

# Frontiers in Natural Product Chemistry



Editor:  
Shazia Anjum



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# **Frontiers in Natural Product Chemistry**

*(Volume 12)*

Edited by

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## CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	i
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS .....	ii
<b>CHAPTER 1 THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF FLAVANONES AGAINST SARS-COV-2</b> .....	1
<i>Asmaa I. Owis</i>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>MATERIALS AND METHODS</b> .....	3
<b>CHEMISTRY AND OCCURRENCE OF FLAVANONES</b> .....	4
<b>ABSORPTION, AND METABOLISM OF FLAVANONE GLYCOSIDES VERSUS THEIR     AGLYCONES</b> .....	5
<b>FLAVANONES EFFECT ON SARS-COV-2</b> .....	6
Direct Antiviral Effects .....	6
Indirect Antiviral Effects .....	7
<b>ANTI-SARS-COV-2 ACTIVITY OF FLAVANONES</b> .....	8
Hesperidin and its Aglycone Hesperitin .....	8
Naringin and Naringenin .....	10
Miscellaneous Flavanones .....	11
<b>STRUCTURE-ACTIVITY RELATIONSHIP (SAR)</b> .....	13
<b>METABOLISM AND EXPOSURE</b> .....	14
<b>CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES</b> .....	15
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	15
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	16
<b>CHAPTER 2 CHEMICAL DIVERSITY AND BIOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES OF MARINE FUNGI OF GENERA ASPERGILLUS</b> .....	21
<i>Supriya Tilvi, Avinash S. Awashank, Keisham S. Singh and Abhay B. Fulke</i>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	22
<b>ASPERGILLUS ASSOCIATED WITH INVERTEBRATES</b> .....	23
Sponges .....	23
Soft Coral .....	29
Sea fans and Tunicates .....	31
Sea Anemone, Sea Cucumber and Sea Urchin .....	32
Mussels .....	33
Gorgonians .....	35
<b>ASPERGILLUS ASSOCIATED WITH PLANTS</b> .....	37
Algae .....	37
.....	40
Mangrove Plants .....	42
<b>ASPERGILLUS ASSOCIATED WITH ENVIRONMENT</b> .....	47
Sediment .....	47
4.2. Sea Water and Fishes .....	54
<b>OTHER SOURCES</b> .....	55
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	57
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	63
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	63
<b>CHAPTER 3 SENSORY ANALYSIS OF VIRGIN OLIVE OIL</b> .....	79
<i>Muhammad E. Elsorady</i>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	79
<b>OLIVE OIL DESIGNATIONS AND DEFINITIONS</b> .....	80

Olive Oils .....	81
<i>VOOs</i> .....	81
<i>ROO</i> .....	81
<i>OO composed of ROO and VOOs</i> .....	81
OPO .....	82
<i>COPO</i> .....	82
<i>ROPO</i> .....	82
<i>OPO composed of ROPO and VOOs</i> .....	82
<b>ORGANOLEPTIC ASSESSMENT OF VOO</b> .....	83
Basic vocabularies for organoleptic assessment are shown in Table 2 according to the IOC standard [5]. .....	83
Specific vocabulary for VOO is according to the International olive council [6] .....	86
<i>Defects</i> .....	86
<i>Other Defects</i> .....	87
<i>Positive Attributes</i> .....	88
Oil-Tasting Glass .....	89
Test Room .....	90
3.4.1. <i>General Specification for Installation</i> .....	90
<i>Description of Booths</i> .....	91
Accessors and Materials .....	92
Panel Leader and Tasters .....	92
<i>Panel Leader</i> .....	92
<i>Deputy Panel Leader</i> .....	95
<i>Tasters (Assessors)</i> .....	95
TEST CONDITIONS .....	95
<i>Sample Presentation</i> .....	95
<i>Sample Temperature</i> .....	95
<i>Time of the Test</i> .....	96
<i>Assessors: General Basics</i> .....	96
Sensory Analysis Procedure and VOO Classification .....	96
<i>Technique of Tasting</i> .....	96
<i>Use of Assessors for Profile Sheet</i> .....	98
<i>Data Usage by the Panel Leader</i> .....	98
<i>Oil Classification</i> .....	99
<i>Approval and Disapproval Criteria Of Duplicates</i> .....	99
<i>The Declared Category Verification</i> .....	100
<i>Calculating Methods for Median and Confidence Intervals.</i> .....	100
<b>METHOD FOR THE ORGANOLEPTIC ASSESSMENT OF EVOO APPLYING TO USE A DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN (D.O.)</b> .....	101
<b>VARIABLES AFFECTING SENSORY QUALITY VOO</b> .....	103
Cultivar (Genetic Factor): .....	104
Ecological and Cultivation Factors .....	104
<i>Healthy Olive Processing</i> .....	104
<i>Olive Fruits Maturity</i> .....	104
<i>Olive Harvest and Storage</i> .....	104
Milling Conditions .....	104
<i>Olive Washing and Removing Leaves</i> .....	104
<i>Milling</i> .....	105
<i>Malaxation</i> .....	105
<i>Systems of Oil Separation</i> .....	105
<i>Oil Storage</i> .....	106

