

Dates: Relief of Pain



It is a long-established custom among Muslim parents to put a piece of well-chewed date (or other available sweet fruit) in the mouth of a newborn baby. Muslims do this following the practice of the Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, believing him to be, as the Quran says, sent as a healing and a mercy to mankind. We may infer from the way this custom originated that there is a virtue in it. There is - complimentary to the virtue and pleasure of following the Sunnah (the practice of the Prophet) - placing a 'sugary substance' inside the mouth of a new-born baby dramatically reduces pain sensation and heart rate.

An interesting scientific medical study, published in the British Medical Journal (No. 6993, 10 June 1995), proved beyond any doubt the benefit of giving a new-born child sugar, in order to reduce the feeling of any painful procedure like heel pricking for a blood sample or before circumcision.

The study, entitled 'The analgesic (pain killing) effect of sucrose in full term infants: a randomized controlled trial', was done by Nora Haouari, Christopher Wood, Gillian Griffiths and Malcolm Levene in the post-natal ward in the Leeds General Infirmary in England.

60 healthy infants of gestational age 37-42 weeks and postnatal age of 1-6 days, were randomized to receive 2ml of one of the four solutions: 12.5% sucrose, 25% sucrose, 50% sucrose, and sterile water (control).

The first group of 30 babies received sugar syrup before a routine blood test (heel pricking, which is usually painful) done to detect jaundice. The other 30 babies were given only sterile water as a control group.

Placing 2ml of a 25% or 50% sucrose solution on the tongue before pricking the heel significantly reduced the crying time, compared to babies who got water. Also, their heart rate returned to normal more quickly. The stronger sugar solution had the greater effect, crying being reduced further with increasing concentration of sucrose. From which we may conclude that

sucrose (sugar) placed on the tongue may be a useful and safe form of analgesia for use with newborn infants.

Blass and Hoffmeyer also showed that 12% solution of inter-oral sucrose significantly reduced the duration of crying in new-born babies subjected to heel pricking or circumcision. This study was reported in The Independent newspaper (Friday 9 June 1995) as well as in the British Medical Journal article.

The practice of the Prophet, upon him b piece, is recorded in the collections of his sayings and reports about him, of which the most revered are the two authentic collections of Al-Bukhari and Muslim:

Abu Buradah reported from Abu Musa, who said:

“I had a new-born baby; I took him to the Prophet Muhammad, who called him Ibrahim. The Prophet chewed a date then he took it and rubbed the inside of the baby’s mouth with it.”

There are many other reported incidents like this one.

The date contains a very high percentage of sugar (70-80%); it has both fructose and glucose which have high calorific values, it is easily and quickly digestible, and very helpful to the brain. The date contains 2.2% protein, vitamin A, vitamins B1, B2 and nicotinic acid (against Pellagra); it has traces of minerals needed for the body such as potassium, sodium, calcium, iron, manganese, copper. Potassium, of which percentage is very high, has been found to be very effective for cases of haemorrhage, such as the occasions of birth or circumcision.

We may note that the Sunnah also commends dates for the breaking of the fast in Ramadan. Dates should be eaten, if available, before the sunset prayer - this is medically and nutritionally the best way and the Sunnah.

The great worth of dates is also indicated in a famous and beautiful passage of the Quran, in chapter named Maryam, verses 25-6:

“And shake towards you the trunk of the palm-tree and it will drop on you fresh ripe dates. So eat and drink and be comforted.”

This was the prescription of God, the Creator, for the blessed Virgin Mary at the time of the birth of Jesus, the blessed Prophet of God. It was a prescription to make the delivery easy and comfortable.

As the authors of the medical study referred to intend trying new sugary or sweet substances, we shall recommend that they try dates for the newborn for the relief of pain.

“We shall show them our signs on the furthest horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is

the truth. Is it not sufficient that your Lord is witness over all things?” (Quran 41:53)