

Fruits as Desserts: An Islamic and Scientific Perspective

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Abstract— Fruits are sources of important nutrients and are essential for a balanced diet as they promote various beneficial effects to the body. The consumption of fruits as desserts, however, differs from the recommended fruit intake. This study discusses the optimum method of fruit consumption that will ensure maximum benefits, from an Islamic and scientific perspective. The study also explores the incorrect way of fruit consumption. The methodology of this study is qualitative in nature, using the collection of data and content analysis. The results of the study finds that eating fruits before a heavy meal has a positive effect on one's health, thus, this practice should be observed widely in the society.

Keywords- How to take; Fruits; Dessert; Islam; Science

I. INTRODUCTION

Diet is a key factor in ensuring the maintenance of one's health (Kashim et al., 2018). The type of food consumed and the proper way of eating are two important elements in our diet (Norlina,

2005). Consumption of nutritious food is inadequate if the method of consumption is wrong. For example, the intake of carbohydrate-based foods is important for the body's needs, but if consumed excessively, it may increase risks of diabetes (Chandra, 2007). Fruits are one of the dietary recommendations to maintain the body health (Johnson & Sinnott, 2017). Apart from vegetables, fruits also have various components of phytochemicals and fiber that are able to provide health benefits and support immune function (Sherry et al., 2010; Cuaves et al., 2013). Through epidemiological evidence, increased fruit intake as part of a healthy diet is proven to reduce various chronic inflammatory diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, asthma and many other serious diseases (Johnson & Sinnott, 2017; Strandhagen, 2000).

The benefits of fruits in one's diet is not merely with its consumption, but also with the proper intake so as to ensure the proper nutrients of the fruit is obtained. Most recently, the USDA recommended a daily intake of 1.5-2 cups of fruits per day for a healthy adult, where one-third of this intake is taken in the form of juice (Slavin & Lloyd, 2012). Although fruits are generally low in energy density and rich in fiber and potassium, the nutritional contribution to fruit intake standards in each country is different (Slavin & Lloyd, 2012). Fruits provide various benefits and nutrients; however, the method of taking it should be emphasised. If the method of intake is not appropriate, then it can lead to harm rather than good (Diyāb & Qarqūz, 2013), as is explored further in this study, where scientific studies have concluded that the consumption of fruit after a heavy meal leads to negative effects on the body.

The method of fruit intake has been recommended in Islam much before the topic has been explored in the realm of science. The Qur'an and hadith clearly state the proper method of fruit intake. However, at times, local influences or customs tend to erase the fundamentals that have been long applied by Islam. In this study, the custom of consuming fruits as part of desserts, is discussed and is seen to violate the discipline brought by Islam. This study will, therefore, analyse the effective method of fruit consumption, based on both the Islamic and scientific perspective.

II. BENEFITS OF FRUITS

Fruits are recommended to be eaten in whole, without any need for processing; however, some fruits are better eaten after undergoing some sort of processing to change its taste, texture or manipulate the quantity and quality of bioactive compounds found in fruits, such as phenols (Minatel et al., 2017). Biological, physical, and chemical modifications that occur during some processing methods, such as in cooking, specifically in relation to sensory, nutritional, and texture changes, may either be beneficial or harmful to human health (Minatel et al., 2017). The Qur'an and hadith recommends the consumption of several fruits such as dates, olives, figs and pomegranates that are rich in fiber and other various mineral sources (Faszly et al. 2015; Kashim

et al.,). The sunnah diet found in the Quran and hadith is proven to be rich in fiber and healthy, especially for the benefit of the digestive system (Kashim et al, 2018).

Cardiovascular illness is a type of disease that can occur due to malnutrition and the lack of nutrients found in fruits (Johnson & Sinnot, 2017). Cardiovascular illness, also known as heart attack, is caused by a troubled circulatory system of the heart and blood vessels (Cedar, 2015). Dried fruits that contain non-heme iron can help with anemia. Therefore, fruits are an important food category that guarantees the stability of the body's health and prevents it from various illnesses (Faszly et al., 2016).