CONCLUSION .....	106
REFERENCES .....	106
<b>CHAPTER 4 PROMISING THERAPEUTIC APPROACH OF DIETARY MELATONIN ON HUMAN HEALTH .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<i>A.S. Zarena</i>	
INTRODUCTION .....	110
PRODUCTION OF MELATONIN .....	111
MELATONIN RECEPTORS .....	114
MELATONIN EXCRETION .....	115
DIETARY MELATONIN SUPPLEMENT .....	116
ANALYTICAL TOOLS IN DETECTING MELATONIN IN FOOD PRODUCTS .....	121
PHYSIOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF MELATONIN .....	122
Melatonin And Circadian Rhythm .....	124
GENETIC OF CIRCADIAN RHYTHM AND REGULATION .....	126
AUTISM .....	128
NEURODEGENERATIVE DISEASES .....	129
ANTI-CANCER ACTIVITY .....	132
OBESITY AND DIABETES .....	134
CARDIOVASCULAR PROTECTION .....	136
REPRODUCTION AND MENSTRUATION .....	139
ANTIOXIDANT .....	142
NANOPARTICLE AND OTHER METAL TOXICITY .....	143
TISSUE INJURY, PAIN AND AGING .....	145
BLOOD PRESSURE .....	147
INSOMNIA .....	148
STRESS .....	149
IMMUNE SYSTEM .....	150
EXERCISE .....	151
VIRAL DISEASE .....	152
OSTEOPOROSIS PREVENTION .....	154
GUT MICROBIOTA AND LIVER .....	156
AGE RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION AND BLINDNESS .....	159
ACUTE DERMATITIS .....	160
ADVERSE EFFECTS OF MELATONIN SUPPLEMENT .....	161
CONCLUSION .....	162
REFERENCES .....	163
<b>CHAPTER 5 TEA MADE FROM CAMELLIA SINENSIS: AN UP-TO-DATE REVIEW OF CHEMISTRY AND HEALTH BENEFITS .....</b>	<b>183</b>
<i>Chandrika Ravi, Nithya Ramesh, Shrila Banerjee, Sharanya K., Payas Salim and Abul Kalam Azad Mandal</i>	
INTRODUCTION .....	184
TYPES OF TEA AND CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF TEA LEAVES .....	184
ABSORPTION AND BIOAVAILABILITY .....	185
METABOLISM .....	186
TISSUE DISTRIBUTION .....	186
GREEN TEA POLYPHENOLS .....	187
Physical Properties of EGCG .....	189
Isolation of Natural EGCG from Tea .....	189
Chemical Synthesis of EGCG .....	190
Biosynthesis of EGCG .....	192

Analytical Methods to Determine EGCG .....	192
Pharmacokinetics of EGCG .....	193
Side Effects and Toxicity of EGCG .....	194
Health Benefits of EGCG .....	194
<i>Antioxidant Effects of EGCG</i> .....	194
<i>EGCG against Obesity</i> .....	195
<i>EGCG against Neurological Disorders</i> .....	196
<i>EGCG against Diabetes</i> .....	197
<i>EGCG against Cardiovascular Disease</i> .....	197
<i>EGCG Against Cancer</i> .....	198
<i>Anti-Microbial Effects of EGCG</i> .....	199
Health Benefits of ECG .....	199
<i>Anticancer Activity of ECG</i> .....	199
<i>Antiobesity Activity of ECG</i> .....	200
<i>Protection Against Heart Diseases by ECG</i> .....	200
<i>Antibiotic Properties of ECG</i> .....	201
Health Benefits of EGC .....	201
Health Benefits of EC .....	201
<b>BLACK TEA POLYPHENOLS</b> .....	202
Physical Properties of Theaflavins .....	202
Biosynthesis and Structure of Theaflavins .....	203
Side Effects and Toxicity of Theaflavins .....	204
Health Benefits of Theaflavins .....	204
<i>Theaflavins against Cancer</i> .....	204
<i>Hepatoprotective Effects of Theaflavins</i> .....	205
<i>Theaflavins against Neurological Disorders</i> .....	205
<i>Regulation of Gut Microbial Population by Theaflavins</i> .....	205
<i>Antioxidant Effects of Theaflavins</i> .....	206
<i>Cardioprotective Effects of Theaflavins</i> .....	206
<i>Theaflavins against Osteoporosis</i> .....	207
<b>NON-PROTEIN AMINO COMPOUND OF TEA</b> .....	207
Physical Properties of L-Theanine .....	208
L-Theanine Isolation from Tea .....	208
Chemical Synthesis of L-Theanine .....	209
Biosynthesis of L-Theanine .....	209
Analytical Methods to Determine L-Theanine .....	210
Pharmacokinetics of L-Theanine .....	210
Side Effects and Toxicity of L-Theanine .....	210
Health Benefits of L-Theanine .....	211
<i>L-Theanine against Neurological Disorder</i> .....	211
<i>Effects of L-Theanine on Anxiety/Sleep</i> .....	211
<i>Improvement in Alertness and Learning Ability</i> .....	212
<i>Protection of Neuronal Health</i> .....	212
<i>L-Theanine against Cancer</i> .....	213
<i>Hepatoprotective Effects of L-Theanine</i> .....	213
<i>L-Theanine's Effect on Immune System</i> .....	214
<i>L-Theanine Against Vascular Diseases</i> .....	214
<i>L-Theanine Against Obesity</i> .....	215
<i>L-Theanine Against Gastric Ulcer</i> .....	215
<i>L-Theanine Effect on Human Embryonic Stem Cells (hESCs)</i> .....	215
<i>L-Theanine on Reduction of Menstrual Discomfort</i> .....	215

