

DESHI MIX

BY SALINA PARVIN



The joy of jaggery

Winter is here in all its glory. We are experiencing a pleasant weather with a cool breeze and nice sunny afternoons. The season is synonymous with some signature specialty foods, especially sweets. A key ingredient in most winter delicacies form pitha, shondesh to payesh, and everything in between, is gur or jaggery.

It would be wrong to assume that jaggery is popular only in Bangladesh, or Bengal. It serves as a special ingredient in many popular dishes prepared throughout South and Southeast Asia.

Jaggery typically comes from the sap of palm trees or sugarcane juice. The sago palm and coconut palm are also now tapped to produce jaggery in Southern India and Sri Lanka, along with the traditional date palm in Bangladesh.

HOW IT'S MADE

Jaggery is made using a traditional method of pressing and distilling palm or cane juice, through a 3-step process.

Extraction: The palms or canes are pressed to extract the sweet juice or sap.

Clarification: The juice is allowed to stand in large containers so that any sediment settles to the bottom. It is then strained to produce a clean liquid.

Concentration: The juice is placed in a very large, flat bottomed pan and boiled. During this process, the jaggery is stirred and impurities skimmed off the top until only a yellow, dough-like paste remains. This 'dough' is then transferred to moulds or containers, where it cools and forms what we know as jaggery. The colour can range from light golden to dark brown. This is important, since the colour and texture are used to grade the jaggery.

NUTRITION VALUE

Jaggery contains more nutrients than refined sugar because of its molasses con-

tent. Molasses is a nutritious by-product of the sugar making process, which is usually removed when making refined sugar. Molasses adds plenty of micronutrients to the final product.

The exact nutrition profile of this sweetener can vary, depending on the type of the plant used to make it (palm or cane). According to one



source, 100 grams of jaggery may contain --
383 calories
65-85g sucrose
10-15g fructose and glucose
0.4g protein
0.1g fat
Iron: 11mg or 61 percent of the Reference Daily Intake (RDI)
Magnesium: 70-90 gm, or about 20 percent of the RDI



zinc, phosphorus and copper.

HEALTH BENEFITS

It prevents constipation by aiding digestion. It activates the digestive enzymes, which in turn aides in digestion. This is one of the reasons why people prefer eating jaggery after a meal. Loaded with antioxidants and minerals like zinc and selenium, which help prevent free-radicals; jaggery helps boost resistance against infections, hence building stronger immunity.

It acts as a detox, as it helps cleanse the liver by flushing out toxins from the body.

Eating a piece of jaggery daily can help women combat

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) symptoms, including mood swings, menstrual cramps and abdominal pain. Jaggery acts as a natural sweetener and provides energy over an extended period of time. It is however suggested that jaggery be consumed in moderation, as it is slightly higher in calories, containing up to 4 kcal/grams.

People who are diabetic, or following a weight loss regimen, should monitor their consumption of jaggery as it can lead to weight gain and fluctuations in blood-sugar levels.

Potassium: 1050 gm or 30 percent of the RDI

Manganese: 0.2 - 0.5 mg or 10-20 percent of the RDI

However, keep in mind that this is a 'per 100g' serving, which is much higher than you would generally eat at once. You would probably consume closer to a tablespoon (20 grams) or a teaspoon (7 grams).

Jaggery also contains small amounts of vitamin B and minerals, including calcium,

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

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