



Dates are nature's candy. Here's how to use them.

Reducing added sugar can have powerful benefits for heart health, blood sugar stability, and weight management, as studies show high intake is linked to conditions like diabetes and heart disease.

Fortunately, cutting back doesn't mean giving up on sweetness. Added sugars—those not naturally present in foods—go straight into the bloodstream without the fiber, vitamins, or minerals that slow absorption and sustain energy. Naturally occurring sugars in foods like dates, however, come bundled with fiber and nutrients, offering a balanced, nourishing way to satisfy your cravings and support overall well-being.

The U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend that added sugars make up less than 10% of daily calories, which is about 50 grams (around 12 teaspoons) for a typical 2,000-calorie diet. (Many experts recommend even less.) However, many Americans consume far more than this amount, often without realizing it. Hidden sugars lurk in many packaged foods, drinks, yogurts, and condiments. By reducing added sugars and focusing on naturally sweet foods like fruits, you can align more closely with these guidelines while still enjoying a satisfying level of sweetness.

“Dating” back thousands of years, dates are truly nature's candy, with a caramel-like sweetness that's hard to beat. These nutrient-dense fruits are packed with fiber, potassium, magnesium, and antioxidants like flavonoids, which have been linked to reduced inflammation and support for heart health. Studies show that dates have a lower glycemic impact than refined sugars, meaning they help keep blood sugar levels stable, thanks in part to their fiber content.

Medjool dates, known for their soft texture and rich flavor, are ideal for snacking or blending into smoothies, while smaller, firmer varieties like Deglet Noor add natural sweetness to both savory and sweet dishes without overpowering them.

Looking to work dates into your meals and snacks? Here are some delicious ways:

- **Pureed:** Boil whole dates for about 10 minutes. Rinse, cool, de-pit, and peel dates, then blend with a little water for a smooth, versatile puree you can spread, bake, drizzle, or mix. A few drops of vanilla extract make it even more special.
- **Blends:** Use this date puree to create healthier versions of pancake syrup and other sweeteners. Simply blend one part maple syrup with 2 parts date puree, thinned out with water to desired consistency.
- **Chopped:** Add chopped dates to oatmeal, salads, or a grain bowl for a chewy, sweet addition.
- **Smoothies:** Throw a couple of dates in the smoothie blender for natural sweetness and fiber.
- **Stuffed:** Split, de-pit, and stuff with almonds or walnuts for a quick treat.
- **Toss into energy bars, top a yogurt parfait, or try them in savory dishes where a hint of sweetness is just right.**

Dates are a simple, nutritious way to add sweetness without the sugar spikes. Next time you're looking for a natural sweetener, consider dates as your go-to.

Vegan Date-Sweetened Banana Bread



This better-for-you banana bread is made with whole grain flour and no added sugar, yet it tastes just as sweet and rich as traditional banana bread.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup Medjool dates, pitted and chopped
- 2 ripe bananas, mashed
- 1/3 cup olive oil or canola oil
- 2 tbsp ground flaxseed + 6 tbsp water (flax eggs)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1½ cups whole wheat flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp cinnamon (optional)
- ½ cup chopped walnuts or pecans (optional)

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C) and lightly grease a loaf pan. In a small bowl, combine ground flaxseed with water, stirring, and let sit for 5–10 minutes until it thickens (this is your flax egg). In another bowl, soak chopped dates in warm water for 10 minutes, then drain and blend into a paste with a small amount of the soaking water until smooth.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the dates, mashed bananas, oil, flax egg, and vanilla. Stir until well-mixed. Add the flour, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon (if using), stirring until just combined. Fold in the walnuts or pecans if using.

Pour the batter into the loaf pan and bake for 45–55 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean. Allow to cool before slicing.