<b>THEOBROMINE</b> .....	215
Physical and Chemical Properties of Theobromine .....	215
Health Benefits of Theobromine .....	216
<b>QUERCETIN</b> .....	216
Physical and Chemical Properties of Quercetin .....	217
Adverse Effects of Quercetin .....	217
Health Benefits of Quercetin .....	217
<i>Quercetin Against COVID-19</i> .....	217
<i>Quercetin Against Cancer</i> .....	217
<i>Quercetin Against Neurological Disorders</i> .....	218
<i>Cardioprotective Effects of Quercetin</i> .....	218
<b>GABA</b> .....	218
Physical and Chemical Characteristics of GABA .....	219
Sources of GABA .....	219
Plant Production of GABA .....	220
Advantages of GABA-enriched Diet for Health .....	220
<i>Neuroprotection</i> .....	220
<i>Prevention of Insomnia</i> .....	221
<i>Anti-depressant</i> .....	221
<i>Anti-hypertension</i> .....	222
<i>Anti-diabetic</i> .....	222
<i>Anti-inflammatory</i> .....	222
<i>Additional Health Benefits</i> .....	223
<b>CAFFEINE</b> .....	223
Absorption and Bioavailability of Caffeine .....	223
Side Effects of Caffeine .....	224
Health Benefits of Caffeine .....	225
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	226
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	226
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	226
<b>SUBJECT INDEX</b> .....	261

## PREFACE

Natural products continue to occupy a central position in contemporary research based on their profound implications for human health and nutrition. Advances in analytical techniques, molecular biology, and interdisciplinary approaches have expanded our understanding of how foods and natural metabolites influence physiological processes, therapeutic outcomes, and quality of life. This book, “**Frontiers in Natural Product Chemistry Volume 12,**” brings together diverse yet complementary perspectives that collectively highlight the chemical diversity, sensory attributes, and biological activities of natural products originating from terrestrial, marine, and dietary sources.

The first chapter establishes the importance of organoleptic evaluation as a cornerstone of virgin olive oil quality assessment. By detailing International Olive Council (IOC)–based methodologies, panel testing procedures, and the classification of virgin olive oils, this chapter underscores how sensory science bridges consumer perception with objective quality control. It sets the foundation for understanding food quality not merely as a chemical construct, but as a multidimensional attribute shaped by sensory, environmental, and processing factors.

Expanding beyond terrestrial food systems, the chapter on the chemical diversity and biological activities of marine fungi of the genus *Aspergillus* explores their remarkable adaptability. By surveying two decades of research, this contribution highlights marine *Aspergillus* as a prolific source of bioactive compounds with significant pharmaceutical potential, emphasizing the untapped promise of marine ecosystems in drug discovery.

The third chapter provides a comprehensive overview of melatonin biosynthesis, circadian regulation, and its presence in foods of plant and animal origin. By linking dietary intake to physiological modulation of serum melatonin levels, this chapter integrates nutrition, chronobiology, and health sciences, offering insight into how dietary strategies may complement therapeutic interventions.

The fourth chapter of this volume examines the complex chemistry of tea in relation to processing methods and health outcomes. This chapter presents an in-depth discussion of catechins, theaflavins, L-theanine, and other phytochemicals, illustrating how biochemical transformations during fermentation influence both nutritional value and therapeutic efficacy.

Finally, the fifth chapter addresses an urgent global health challenge by evaluating flavanones as promising antiviral agents. Through a critical analysis of their chemistry, mechanisms of action, and structure–activity relationships, this contribution bridges natural product chemistry with modern pharmacological and computational approaches aimed at combating emerging viral diseases.

This volume is intended to serve as a valuable resource for researchers, academicians, and professionals in food science, biotechnology, pharmacognosy, and related disciplines, fostering cross-disciplinary dialogue and inspiring future research on natural product-based health solutions. I express my profound thanks to the entire editorial team, including Mr. Mahmood Alam, for their diligent work.

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## CHAPTER 1

# Therapeutic Potential of Flavanones against SARS-CoV-2

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**Abstract:** The emergence of SARS-CoV-2 in late 2019 and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted an urgent global demand for developing potent antiviral therapies with minimal side effects. Despite advances in current treatments, they remain limited and non-specific medications. Natural phytochemicals, particularly flavanones, a subclass of flavonoids with diverse biological properties, have emerged as promising antiviral candidates. This review explores flavanones' potential against SARS-CoV-2, focusing on their chemistry, occurrence, mechanism of action, key active compounds, challenges to their application, and structure-activity relationships (SARs). A comprehensive literature review was conducted using multiple electronic databases, including Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect. Evidence from previous computational, cellular, and animal models underscores flavanones' multifaceted mechanisms, including direct viral enzyme inhibition and immunomodulation to mitigate cytokine storms. Flavanones such as hesperidin, naringin, and their aglycones exhibit significant potential for combating the COVID-19 pandemic, though challenges such as poor solubility and insufficient clinical data remain. SAR insights showed how structural modifications, specifically glycosylation, could enhance potency and bioavailability. These findings could position flavanones as valuable scaffolds for developing novel anti-COVID-19 agents and optimizing current therapeutic protocols. Further studies are warranted to transform these research insights into clinical applications.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Flavanones, Hesperidin, Hesperetin, *In silico*, *In vitro*, *In vivo*, Naringin, Naringenin, SARS-CoV-2, Structure-activity relationship.

## INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, the coronavirus disease first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019, spread throughout the country and subsequently achieved global pandemic

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status, impacting around 210 territories within a few weeks. SARS-CoV-2, the causative pathogen of COVID-19, was recognized as a single-stranded RNA virus of the beta-coronavirus genus that is phylogenetically related to SARS-CoV. Infected patients may experience an acute and progressive respiratory condition, which can be fatal following massive alveolar impairment and subsequent respiratory failure [1]. As confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO) situation report on 8th November 2023, the virus had caused approximately 771,820,937 COVID-19 cases globally, including 6,978,175 deaths. The groups at the highest risk for severe COVID-19 outcomes include older adults and those with underlying chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and cancers (The, 2020). Historical epidemics such as the 2002 SARS-CoV outbreaks in Guangdong, China, and the 2012 Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) outbreak in Saudi Arabia have demonstrated their high CoVs lethality (Schoeman & Fielding, 2019; Zhong *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, a response is desperately needed globally for an effective drug against this pandemic disease. At present, there is no globally approved therapy for COVID-19.

Nevertheless, several protocols were applied, such as azithromycin, chloroquine derivatives, and convalescent plasma, in addition to widely applicable antiviral drugs. Favipiravir and remdesivir, as inhibitors of RNA polymerase, have been evaluated in recent clinical trials. However, systematic reviews did not show significant efficacy against COVID-19 [2].

In early drug discovery, plants were the main source of medicines. The WHO encourages the integration of traditional herbal remedies for the treatment of chronic ailments, especially in developing nations [3]. Several *in silico* studies have pointed out the potential of plant-derived natural products as antiviral agents. Flavonoids, a diverse class of phytochemicals commonly found in many dietary fruits and vegetables, have demonstrated valuable pharmacological actions, including antiviral effects. Such compounds exert their antiviral effect by interfering with essential steps of replication and infection. Among them, the major subclass, flavanones, have shown promising activity against SARS-CoV-2 [2].

Given the continuing global impact of COVID-19 and the urgent need for accessible antiviral options, naturally occurring flavonoids, particularly flavanones, have gained attention for their potential to modulate key viral and host mechanisms. This review, therefore, focuses on summarizing current experimental and computational evidence for flavanones as potential anti-SAR-CoV-2 agents. It was conducted using literature published till December 2024. The main evaluated outcomes include chemistry, inhibitory potencies, selectivity, cytotoxicity indices, mechanistic pathways, and translational prospects.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Of 753 records identified, 121 duplicates were removed; 684 titles/abstracts were screened; 211 full texts were assessed; and 56 studies were included (Fig. 1). Records were screened first by title/abstract and then by full text, to include studies assessing flavanones' antiviral or mechanistic activity. Data on compound, model type, potency, and cytotoxicity were extracted using a standardized template. Docking-only studies were analyzed separately from *in vitro* and *in vivo* data to avoid bias. Study quality was appraised using modified SYRCLE and GRADE criteria, focusing on design, controls, and reporting clarity.

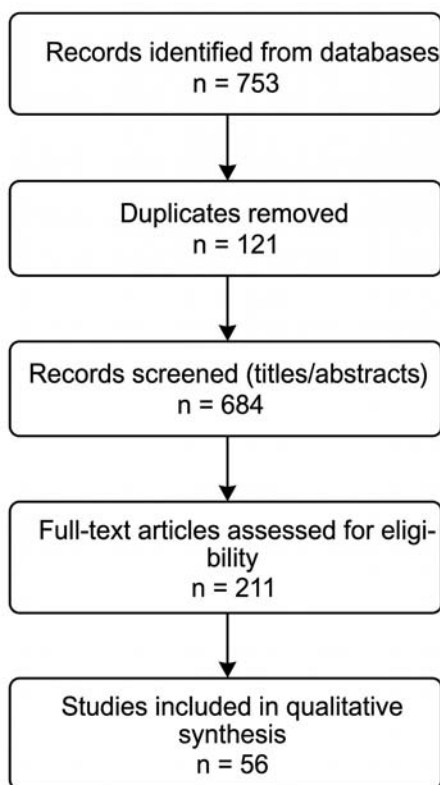


Fig. (1). PRISMA flow diagram summarizing database search and study selection.

A comprehensive search was performed using three electronic databases, including Web of Science, PubMed, and Scopus, until 2024. The applied search strategy used the following query: (SARS OR COVID-19 OR coronavirus [in abstract/title]) AND (extract OR plant OR herb OR flavonoids OR phytochemicals OR flavanones [all fields]). Additionally, the names of common flavanones, such as hesperetin, hesperidin, naringin, naringenin, bailalein, and

## CHAPTER 2

## Chemical Diversity and Biological Activities of Marine Fungi of Genera *Aspergillus*

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**Abstract:** In the marine environment, it is estimated that numerous fungal species on our planet range from 1.5-5.0 million, however, to date, only 10% of fungi have been identified. In the marine ecosystem, the most widely found fungi belong to *Aspergillus* genus. Apart, from the coastal ecosystem and open-ocean, fungi are also found in the deep sea and demonstrated the ability to adapt to extreme environmental conditions. Marine fungi have developed chemical defenses for their survival to combat extreme conditions like variations in pressure, temperature, salinity, desiccation, and pH, resulting in the production of chemically diverse scaffolds. Different strains of genus *Aspergillus* settle on various marine substrates like fauna (sponge, softcoral, tunicates, fish *etc.*), plants (algae), and with the environment (sediments, seawater), have been known to produce numerous secondary metabolites. Bioactive compounds, namely, butyrolactones & terrein (anti-inflammatory), kojic acid (skin whitening agent), pyrrolidinedione, AD0157 (angiosuppressive), asperxanthone (Antiviral), aspergiolide A (cytotoxic), methylhydroquinone (antibacterial), *etc.* from marine *Aspergillus* make them a valuable source for pharmaceutical applications. This chapter gives a comprehensive survey of metabolites isolated from marine *Aspergillus* in the last two decades beginning from 2001, including their occurrence, structural information and biological activities.