The consumption of fruits, whether in the form of juice or not, is able to reduce the risk of developing diseases such as stroke, heart disease, Alzheimer's, cataracts and diseases of decreased organ function. Diseases such as these can be avoided through fruit intake as fruits contain water, vitamin C and phytochemical which serve to maintain the health of the body (Ismail & Lokman, 2016). Fruits contain a higher percentage of water than the percentage of sugar, and contain an antioxidant known as lycopene. Lycopene is a nutrient that has been linked to several health benefits, and the prevention of various diseases, especially those of cancer (Noor, 2015). With these benefits, fruits, which can be found on the second level of the food pyramid, serves as an important element in ensuring the health of the body, as well as in preventing various severe diseases.

III. ISSUE OF METHOD OF INTAKE

Although fruits contain a variety of nutrients, if consumed incorrectly, the body will not absorb the nutrients properly. According to studies being conducted, the correct method of fruit intake is to eat fruits before having a meal. Therefore, having fruits after a meal, as a form of dessert is a much less effective dietary habit that brings about minimal nutritional benefit (Diyāb & Qarqūz, 2013).

Dessert is a term often used in the food menu. According to the dictionary definition, *dessert* is something sweet that is often eaten at the end of a meal, and often involves fruits (Pustaka, 2014). Desserts also consist of other sweet foods such as cakes, biscuits, and ice cream (Saunders, 2011). However, this study focuses solely on the consumption of fruits as desserts.

The word *dessert* originated from the French word *desservir*, meaning to "clear the table", as though to denote that it is to be had after the clearing of the table from the main course such that of rice and meat (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This eating habit has been around since 1600 (Charlton, 2005).

The sequence of fruit intake is an issue that is less discussed in society. The intermingling of different cultures in today's globalised world has normalised the consumption of fruits as desserts, after a meal. Desserts that include fruits have evolved over time and now include an array of items such as lychee jelly, cocktails, mango sticky rice, pengatbanana, and corn porridge. Studies conducted found an unsatisfactory level of public understanding and knowledge in Malaysia, regarding the proper intake of fruits prior to a heavy meal (Fairuz et al., 2015).

IV. METHOD OF FRUIT CONSUMPTION

A. Islamic Perspective

The method of fruit consumption is a topic that should not deviate from the Islamic view. Islam is a comprehensive religion, providing a guideline and observing various aspects of life, even in regards to fruit consumption (Basyīri, 2016). In this case, the Qur'ān and hadith, which serve as the main sources in the guide of life (Zahir, 2015), have discussed the correct order or method of taking fruits. In the Qur'an, Allah SWT says:

They will also be served any fruit they choose. And meat from any bird they desire (al-Qur'ān, al-Wāqī'ah 56:20-21).

From the verses of the Qur'an above, Allah SWT discusses the provision of food for the dwellers of paradise, and He strategically mentions fruits before He mentions meat. Based on the verse, Imam al-Ghazaliyy argues that it is of the Sunnah to eat fruits prior to eating other food, as it is good for the digestive process (al-Ghazālīyy, 2008). Moreover, the Prophet SAW also discusses the same issue in the following:

Abu Huraira reported that Allah's Messenger SAW went out (of his house) one day or one night, and there he found Abu Bakr and 'Umar also. He said: What has brought you out of your houses at this hour? They said: Allah's Messenger, it is hunger. Thereupon he said: By Him in Whose Hand is my life, what has brought you out has brought me out too; get up. They got up along with him. and (all of them) came to the house of an Ansari (AbūHaithamIbn al-Taihan), but he was not at home. When his wife saw him she said: Most welcome, and Allah's Messenger SAW said to her: Where is so and so (AbūHaitham)? She said: He has gone to get some fresh water for us. When the Ansari came and he saw Allah's Messenger SAW and his two Companions, he said: Praise be to Allah, no one has more honourable guests today than I (have). He then went out and brought them a bunch of ripe dates, dry dates and fresh dates, and said: Eat some of them. He then took hold of his long knife (for slaughtering a goat or a sheep). Allah's Messenger SAW said to him: Don't slaughter that of which still has milk. The Ansari

then slaughtered a sheep for them. And after they had taken their fill and had been fully satisfied with the meat, dates and drink, Allah's Messenger SAW said to Abu Bakr and Umar: By Him in Whose Hand is my life, you will certainly be questioned about this bounty on the Day of judgment. Hunger brought you out of your house, then you did not return until this bounty came to you. (Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, KitābMinuman, Bab HarusMemintaKeizinan Orang Lain UntukMengikutiUndangan).

