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NUTRITION REVIEW FROM THE INC SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Dates: Overview of an Emerging Medicinal Food

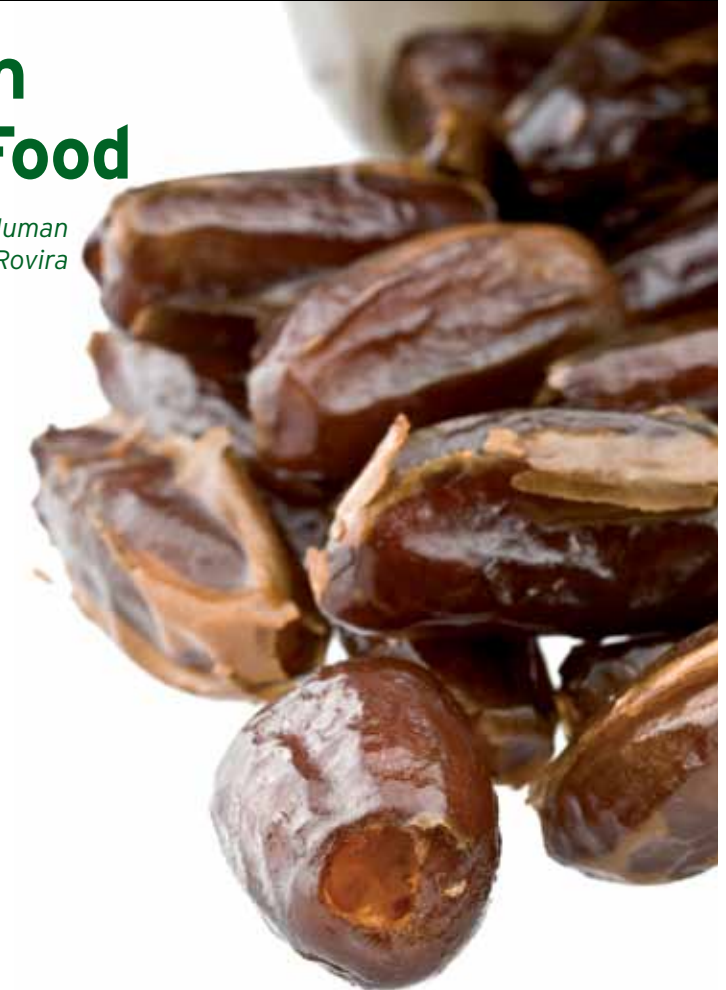
By Prof. Jordi Salas-Salvadó and Núria Ibarrola Jurado. Human Nutrition Unit, Department of Biochemistry & Biotechnology, Rovira i Virgili University, Reus, and CIBERobn, Instituto Carlos III.

Due to their nutritional and health benefits, it is recommended that fruit and vegetables should form the basis of our diet, with a minimum intake of five portions each day. There is plenty scientific evidence demonstrating that a balanced diet including a daily intake of fruits and vegetables helps to reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as coronary heart disease and some types of cancer. These beneficial effects on human health have been recognized in recent years because fruits and vegetables are very rich in different bioactive compounds that could act by different mechanism on human physiology. People think that only fresh fruits are healthy, however health benefits can be gained from fresh, canned (in natural juice), frozen, cooked, juiced, or dried fruits.

In recent years, nuts and fresh fruits have focused the attention of many researchers. In fact hundreds of studies have been conducted demonstrating the beneficial effects on health and disease prevention. However, few studies have been published in relation to dried fruits probably because its composition is little known.

Dried fruits such as dates, prunes, raisins and figs have a long tradition of use dating back to the fourth millennium BC in Mesopotamia, but also in ancient Egypt and Greek civilizations, and are prized because of its sweet taste, nutritive value, and long shelf life.

The date palm is one of man-kind's oldest cultivated fruits. There are more than 1,000 varieties of dates (i.e. Deglet Noor, Medjool, Fara'd) with different origins and nutritional compositions, and are widely consumed in many countries, particularly those within the Islamic world. However, little is known in relation to its nutritional properties. Recently, a systematic review has been published in one of the best reputed scientific journals on Food Sciences: "Critical Review on Food Science and Nutrition" entitled "Date Fruits (Phoenix dactylifera Linn): An Emerging Medicinal Food"¹. This is one of the first reviews focused



in dried fruits (in this case dates) analyzing the nutritional composition, its beneficial compounds, and the potential health effects that should be explored in the future.

Dates can be consumed in any of the 3 stages of maturity (Khalil, rutab or tamr), although the most common way to find them is dehydrated because their storage and transportation do not need additional processing². Strictly, date fruits are considered as semi-dried fruits because their nutritional properties are more similar to fresh fruits than other types of dried fruit.

Part of the beneficial effects on health arises from the effect of the bioactive components called phytochemicals. Date fruit is renowned for the