**Keywords:** *Aspergillus*, Bioactivity, Invertebrates, Marine fungi, Marine natural products.

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Shazia Anjum (Ed.)

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## INTRODUCTION

*Aspergillus* is a genus of filamentous fungi that belongs to the Phylum Ascomycota, Class Eurotiomycetes and Order Eurotiales. Aspergilli have a world-wide distribution, are ubiquitous and can adapt and grow in various conditions at varying temperatures, salinity, nutrients, etc. In terms of species number, *Aspergillus* represents the most abundant genera of filamentous fungi reported from marine contexts [1]. Different species of *Aspergillus* fungi are generally conveyed in marine conditions from intense ocean to polar ice covers. *Aspergillus* fungi have been found in nearly every marine habitat like sessile and mobile invertebrates [2], and marine mammals [3], algae [4], driftwood [5], sediments [6], the water column [7], ranging from surface waters to the deep sea. In situations of nutrient depletion, competition, or other types of metabolic stresses, marine fungi promote the formation and secretion of various secondary metabolites. Marine fungi have been estimated to be greater than 10,000 marine fungal species belonging to the Ascomycota and Basidiomycota phyla. *Aspergillus* sp. was first described in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and 339 species have been reported worldwide, categorized into four subgenera (*Aspergillus*, *Circumdati*, *Fumigati*, and *Nidulantes*) and 20 sections [8]. Marine fungi belonging to genus *Aspergillus* are excellent producers of large number of bioactive secondary metabolites like terpenes, alkaloids, peptides, etc., that have gained industrial and therapeutic importance [9,10]. Varieties of chemical scaffolds like fatty acids, peptides, sterols, alkaloids and terpenoids isolated by a marine *Aspergillus* fungi fungus show potent pharmacological activities like antimicrobial, cytotoxicity, insecticidal, neuroprotective, antiviral and antioxidant activities have been reported [11,12]. The blue biotechnology industry has been using marine organisms to find compounds of therapeutic uses. The marine environment is covered with a huge biomass of microorganisms. Therefore, research in the marine microbiome, including bioactive compounds isolated from marine fungi and bacteria will accelerate the blue biotechnology industry [13]. Interestingly, looking at the number of bioactive compounds isolated from marine fungi *Aspergillus*, it would definitely play a huge role in the development of Blue biotechnology.

A literature search on secondary metabolites produced by extremophilic fungi has been presented by Zhao *et al.*, (2018) [14]. The authors have discussed 314 novel compounds describing their chemical structures and their biological potential from 56 fungal cultures reported from 2005-2017. Thousands of natural products exhibiting anticancer activity have been isolated from marine fungi alone. And, these compounds show potency in the development of anticancer drugs [15]. Deshmukh *et al.*, (2018) [16], in a review, covered the majority of marine fungi-derived anticancer compounds reported during 2012–2016 that showed activity

towards specific cancer cell lines. Both the reviews have been focused on anticancer compounds derived from a common group of marine fungi (phyla ascomycota and basidiomycota) not specific to any particular type or genus. In this review, we have surveyed bioactive secondary metabolites isolated from marine fungi belonging to genus *Aspergillus* emphasizing their fungal source, the chemical structure of new compounds, and their biological activity, along with references. Based on these compiled data, researchers in the field of chemistry, microbiology, pharmacology and bioinformatics will get an insight into the different bioactive scaffolds that could have the potency to lead to a drug candidate.

## ASPERGILLUS ASSOCIATED WITH INVERTEBRATES

### Sponges

Sponges are commonly known to harbor diverse microbe, both prokaryotic and eukaryotic. Filamentous fungi are ubiquitous and easily associated with sponge tissue. So far, the highest number of secondary metabolites have been reported from sponge-derived fungi. Aspernigrins A-B (**1-2**) carrying unusual 4-benzyl-1*H*-pyridin-6-one moiety were isolated from a sponge-associated *Aspergillus niger* (Fig. 1) [17]. These compounds displayed moderate cytotoxic activities towards 10 different human leukemia and carcinoma cell lines at a concentration of 50 µg/ml. The structure of aspernigrin B (**2**) has been revised by Hiort and group [18] based on an X-ray analysis of aspernigrin A (**1**) [19]. The isolation of *A. versicolor*, associated with the sponge *Xestospongia exigua* from Bali, resulted in aspergiones A-F (**3-8**) [20], along with aspergillone (**9**), aspergillodiol (**10**), aspergillol (**11**) and 12-acetylaspergillol (**12**) [21]. *A. niger*, associated with sponge *Axinella damicornis* (Italy), produced bicoumanigrin (**13**), pyranonigrins A-D (**14-17**), along with aspernigrins A-B (**1-2**). Bicoumanigrin (**13**) showed *in vitro* moderate cytotoxicity against human cancer cell lines, while aspernigrin B (**2**) showed strong neuroprotective activity with a decrease in intracellular calcium in the neuronal cells by 33.6% and 23.5% at a concentration of 1 and 5 µg/ml, respectively. [22]. Cueto *et al.*, (2006) isolated the fungal strain *Aspergillus sp.* derived from an unidentified sponge collected from the Bay of Manele in Hawaii. Fermentation of the fungi led to the purification of meroterpenoids, tropolactones A-D (**18-21**) that displayed weakly cytotoxic to human colorectal carcinoma (HCT-116) cells [23]. Tropolactones A, B and C (**18-20**) exhibited cytotoxicity with IC<sub>50</sub> values of 13.2, 10.9 and 13.9 µg/mL, respectively. A culture *A. ostianus*, isolated from an unidentified marine sponge from Pohnpei, yielded three chlorinated antibiotics, the asperlactone derivatives, 8-chloro-9-hydroxy-8,9-deoxyasperlactone (**22**) and 9-chloro-8-hydroxy-

