



## With dates, you can keep the sweet, lose the processed sugar - Chocolate-Almond Quinoa Bars -

*By: Melissa d'Arabian*

*May 26, 2015*

After spending a semester of my sophomore year of college studying abroad, I headed to Tunisia for a week of solo reflection.

(Note to my daughters: According to your father, you will not be allowed to do this until you are at least 30. Same goes for dating.)

I arrived in Tunis — way back in 1989 — toward the end of Ramadan, and the sweetest dates I'd ever tasted were everywhere. Even as a tourist, I was offered dates at nearly every meal — roasted and doused with herbed honeys, or dried and served with mixed nuts as a mid-afternoon snack. I fell in love with them.

Since then, dates have become far more common in the U.S. That's partly because people have discovered they make a great natural, unprocessed sweetener.

The most common version of dates you'll see at your local grocer is the California medjool date, a large, barely-wrinkled plump variety. Dates are delicious and indulgent to eat just on their own, but you also can blend them into smoothies (instead of bananas) for a sweet creaminess. Or pry them open, pop out the pits and fill them with a spoonful of nut butter (you even can freeze them like this!).

Want a savory snack? Do the same stuffing routine, but use a pungent cheese (something blue is nice), and serve with a glass of wine.

When I indulge my sweet tooth, I like there to be a nutritional payoff along with the treat. Dates fit the bill perfectly. Clearly, dates are naturally incredibly sweet, to the tune of about 16 grams of sugar per date. But they also bring other nutrients to the table, including 1.5 grams of fiber, B vitamins, potassium and other minerals.

### CHOCOLATE-ALMOND QUINOA BARS

Total time: 1 hour

Makes 12 servings



1 cup raw almonds, chopped  
1/2 cup whole flax seeds  
1/2 cup raw quinoa, rinsed and drained  
1 cup packed, pitted medjool dates  
2 tablespoons almond butter  
3 tablespoons warm water  
1/3 cup chopped bittersweet chocolate (or chopped bittersweet chocolate chips)  
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

**Preparation:**

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Line an 8-by-8-inch baking dish with kitchen parchment, letting it hang over the sides.

Combine the almonds, flax seeds and quinoa on a rimmed baking sheet. Toast in the oven, stirring every 3 minutes, until well toasted and fragrant, 10 to 14 minutes. Let cool completely. Lower the oven to 200 degrees.

Meanwhile, in a food processor combine the dates, almond butter and water. Process until smooth. You may need to scrape down the sides several times during processing. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl. Once the almond-quinoa mixture is cooled, stir them into the date mixture, along with the chocolate and salt.

Using wet fingers, press the mixture firmly into the parchment-lined baking dish. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the bars are no longer sticky. Let cool completely, then use the parchment to lift out of the pan and cut into 12 bars. Bars can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 2 weeks.

---

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget. She is the author of the "Supermarket Healthy" cookbook. <http://www.melissadarabian.net>