, and is shaped in various ways, with the cheese in the middle and a crust that is ripped off and used to dip in the cheese. The filling contains cheese (fresh or aged, most commonly sulguni), eggs, and other ingredients.

**Limu Omani** (also known as **Noomi Basra**, **limoo Amani**, **loomi**, dried lime, and black lime) is a sun-dried lime or lemon. It is used as a spice, either ground, sliced, or whole. It adds a sour flavor to soups and stews. It is also used in cooked fish and may be added to almost all dishes and stuffing. After grounding, sprinkle on rice or grain salads, or add it to a marinade for chicken, as a substitute for sumac. It is also used to make a warm drink, called **Hamidh** (sour) that is used to help with indigestion, diarrhea, and nausea.

**Laban**, **Leben**, and **Lben** refers to a food or beverage of fermented milk. There are two main products known as **leben**, yogurt and buttermilk. It is made by intentionally allowing milk to sour.

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**Limonana** or **Lemunada** is a type of lemonade made from freshly squeezed lemon juice and spearmint leaves that forms a popular summer drink in Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria.

**Lokum** or **Halqum**, also called **Turkish Delight**, is a Turkish gelatinous candy based on a gel of starch and sugar. Many varieties will include chopped dates, pistachios, hazelnuts, or walnuts. Others will often be flavored with rosewater, mastic, bergamot orange, or even lemon. Packaged and eaten in small cubes, it is dusted with confectioners’ sugar or powdered cream of tartar to prevent clinging. Some variations include cinnamon and mint.

**Mahlep**, **Mahleb**, or **Mahalepi** is an aromatic spice made from the seeds of a species of cherry (the **mahaleb** or St. Lucie cherry). The seed kernel is extracted from the cherry stones, then ground to a powder before use. Its flavor is similar to a combination of bitter almond and cherry, and similar also to marzipan. It is used in small quantities in sweet foods and cakes and in the production of **Tresse** cheese. In Greek cuisine, **mahlep** is sometimes added to holiday breads, e.g., Tsoureki, Christmas bread, the New Year’s Vasilopita, and the braided Easter bread; in Armenia, a bread called cheoreg; in Turkey Paskalya Çöreği; and in the Middle East it is used in ma’amoul scones. In Egypt, powdered mahlab is made into a paste with honey, nuts, and sesame seeds, and is eaten as a dessert, or a snack with bread.
Mastic is a resin obtained from the mastic tree. In pharmacies, it is called ‘Arabic gum’ (not to be confused with ‘gum arabic’) and ‘Yemen gum.’ In Greece, it is known as ‘tears of Chios’ being traditionally produced on the Greek island Chios, and, like other natural resins, is produced in ‘tears’ or droplets. Mastic is sun-dried into pieces of brittle, translucent resin. When chewed, the resin softens and becomes a bright white and opaque gum. The flavor is bitter at first, but after some chewing, it releases a refreshing flavor similar to pine and cedar. Mastic is believed to have medicinal properties and to aid in digestion.

Muhammara or Mhammara is a hot pepper dip. In Western Turkey, Muhammara is referred to as acuka, made with fresh or dried peppers, primarily Aleppo pepper and bread crumbs, cumin, garlic, lemon juice, olive oil, pomegranate molasses, salt, ground walnuts, and garnished with mint leaves. It is eaten as a dip with bread, as a spread for toast, and as a sauce for fish, kebabs, and grilled meats.

Peri-Peri (also known as Biri Biri, Piripiri, or Pili Pili) is a very hot sauce made with the malagueta pepper. It originated in North Africa and is used to flavor stews. Preserved Lemons (also known as Leems and country lemon) are diced, quartered, halved, or whole lemons, pickled in a brine of lemon juice, salt, and water. They are used in North African cuisines.

Qamar al-Din is an apricot juice or nectar beverage that is typically consumed during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Making the drink from this apricot leather requires adding rosewater or orange blossom, water, and ice. Served thick and cold, it is believed to be especially fortifying and a good source of energy, electrolytes, and hydration, which are crucial after a day of fasting. In Iran, it is served as a dried fruit roll called Lavāshak. Some will add pine nuts.

Qishr, Geshir, or Kishr is a Yemeni traditional hot drink made of spiced coffee husks, ginger, and sometimes cinnamon. It is usually drunk instead of coffee as it does not need to be roasted.