## Sensory Analysis of Virgin Olive Oil

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**Abstract:** Sensory analysis of virgin olive oil, organoleptic assessment, or panel test (PT), is one of the most important techniques for evaluating the quality of virgin olive oil. Sensory analysis of olive oil is based on the International Olive Council (IOC) standards. It is carried out by trained panelists to evaluate and calculate median values of the positive and negative attributes. This chapter is aimed to discuss the sensory analysis of virgin olive oil, sensory methodology, positive and negative (defects) attributes, classification of virgin olive oils, test conditions, and impact factors on sensory quality.

**Keywords:** Sensory, Virgin olive oil, Designations, Quality, Organoleptic assessment, Negative attributes, Positive attributes, Tasting glass, Test room, Olfactory test, Panel leader, Panel.

### INTRODUCTION

Sensory analysis is a scientific discipline used to evoke, measure, analyze and interpret reactions to those characteristics of foods perceived by the five senses, sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing [1].

Therefore, in sensory analysis, human senses are used to measure, analyze and interpret the organoleptic or sensory properties of food. It means more than just food tasting. Sensory analysis is a recognized science. The term Sensory Analysis is a European term, whereas Sensory Evaluation is an American term. Sensory evaluation, done mainly by trained panelists, involves evaluations in main areas, preference, difference and descriptive tests. Preferences Tests supply information about whether people like or dislike, and are often referred to as “acceptance” or “consumer” tests. Difference Tests are used to detect small differences in foods, and are sometimes called “discrimination” tests. Descriptive Tests are used to describe the perceived sensory characteristics of food.

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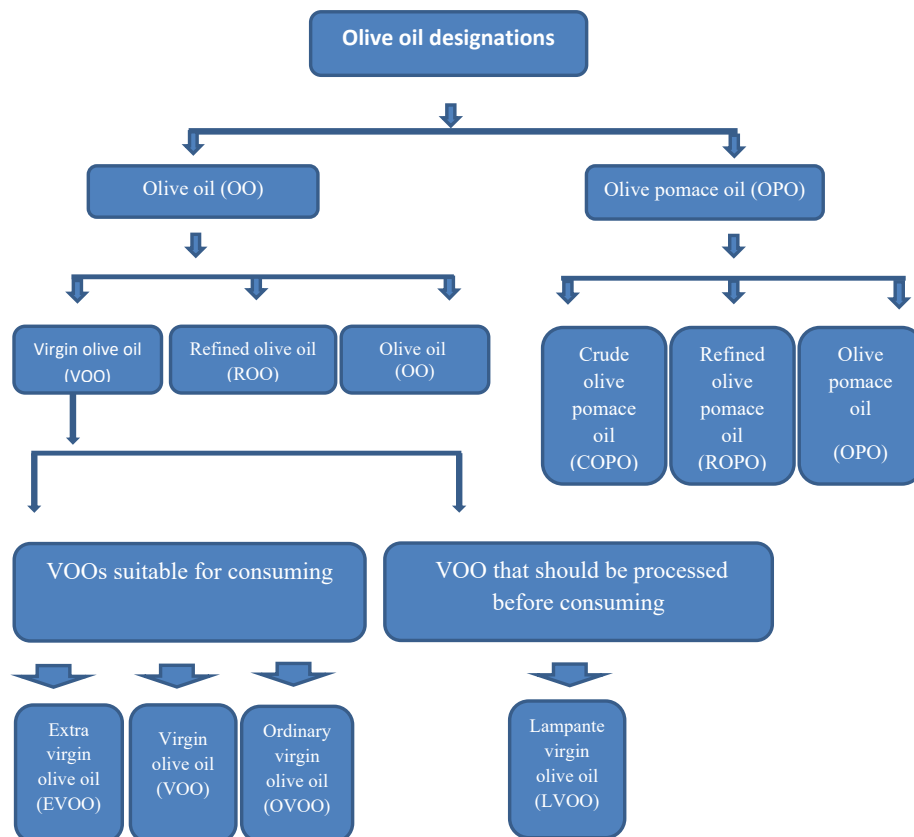
The main achievement of sensory analysis is sensory properties evaluation and its effect on consumer product acceptance.

Olive (*Olea europaea L.*) is the most important and well-adapted crop in the Mediterranean region. Virgin olive oil (VOO) is extracted mechanically from olive fruits without a refining process. It achieves basic nutritional needs and reduces common disease risks. VOO has a unique flavor that distinguishes VOO from other vegetable oils [2, 3].

## OLIVE OIL DESIGNATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

**Olive oil** obtained at the mill from olive fruits (*Olea europaea L.*), a traditional tree crop of the Mediterranean Basin, is produced by pressing olives and extracting the oil.

The illustrated Fig. (1) shows olive oil designations



**Fig. (1).** Designations of olive oil.

## Olive Oils

### VOOs

VOOs are oils which are obtained from the fruit of the olive tree (*Olea europaea* L.) solely by mechanical or other physical means under conditions, particularly thermal conditions, that do not lead to alterations in the oil, and which have not undergone any treatment other than washing, decantation, centrifugation and filtration.

