



GUIDE

Dates and Blood Sugar: What the Research Really Says

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IN THIS GUIDE

- 01 The short answer
- 02 What controlled trials measured
- 03 Glycemic index is only half the story
- 04 Pairing changes the curve
- 05 Who should talk to a clinician first
- 06 FAQ

By **Hassen Moumen** – Founder & Editor – Reviewed September 2026

Medical disclaimer. This article summarizes published nutrition research and is not individual medical advice.

Blood sugar management involves medications and conditions unique to each person – review any change in diet with your physician or a registered dietitian.

Dates are sweet, fiber-carrying, and confusing. Blog posts swing between “eat them freely, they’re low glycemic” and “they’re straight sugar, avoid them.” The research permits neither extreme. What controlled trials actually show is a moderate, measurable, portion-dependent effect – and the numbers behind that conclusion are specific enough to be worth writing down.

QUICK ANSWER

D a t e s h a v e a m o d e r a t e t o l o w e r g l y c e m i c r e s p o n s e
p o r t i o n s t h a n k s t o t h e i r f i b e r , b u t p o r t i o n s i z e
n o t m a n y .

The short answer

Published glycemic index (GI) values for dates cluster roughly between the mid-40s and the mid-50s for common varieties – the transition zone the ADA treats as low-to-moderate. On a per-fruit basis the total carbohydrate, and therefore the glycemic load, scales with size: a 24 g Medjool carries about 17 g of carbohydrate and a glycemic load near 8-9 per two dates, while a smaller Deglet Noor carries less. Managing dates is an exercise in portions and pairings, not one of outlawing the fruit.

What controlled trials measured

Four published studies establish the shape of the answer:

- **Miller et al. (2002), Saudi Arabia:** three varieties – Khalas at 35.5, Barhi at 49.7, and Bo ma'an at 30.5 – GI measured in healthy subjects.
- **Ali et al. (2009), Oman:** values across varieties in the range of 47.6-57.7, reinforcing the moderate band.
- **Alkaabi et al. (2011), the largest controlled trial:** five varieties tested in both healthy and diabetic subjects; GI 46.3-55.1 in healthy subjects and 46.1-54.0 in diabetic subjects, with no significant postprandial glucose excursion after two servings of three dates each.
- **AlGeffari et al. (2016):** 17 Saudi varieties averaged 55.2, ranging 42.8-74.6 – Medjool at 43.4 and Ajwa at 42.8 sit near the low end, with a few cultivars crossing into the moderate-high band.

Two details matter before you quote any single number. First, method matters: studies use different carbohydrate loads, different numbers of fruits, and different subject groups, so exact figures vary even for the same variety. Second, the range is real: 42.8 to 74.6 is a wide spread, and variety choice genuinely matters more than most articles acknowledge. A 2023 review of the glycemic-index literature converges on the same band – GI

roughly 42.8-74.6 and GL 8.5-24 – which is where the honest summaries sit.

Glycemic index is only half the story

GI ranks foods by how fast a fixed carbohydrate portion raises glucose; it ignores how much carbohydrate actually lands on the plate. Glycemic load (GL) corrects for that – $GL = GI \times \text{carbohydrate per serving} / 100$ – and for dates the per-fruit carbohydrate is what drives real-world effect.

Two medium Medjools (about 48 g of fruit, roughly 34 g of carbohydrate) carry a GL of about 8-9 – a low single-serving load. The same count of larger Medjools, or doubled servings, climbs the table quickly because the load rises with fruit size, not with the variety's GI. Smaller, firmer varieties such as Deglet Noor naturally produce lower loads per piece.

Pairing changes the curve

Eating dates with protein and fat – nuts, yogurt, cheese – slows carbohydrate absorption and flattens the response, the same way it does for any carbohydrate food. The American Diabetes Association's food-label guidance treats glycemic index as a relative tool, not a standalone rule, and the [National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases](#) emphasizes the same whole-diet framing for meals generally. If the pairing question is really about which fruit to keep on hand, our [date storage guide](#) covers how long each variety keeps once you've chosen.

Who should talk to a clinician first

If you take insulin or sulfonylureas, change carbohydrate loads with a dosing plan in hand – a shift in fruit intake is still a shift in carbohydrates. For most people with well-managed prediabetes or type 2 diabetes, two to three dates paired with protein is a measured, evidence-supported choice, not a gamble. This is the framing the [American Diabetes Association's glycemic index explainer](#) uses, and it is the one I'm comfortable standing behind. For variety-level comparisons beyond the glycemic table, the [Medjool buying guide](#) and [Barhi guide](#) go deeper on the two ends of the range.

FAQ

What is the glycemic index of dates?

Published values across varieties and studies sit roughly between the mid-40s and the mid-50s for common varieties. Alkaabi et al. reported 46.3-55.1 across five varieties; Medjool measured 43.4 and Ajwa 42.8 in the AlGeffari et al. trial – both below the ADA’s “low GI” threshold of 55.

How many dates can a person with diabetes eat?

Two to three dates as part of a meal, or paired with protein and fat, is the serving most frequently studied – the one Alkaabi et al. tested in subjects with diabetes. Treat it as a starting conversation with your endocrinologist or dietitian rather than a target.

Which date variety has the lowest glycemic index?

Among tested cultivars, Ajwa measured 42.8 and Medjool 43.4 – the low end – while some varieties reached the mid-70s. Per piece and per gram, drier, smaller varieties such as Deglet Noor carry less total carbohydrate, so glycemic load is lower even where GI looks similar.

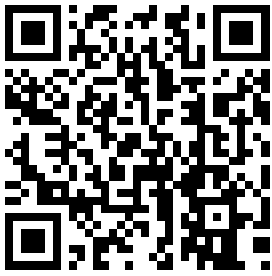
Choosing a date by what you actually need?

Compare per-variety nutrition and texture side by side in our [Medjool](#) and [Deglet Noor](#) guides, then let the Date Finder narrow the field.

[Start the Date Finder](#)

Source: Misl:ler et al., Saudi Medical Journal 2002; International Journal of Nutrition; Alkaabi et al., NutriAlGeffari et al. 2011; 2016 (17 S American Diabetes NADSD; USDA FoodData; Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Nutrition Source

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