From this hadith, Imam al-Nawawī opines that it is sunnah to eat fruits prior to bread, meat or other food (al-Nawawīyy, 1929). Furthermore, in Islam, it is also highly encouraged to break one's fast with a date, which falls under the category of fruits, prior to consuming the main meal (al-Haddād, 1994).

B. Scientific Perspective

Vegetarian or fruitarian diets have been practiced for centuries, and were originally done for physical and spiritual health. Nowadays, those who practise this strict diet are said to be among those who are committed to maintaining their health and promote social renewal. Processing of fruits can increase or decrease the fiber content of the fruit. Peeling of fruits or vegetables will also lower its fiber content (Marlett & Cheung, 1997; Slavin & Lloyd, 2012). Cooking, in general, can increase the fiber content of the product if water is removed in the cooking process. Baking or heat treatment used in food processing will also increase the fiber content of the fruit, either through fiber accumulation by water removal or by producing Maillard products. Consumption of fruit in the form of juice, which is often practiced in today's modern society, is said to lack in fiber components even though the nutrients are the same as the fruit in its original form, which contains polyphenols, vitamins, and minerals. The intake of fruit juice is also likely to change the *intestinal location* and the mechanism by which fruit nutrients are absorbed and processed (Blumberg, 2010).

For Muslims, eating fruits before a heavy meal is an Islamic requirement that is deemed Sunnah and should be practised. The recommendation is not based on purely Islamic reasonings, but is also backed by scientific findings. Research has found that the sugar contained in fruits is easily absorbed and easily digested by the intestinal tract, compared to other foods which takes about three hours for the process of absorption and digestion (Diyāb & Qarqūz, 2013). Furthermore, previous studies have also indicated that fruit intake of at least 15 minutes prior to a meal, can reduce hunger and avoid excessive food intake (Obbagy & Rolls, 2010). Fruits can reduce hunger in a short period of time, thus preventing the occurrence of gastric acid secretion that will cause gastric pain. The presence of fruit sugar in the cells and intestinal wall of the villus on an empty stomach, will make the stomach feel fuller as the sugar in fruits is processed and absorbed very rapidly by the body and intestinal cells (Diyāb & Qarqūz, 2013).

Among the effects of eating fruits after a heavy meal is that it can cause the fruit in the stomach to rot. The fruit has to wait for other food to be processed, which takes a long time (al-Khūrī, 2011). Therefore, the fruit consumed will not provide any nutritional benefits to the body; in fact, it can cause constipation and bloating. Moreover, fruit intake after eating meat, for example, will interfere with the process of protein metabolism (Ruwaitḥah, 2014).

Consumption of fruit after a meal is likened to consuming poison because the practice can cause damage to the amylase enzyme that catalyses the hydrolysis of starch into sugar (Org. Chem. Enzym. React., 2002). Therefore, the optimal method of fruit intake is to consume it before eating heavy foods to avoid any risk of starch deficiency. The practice of consuming dessert containing fruits is a less effective dietary habit because the body can not absorb the nutrients of the fruit properly (NurShafawati, 2015).

V. CONCLUSION

The correct method of eating fruits, based on the Islamic and scientific perspective, is to consume it prior to the consumption of heavy foods as it will maximise the nutrients absorbed. Fruits contain various nutrients such as vitamins A, B, C, D, E, K, potassium, sodium, calcium, fiber and many others. These nutrients help the digestive process, reduce risks of heart disease, osteomalacia, cancer and other illnesses. However, nutrients contained in fruits will not contribute positively to the body if the method of intake is incorrect. Scientific facts have shown that eating fruits after a heavy meal, as a form of dessert, is one of the causes of constipation and bloating. Moreover, it also increases risk of starch deficiency, disrupts the amylase enzyme and the metabolism. The proper way of fruit intake is by eating fruits before eating heavy meals, as stated in the Qur'an, and as taught by the Prophet SAW. The consumption of desserts containing fruits has a negative effect on the health of the body, as indicated in the findings of this study.

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