Rosewater is a flavored water made by steeping rose petals in water. It is used to flavor food, as a component in some cosmetic and medical preparations, and for religious purposes throughout Europe and Asia. It is added to lemonade, added to water to mask unpleasant odors and flavors found in tap water, and used in making syrup for some versions of Baklava. In India, rosewater is used in sweets such as Laddu, Gulab Jamun, and Peda, as well as to flavor milk, yogurt-based Lassi drink, rice pudding, and other dairy-based dishes. In Malaysia and Singapore, red-tinted rosewater is mixed with milk, which then turns pink, to make a sweet drink called Bandung. Rosewater is frequently used as a halal substitute for red wine and other alcohols in cooking. The Premier League (soccer) offers a rosewater-based beverage as an alternative to champagne when awarding Muslim players. It is also used instead of champagne for the Bahrain and the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Rosewater is a usual component of perfume and is used in the religious ceremonies of Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. Rose syrup, not to be confused with rose hip syrup, is a syrup made from rosewater, with sugar added. A variation of this is orange blossom water, which is made from the flower of the orange tree.

Sahlab or Salep is a flour made from the tubers of the orchid genus Orchis (including species Orchis Mascula and Orchis Militaris). These tubers contain a nutritious, starchy polysaccharide called Glucomannan. Salep flour is consumed in beverages and desserts as a traditional winter beverage.

Sumac, Sumach, Sumak, Soumak, or Sumaq comes from any one of about thirty-five species of flowering plants in the genus Rhus. The dried fruits are ground into a reddish-purple powder to produce a tangy, crimson spice, popular in many countries. It is used to make a traditional pink lemonade beverage by steeping in water, sometimes adding sweeteners such as honey or sugar. In Middle Eastern cuisine it is used to add a tart, lemony taste to salads, meat, or as a garnish on meze dishes such as hummus and tashi; in Syria it is added to falafel as well as being one of the main ingredients of Kubah Sumakieh; is added to salads; and is one of the main ingredients in the Palestinian dish, Musakhan. It is also used in the spice mixture za’atar. Some beekeepers use dried sumac bobs to fuel their smokers.
Taboon bread or Laffa (sometimes called Iraqi pita) is a flatbread, traditionally baked in a taboon oven or a tannur. It is similar to the various tandoor breads found in many parts of Asia. It is used as a base or wrap in many cuisines, and the base of Musakhan, often considered the national dish of Palestine. It is of medium thickness, slightly chewy, and doesn’t tear easily. It is eaten with different accompaniments.

Tahdig (scorched rice, also known as crunchy rice) is a thin crust of slightly browned rice at the bottom of the cooking pot. It is produced during the cooking of rice over direct heat from a flame. Cherry rice with Tahdig or Albaloo Polow Ba Tahdij Maast are very popular.

Tahini is a condiment made from toasted ground hulled sesame seeds. It is served by itself as a dip or as a major ingredient in baba ghanoush, halva, and hummus.

Za’atar is a highly valued herb, commonly used in a spice mixture and typically used as a condiment. It is generally made with marjoram, oregano, and ground roasted thyme, mixed with salt, toasted sesame seeds, and sumac, known as za’tar akhdar (green). Some commercial varieties also include roasted flour, while other varieties may add coriander, cumin, fennel seed, or savory. One distinctively Palestinian variation of za’atar includes caraway seeds, while a Lebanese variety sometimes contains sumac berries, and has a distinct dark red color. Recipes for such spice mixtures are often kept secret and not even shared with daughters and other relatives. Traditionally, pita that is dipped in olive oil and then za’atar is known as zeit ou za’atar. Za’atar is used as a seasoning for meats and vegetables or sprinkled onto hummus. It is eaten with labneh, bread, and olive oil for breakfast, most commonly in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria. The Lebanese specialty Shanklish is made of dry-cured balls of labneh rolled in za’atar to form its outer coating.

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A Breath of Fresh Air

By Linda Gardner Phillips
Ready to rejuvenate? Step outside and fill your lungs with fresh air. It’s free! Each inhale invigorates your brain cells and each exhale cleanses your body of carbon dioxide and other wastes.