It has a distinctive flavor when compared to edible oils.

International olive council (IOC) categorized VOOs as [4]:

#### **-Virgin Olive Oils Suitable for Consuming:**

- i. **EVOO:** VOO that has free fatty acids (FFA)  $\leq 0.80$  (% as oleic acid) and has physical, chemical and sensory parameters, as shown in Table 1.
- ii. **VOO:** VOO that has free fatty acids (FFA)  $\leq 2.0$  (% as oleic acid) and has physical, chemical and sensory parameters, as shown in Table 1.
- iii. **OVOO:** VOO that has free fatty acids (FFA)  $\leq 3.3$  (% as oleic acid) and has physical, chemical and sensory parameters, as shown in Table 1.

#### **- VOO that should be processed before consuming:**

### LVVOO

VOO that has free fatty acids (FFA)  $> 3.3$  (% as oleic acid) and has physical, chemical and sensory parameters, as shown in Table 1. It is prepared for refining or for technological purposes.

### ROO

The refined VOOs have free fatty acids (FFA)  $\leq 0.30$  (% as oleic acid) and have physical, chemical and sensory parameters as shown in Table 1. ROO has no modifications in glyceridic composition.

### **OO composed of ROO and VOOs**

It is a mix between ROO and VOO suitable for consumption. It has free fatty acids (FFA)  $\leq 1.00$  (% as oleic acid) and has physical, chemical and sensory parameters, as shown in Table 1.

## Promising Therapeutic Approach of Dietary Melatonin on Human Health

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**Abstract:** Melatonin production and release in the brain are related to the light and dark cycles. The synthesis of melatonin occurs in the pineal gland. The night-time melatonin production is stimulated by neural input from a structure called the suprachiasmatic nucleus, which acts as a master circadian clock for the brain. Tryptophan is an essential amino acid that is used to produce the monoamine neurotransmitter serotonin and the hormone melatonin. In the process of converting tryptophan into serotonin and melatonin, several important cofactors are used, including tetrahydrobiopterin, s-adenosyl methionine (SAM), and co-enzymes. Molecular models have indicated that any disruption in the circadian rhythm of melatonin production or release can cause nocturnal activity and daytime quiescence. Convincing evidence supports the presence of melatonin in plants and foods. The intake of such foods affects circulating melatonin levels in humans. Melatonin dietary supplements have been studied for sleep disorders, such as jet lag, disruptions of the body's internal "clock," insomnia, and problems with sleep among people who work night shifts. The normal melatonin cycle can diminish with age and be disrupted by exposure to electromagnetic pollution and blue-wavelength light. Supplemental melatonin contributes to restoring normal, healthy sleep patterns. The highest melatonin-containing food groups in animals are eggs and fish. Dietary melatonin is absorbed in the gastrointestinal tract and transported into the bloodstream. The ingestion of medicinal and plant foods by mammals as a source of melatonin may be conceived as a key step in serum melatonin modulation and may even cross the blood brain barrier, promoting health. Literature reviews have reported mixed views regarding melatonin supplementation and dosage.

**Keywords:** Melatonin, serotonin, pineal gland, dietary supplement, circadian rhythm, antioxidant, cancer, mental disorder, metabolism, cardiovascular, insomnia, meta- analysis.

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## INTRODUCTION

Age, gender, hormonal imbalance, nutritional deficiency, and pathological conditions exacerbate the disease state in an individual. Administration of dietary formulations or supplements can prevent or delay these consequences. Sleep patterns of all ages, including children, adolescents, and adults, have changed as a result of modern living and technology, which could be a blessing or a curse. Sleep is regulated by two biological rhythms in the body. The circadian rhythm controls the release of hormones related to sleep and wakefulness. It is moderated by sunlight and darkness and typically has a 24-hour cycle. The other rhythm that affects sleep is the homeostatic rhythm, which is our need for sleep.

In the morning, when sunlight hits the photoreceptors in our eyes, our brains begin producing chemicals that make us feel alert and ready for the day. In the evening, when the sun sets, our brain begins producing a hormone called melatonin, which makes us feel drowsy and helps us fall asleep. As we sleep, our brain processes melatonin, and its levels are reduced again, preparing us to go through this cycle again the next day. The homeostatic rhythm works independently of this, and for people who are sleeping normally, these two rhythms are in sync. However, when these cycles are not in sync, we end up feeling alert when we should be feeling sleepy. This leads to insomnia, causing sleep difficulties and decline in the quality of life [1]. The behavioural pattern, or homeostasis, is controlled by the hypothalamus of the brain. In the hypothalamus, there is the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN), located directly above the optic chiasm. The SCN is the master pacemaker that controls the sleep-wake cycle. Melatonin regulates the activity of pituitary cells, which in turn affects the synthesis and release of several hormones based on the body's changing functional demands. Melatonin is a highly flexible hormone that varies according to season, time of day, physiological status, life stages, and reproductive behaviours [2]. It is used principally for jetlag (a temporary sleep problem that affects anyone who travels across multiple time zones), for shift workers, and for insomnia. According to accumulating evidence, biochemical and neuroendocrine circadian cycles may be knocked off in cardiovascular and metabolic illnesses. In both human and animal studies melatonin helps prevent a variety of diseases and disorders and lowers anxiety. It is well established in regulating circadian rhythms, which are modulated by the brain's renin-angiotensin system (RAS) [3]. Both hypertension and the circadian regularity of blood pressure appear to be impacted by angiotensin production in the central nervous system. Drugs acting on RAS have been proven potent in the treatment of cardiovascular and metabolic disorders, including hypertension and diabetes mellitus (DM). The positive effects of RAS blockage, however, could be enhanced by combining RAS blockers with melatonin. This is because melatonin has the ability to alleviate metabolic

