



NATURAL SOLUTIONS

Clinical Kinesiology, Acupuncture, & (w)Holistic Healthcare

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Brief History of Food Dehydration

Dehydration is one of the oldest methods of food preservation known to man. Primitive civilizations throughout the world first dehydrated grasses, berries, roots, meat and fish by putting them in the sun to dry. Dehydration allowed man to exist through long periods of drought or freezing winters when food was scarce. The high nutritional value and light weight of dehydrated food allowed early peoples to carry provisions and to travel and explore, as they searched for additional food sources.

The development of agriculture was the single, decisive factor that made it possible for mankind to settle in permanent communities and transition from hunter-gatherers. Farming eliminated the continual need to search for food and allowed populations to grow via more stable food supplies. Some of the first ancient stable, settled civilizations arose in Mesopotamia and Egypt in the Middle East. Several thousand years ago, these ancient people dried fruits and grains and preserved fish and meat with salt and sun. Storage and preservation of harvested food was an important factor in the growth of these civilizations. In particular, solar dehydration worked well in ancient Egypt because of its hot, arid climate.

Sun and salt were some of the basic components of food dehydration until the late 1700's. Approximately 1795 the French developed a dehydration unit that successfully dried fruit and vegetables at a controlled temperature and via continuous circulating air flows. In the early 1900's, natural draft dehydrators were created. These early dehydrators were designed with fire pits on the bottom of the device and exhaust vents at the top. As the fire heated the air, it was carried upwards creating the critical air flow and low humidity that is essential for dehydration.

Modern dehydration techniques have been largely stimulated by the advantages dehydration gives in compactness; on the average, dehydrated food has about 1/15 the bulk of the original product. The need to transport large shipments of food over great distances during [World War II](#) provided much of the stimulus to perfect dehydration processes. The advantages of reduced bulk later came to be appreciated by campers and backpackers and also by relief agencies which provide food in times of emergency and disaster.

Dehydration equipment is available in various forms and includes tunnel driers, kiln driers, cabinet driers, vacuum driers, solar driers, and others. Compact equipment suitable for home use is also available. A basic focus of design is to shorten the drying time which helps retain the inherent characteristics of the food product. Drying under [vacuum](#) is especially beneficial to fruits and vegetables. [Freeze-drying](#) benefits heat-sensitive products by dehydrating in the frozen state without intermediate thaw. Freeze-drying of meat yields a product of excellent stability which, when rehydrated, closely resembles fresh meat.

The [dairy](#) industry is one of the largest commercial processors of dehydrated food, producing quantities of whole milk, [skim milk](#), buttermilk, and eggs. Many [dairy products](#) are spray dried—that is, atomized into a fine mist that is brought into contact with hot air, causing an almost instant removal of moisture content. See also [food preservation](#).