Day and night, the rhythm of breath keeps you company. You might take this lifelong relationship for granted unless you are congested or coughing. Air always surrounds us, and most people hardly think about what it might hide. Outdoor breezes and indoor air deliver life-giving oxygen, but sadly, they may also carry unseen substances and risks.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines air pollution as “gas and particle contaminants” in the atmosphere. These risky substances can cause health issues even if they are invisible—especially for sensitive groups like young children and asthma patients. In fact, over 90% of the world’s population breathes air laced with harmful airborne toxins and micro-particles.

Top 5 Outdoor Air Pollutants
(Source: EPA)

1. **Particulate matter** consists of microscopic bits of solid material that include pollen, smoke, soot, and heavy industrial metals.

2. **Sulfur dioxide (SO2)** is a sharp-smelling, invisible gas released by burning fossil fuels. It joins with other chemicals to form harmful compounds.

3. **Nitrogen dioxide (NO2)** is an invisible gas that comes from combustion and looks reddish when concentrated.

4. **Volatile organic compounds (VOCs)** are complex, carcinogenic mixes of chemical compounds emitted by manufacturing processes and some products.

5. **Ozone (O3)** is a highly reactive gas formed when heat and sunlight combine NO2 and VOCs.

Pollution from Trees to Tailpipes
Dirty air is nothing new. Throughout history, fires have caused people to cough and pollen has caused people to sneeze. The jet stream carries smoke from forest fires and volcanoes to distant regions, thus impacting people far from the original site. These days most air pollution is the result of industrial manufacturing and fossil fuel combustion. The industrial revolution sparked skyrocketing air pollution rates, and vast amounts of risky substances keep spewing from smokestacks and tailpipes all over the world.

Smog is a noticeable indication of polluted air. It appears locally when industrial pollutants rise into the sky, stick to water and dust, then sink back to the earth in a heavy, hazy cloud. Smog obscures the sunlight and creates dangerous breathing conditions.

Acid rain travels far from its source to damage entire ecosystems. Atmospheric water joins with pollutants, then drops across wide regions in the form of rain, snow, fog, or hail. This acidic precipitation damages trees and plants, attacks the chemical balance of soil and water, and kills aquatic creatures.

Air Around the World
Air quality measurements depend on a number of factors, including the number and combination of air pollutants present and how long they persist. The World Air Quality Index Project provides a way to check the air quality for your area at any time. In general, it indicates the poorest air quality is in regions of India, China, and Thailand while the best air quality is in parts of New Zealand, Australia, and Scandinavia.

Even if your community or house seems clean, its air may harbor invisible risks. Microclimate pollution levels can vary widely between cities, across regions, or between neighborhoods and streets.

You don’t need to feel sick to be harmed by air pollution. Even low levels of toxins and tiny particles can cause many illnesses, from acute respiratory infections and lung cancer to strokes and heart disease. Long-term exposure may slow childhood development and can restructure the brain like Alzheimer’s disease. Every year, seven million people die prematurely from the effects of repeatedly inhaling tainted air.

Your body does fight back. If you have ever sneezed, coughed, or even had a pimple, you have seen firsthand how it naturally expels toxins and illnesses. Inflammation is how the body clears foreign irritants (anything from splinters to viruses and poisons) from your tissues. Usually, this swollen state disappears once the irritant is gone, but long-term air pollution interferes with this process. The body struggles to keep up when every breath introduces a new lungful of contaminated air. Swollen tissues and irritated nerves trigger more inflammation. This vicious cycle of the body turning against itself can be difficult to escape. Many experts believe that chronic inflammation links airborne toxins to diseases like diabetes, Alzheimer’s, and dementia. (National Institutes of Health)

Health Risk Primer
Nearly all airborne pollutants can cause breathing difficulties, but different toxins and particles pose additional health risks.
Pollen sparks hay fever. It also irritates mucous membranes in the eyes and nose and intensifies asthma. These issues get worse when industrial pollution joins the mix. Smog traps pollen and changes its protein structure to be even more irritating to sensitive tissues.

Smoke from campfires, grills, and cigarettes tightens the chest and causes coughs. In the long term, it can damage the lungs and worsen asthma and heart disease.

Heavy metals cross cell walls and lodge in body tissues to contribute to asthma, lung cancer, heart disease, diabetes, dementia, and increased mortality.

SO₂ makes it hard to breathe, especially for children and people with pre-existing respiratory conditions and interferes with oxygen production by plants.

NO₂ aggravates mucus membranes in the eyes, nose, throat, and lungs and increases respiratory infections. Areas with high concentrations of NO₂ usually have higher asthma rates.

VOCs irritate eyes, nose, and throat tissues, causing headaches, nausea, liver and central nervous system damage, and disrupt coordination.

Ozone interferes with oxygen intake and can hasten death in older adults.

Benzene causes cellular mutation and harms reproductive organs.

Carbon monoxide replaces oxygen in your blood to make you sleepy, spark a headache, or cause sudden illness and death.

Formaldehyde causes chest pain and coughing, damages the nervous system, and increases asthma and allergies in children.

Naphthalene used in moth repellant destroys blood cells to block the oxygen pathway, causes diarrhea, fever, and respiratory tract lesions. Baby blankets that were stored with naphthalene-laden mothballs can inflict infants with acute hemolytic anemia.

Air Alert
If you can’t see, smell, or control unhealthy air, how can you detect it? Check the numbers. You can learn about your home’s air quality by testing it with an indoor air monitor. For outdoor air conditions, pay attention to the Air Quality Index and Action Day Alerts in your local weather report.

The EPA monitors air conditions across the country every day and translates this raw data into simplified guidelines on AirNow.gov, a helpful free website. The color-coded ratings range from green (good) to red (hazardous). You’ll find related information on popular websites like Weather.com and Wunderground.com. Code Orange indicates unhealthy air days that are especially dangerous for sensitive groups, who should remain indoors. Others should reduce time spent outdoors and avoid strenuous activities like biking and running.

Your choices Help
No one person can solve the air quality problem, but your choices do contribute to better air conditions for yourself and the planet. Here are some actions you can take:
When Outdoors

- **Avoid rush hour.** Pollution levels are highest when roads are busiest.
- **Choose the road less traveled.** Pollution levels can vary significantly, even from block by block. Choose less busy roads and you will enjoy cleaner air.
- **Use public transport.** Fewer cars on the road mean fewer emissions.
- **Reduce car emissions.** Well-maintained cars with excellent catalytic converters emit less pollution. You can halve your emissions by driving a hybrid or electric vehicle.
- **Limit outside time on bad air days.** If you simply must go for a run or take the kids to the park, try to go between noon and 6 pm when pollution levels are at their lowest.

If you can’t see, smell, or control unhealthy air, how can you detect it? Check the numbers. You can learn about your home’s air quality by testing it with an indoor air monitor. For outdoor air conditions, pay attention to the Air Quality Index and Action Day Alerts in your local weather report.

When Indoors

- **Monitor & purify indoor air.** Use an air quality monitor to track levels of dust, allergens, and chemical pollutants in your home. An air purifier with HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate Absorbing) filter can significantly improve indoor air quality.
- **Limit fires.** Cozy fireplace fires can produce dangerous levels of smoke.
- **Cook safely.** Open a window or turn on the exhaust fan to ensure you have adequate ventilation. If you use a gas stove, install a carbon monoxide detector.
- **Avoid cigarette smoke.** Secondhand smoke causes respiratory issues for children and sensitive people.
- **Keep windows closed during allergy season.** This will minimize pollen entering the home.

For more information on air pollution and what you can do, check the EPA or American Lung Association websites.

**LINDA GARDNER PHILLIPS** is a creative strategy consultant and writer focused on healthy green living, storytelling and transformative design thinking. She can be reached at lgardnerphillips@gmail.com.
Ready... Set... Ramadan!

By Ali Othman, CPT
Food is one part of our lives that has always brought people together. We pour our hearts into the preparation of our meals; and we sit together with our friends and family to enjoy the tastes, aromas, and enlightening conversation which accompanies a bountiful dinner. As Ramadan draws near, food becomes a smaller, but even more important part of our day. An empty stomach and a clear mind should provide the proper temperament necessary for basking in the glory of the month. Ramadan is one of the holiest months of the year. It’s a time when Muslims engage in introspection, extra prayer and dua; and refrain from eating and drinking from dawn until after sunset. Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam, and therefore a requirement for all those who are physically able to perform the task.

So how do we reap the benefits of Ramadan while still maintaining a well-balanced diet and exercise routine? Each one of us has different dietary needs based on our lifestyle, genes, and daily activities. Still the consensus is that the human body needs around 1,200 calories per day to function properly. During Ramadan, people typically eat two meals a day. Suhoor, the first meal, is eaten before dawn; and this meal should provide enough sustenance to get you through the day until sunset. Iftar, the second meal, is eaten shortly after sunset, typically in the company of family and friends. This means that a lot of rich, succulent foods are the norm, and after a long day of fasting, it is very easy to overeat. Selecting the proper foods for Suhoor and Iftar can mean the difference between hunger and thirst setting in early, or a sustained feeling of satiety throughout the day.

One element to keep in mind while selecting your foods for Ramadan is the caloric density of what you are eating. The Mayo Clinic defines caloric density as “The number of calories in a given amount of food.” Some foods have a high caloric density, which means that in a small portion of that food, there are a high number of calories. By choosing foods with a low caloric density, you are able to eat more, fill your stomach with healthier calories, and feel full longer. One glazed donut, for example, contains about 300 calories. Instead of the delicious but inefficient and unhealthy sugar-packed donut, you can eat a bowl of low sugar cereal with some fresh fruit, a glass of low-fat milk, and a peanut butter sandwich on whole-grain bread while consuming around the same number of calories. Although this is one extreme example, it’s easy to see which of these breakfasts will keep you feeling full longer.
Calculating the caloric density of your food is easy. All you need is a nutritional label and a simple mathematical equation. Divide the number of calories per serving by the number of grams in that serving (both of these should be listed on the nutritional label). This gives you the number of calories per gram of food. Foods with a low caloric density contain less than one and a half calories per gram. Foods that are considered high caloric density will contain four or more calories per gram. Simply put, by choosing your foods properly, you can eat four times the volume while consuming the same number of calories. No, this is not a recommendation to overeat, of course; but filling your body with the proper fuel is an essential part of Ramadan.

Some basic nutrients are required to sustain life, each of them providing a different caloric density. Carbohydrates are broken down into glucose to provide us with our main source of energy. Proteins are essential for rebuilding and repairing our tissue and helping our bodies make certain hormones. Both carbohydrates and proteins provide us with four calories per gram. Fats are the third group of nutrients that our bodies require. Through digestion, fats are broken down into fatty acids, and then used to help with the absorption of vitamins, treat certain diseases, and can even improve your health and body composition. Most important are the essential fatty acids which the body cannot make on its own, and must be consumed through the foods we eat. Fats are the highest caloric density nutrients and provide our bodies with nine calories per gram. Looking at the opposite end of this spectrum, we have water. Although water is essential for all life, it has a caloric density of zero and can help you feel full without adding calories to your diet. Another important nutrient is fiber. Our bodies do not digest fiber; instead, fiber slows the digestion process allowing us to absorb more nutrients from our food and provides bulk to our stool, which promotes a healthy digestive system. Foods that have high fiber and water content, such as fruits and vegetables, are an excellent choice for consuming large portions without filling your stomach with empty calories.

With a basic understanding of our food, we can move towards preparing our bodies for a month of fifteen or more hours a day with no nutrient intake. About four weeks before the start of Ramadan, most people can benefit from an adjustment to their eating habits. First, move to a three meals a day routine, and try to cut out snacking in between meals. This will get your body used to longer periods of not eating, and help reduce the shock to your metabolism. Do your best to decrease your sodium, sugar, and fat intake while increasing the amount of low caloric density foods. We already know why we should reduce the amount of sugar and fat we consume, but why reduce your sodium intake?

Sodium is one of the many minerals which are fundamental for sustaining life. Among its other roles, sodium helps to balance and regulate the body’s fluids. The FDA recommended daily allowance of sodium is “less than 2,300 milligrams,” equal to around one teaspoon of salt. According to the FDA, Americans consume about 3,400 milligrams of sodium daily. Aside from causing increased thirst, an excessive intake of sodium draws water into your blood vessels, increasing the fluid volume contained therein. This increase in volume translates to higher blood pressure and forces the heart to work harder than it should. Aside from the obvious risks associated with elevated blood pressure, when your heart works harder, it requires more energy and causes an increase in your metabolic rate using a higher number of calories to perform its daily function. The vast majority of our sodium intake comes from packaged foods and restaurant meals, so do your best to eat home-cooked meals when you can, and give that salt shaker a rest.

Coffee and tea both have rich histories in Islamic culture, as well as many other cultures. These drinks are a staple in nearly every household and are very difficult to give up. Caffeine is a powerful substance and can cause withdrawal symptoms when regular, daily ingestion is abruptly stopped. It is also a mild diuretic and causes fluid loss if overly consumed. Try to reduce the amount of coffee and tea in your diet and increase your water consumption a few weeks before the start of Ramadan. Two to three liters of water per day should be your goal in order to stave off the effects of dehydration.
About two weeks before the start of Ramadan, move from three meals a day to two by cutting out your lunch. This will likely be the hardest adjustment to make during your preparation phase but will be the most accurate simulation of a full day fast. Also, start to pay more attention to your fluid intake. The majority of your drinking should be done during breakfast and in the evening hours, with only small amounts during the daytime. By the time Ramadan arrives, your mind and body will be ready to go, and you can concentrate on using the month to its fullest potential. Spend your free moments in reflection, prayer, dua, family time, and sleep, but don’t neglect your exercise!

Fasting is said to provide increased concentration and focus, which can be very useful for starting or maintaining an exercise program...Exercise goals during Ramadan should be limited to maintenance and loss of body fat.

Fasting is said to provide increased concentration and focus, which can be very useful for starting or maintaining an exercise program. The decreased nutrient intake during this month can make it more difficult to find the energy to exercise, but without exercise, that decrease can lead to a loss of muscle. Exercise goals during Ramadan should be limited to maintenance and loss of body fat. Your first choice will be to decide what time of day to exercise. Joanna Soh, a Malaysian-based certified personal trainer and nutrition coach, maintains that the best time to exercise during Ramadan should be after Iftar. At this moment, your body has satisfied its hunger, nutrients are being converted to energy for your muscles and brain, and you are able to rehydrate freely. Another suggestion would be to exercise after Taraweeh prayer if you can stay awake. By this time, your Iftar has begun to digest, you’re not feeling as full, and afterward, you can add a small, protein-rich snack between your two daily meals to help rebuild your muscle tissue. Before Suhoor is another great option. Consume a small amount of carbohydrate-rich food before exercising, and then enjoy your Suhoor post-workout to replenish your body’s spent energy. Exercising while fasting is not recommended for unseasoned exercisers; however, it is still an option if there is no other viable time. Just before Iftar you can exercise knowing that shortly afterward you will be able to break your fast, and above all, replenish the water lost during your workout. If this is your chosen time, be sure to moderate your intensity.

Ramadan is not the time to set audacious exercise goals. Instead, concentrate on maintaining your lean muscle and shedding some body fat. Turn down the intensity of your normal workout to about seventy percent. This will ensure that you are not exhausting yourself while allowing you to maintain your current state. Limit yourself to three to four days of exercise per week at about thirty to forty-five minute sessions each day. Chose exercises that you enjoy, or ones that you can enjoy together with your family. If you are a good multitasker, recite some Quran or do some dua together with your fitness.

When the blessed month comes to an end, it’s easy to revert to our normal daily lifestyle. If your pre-Ramadan lifestyle needed an adjustment, this is the best time to act. Your mind and stomach are used to your new healthy eating habits, and your body is used to your exercise routine under the more difficult conditions. Keep up these habits and maintain them year-round. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) used to fast on Mondays and Thursdays throughout the year. Doing so will not only provide extra rewards in the next life; it also helps guarantee that you’re prepared for next Ramadan. Remember, its only eleven months away.

ALI OTHMAN has been an NSCA certified personal trainer for the past 13 years with specialization in weight loss, functional training, muscular hypertrophy, and human nutrition. He also works in the Technical Department at IFANCA and manages IFANCA business activities in South Korea.
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| Saffron Road    | Food Products, Snack Food, Appetizers | American Halal Co., Inc.         | • Target, Whole Foods, Kroger, Publix, HEB, and various markets throughout the United States  
|                 |                           |                                   | • Visit their website to locate a store near you: www.saffronroadfood.com     |
| Sunrider        | Personal Care Products, Cosmetics, Food Products, Nutritional Supplements | Sunrider International          | Visit their website for distributors: www.sunrider.com                      |
| Tom’s of Maine  | Personal Care Products    | Toms of Maine, Inc.               | Department stores, supermarkets, and drugstores throughout the United States  |
| Turtles® Flipz® | Candy / Chocolate         | DeMet’s Candy Company             | Supermarkets, drugstores, discount stores                                    |
| Wonderful       | Pistachios and Almonds    | Paramount Farms                   | Supermarkets and drugstores throughout the United States                     |
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