irregularities in diabetes and insulin resistance [4]. Melatonin was first identified in a plant by Dubbels in 1995; it is also produced in animals and is important for reproductive behaviour and skin coat camouflage. Melatonin is also produced by bacteria, fungi, and plants (leaves, stems, roots, fruits, and seeds) [5]. People travelling at high altitudes (*i.e.*, >2500 m) often end up with reduced physical and mental performance, fatigue, and sleep disturbances. This is mainly due to oxidative stress, and much of the literature has proposed that melatonin could be a remedy. However, if endogenous melatonin is insufficient, exogenous melatonin administration may be required to maintain the potential protective effects. It could be employed as a supplement to medical therapy and could lead to improvements in pathological changes [6].

Unfortunately, in many studies there is a discrepancy in the dose, duration of the study, intensity of the interaction, gender of the patients, or other comorbid disease conditions. There is inconsistency in the scientific data regarding the lowest optimum dose and the long-term safety of melatonin. Further clinical studies are necessary to obtain more conclusive evidence, as each study has its own limitations as previously mentioned [7]. Whether melatonin has autocrine or paracrine effects is still in dispute. Nevertheless, a growing body of literature from molecular approaches and animal models has provided substantial insights into the mechanisms involved in the prevention of pathogenesis by melatonin.

## PRODUCTION OF MELATONIN

Melatonin, or 5-methoxy-N-acetyltryptamine, is an indolamine secreted by the pineal gland of the brain through the upregulation of the NAT (N-acetyltransferase) and ASMT (N-Acetylserotonin O-methyltransferase) genes and several other non-pineal tissues. It is produced during the dark phase of the circadian rhythm in both diurnal and nocturnal species [8]. Melatonin has a half-life of approximately 40 minute and is produced from serotonin through two enzymatic steps: acetylation and transfer of a methyl group Fig(1).

The initial step in melatonin synthesis is the hydroxylation of tryptophan by tryptophan hydroxylase. The product, 5-hydroxytryptophan, is then decarboxylated *via* 5-hydroxytryptophan decarboxylase to form serotonin. N-acetyltransferase (AANAT) converts serotonin to N-acetylserotonin, the precursor of melatonin, and this is the rate-limiting step in melatonin synthesis. ASMT, on the other hand, modulates the process of melatonin biosynthesis at night. Since it is a neuro-hormone produced during the night, it is also called the “hormone of darkness” [9]. AANAT and ASMT are two rate-limiting enzymes in the melatonin synthesis pathway. Light blocks the action of AANAT in melatonin biosynthesis during the daytime. This process is modulated by ASMT at night

## CHAPTER 5

## Tea made from *Camellia Sinensis*: An Up-To-Date Review of Chemistry and Health Benefits

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**Abstract:** Since the ancient period, various plants have been used for dietary consumption for their tastes as well as beneficial effects on health. Among them, the tea plant (*Camellia sinensis*) is a notable one. Brewed tea is amongst the top most consumed beverages around the globe. Tea leaves undergo different processes and fermentations to produce tea powder from which brew is prepared. Depending upon its processing, it is divided into various varieties like green, oolong, white, and black tea. Fermentation processes also affect the phytochemical contents in each variety which further determines its dietary significance. Among various phytochemicals present in tea leaves, polyphenolic catechins are the most abundant ones among which epigallocatechin-3-gallate is the dominant catechin. At the time of fermentation, most contents of catechins are found in green tea as oxidation of catechins takes place. Black tea undergoes the most extensive fermentation process and hence catechins get reduced. Most of the catechins in black tea bind with each other and form polymeric structures (e.g. theaflavins and thearubigin) which also exhibit prominent health benefits. Theaflavins, one of the categories of polymeric catechin compounds, are antioxidants and also have various medicinal properties. Apart from the entire polyphenolic compound present in tea, various other non-polyphenolic compounds like enzymes, and non-protein amino acids like L-theanine, pigments, *etc.* can also be found that exhibit beneficial properties. A detailed study of polyphenolic green tea catechins mainly EGCG, polyphenolic black tea compound theaflavins, and non-protein L-theanine are described in this chapter containing physical properties, chemical, and biosynthesis process, isolation process, pharmacokinetic study, analytical process, toxicity study, and health beneficial studies.

**Keywords:** Black tea, Cancer, Catechins, Cardioprotective, Diabetes, EGCG, Green tea, L-theanine, Pharmacokinetics, Obesity, Tea, Theaflavins.

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## INTRODUCTION

The tea plant botanically known as *Camellia sinensis* was originally native to Southeast Asia [1]. It was the Portuguese and Chinese who introduced tea drinks during the 16<sup>th</sup> century [2]. Today, it is notably the most venerable and well-liked aromatic beverage consumed worldwide after water. It is an evergreen tropical plant. Countries with a significant amount of tea production include India, Sri Lanka, Japan, and China [3]. Given the genetic differences, it primarily has two species – *Camellia assamica* and *Camellia sinensis* belonging to the Camelliaceae family. The ideal climate for the growth of this evergreen shrub ranges from 15-to 20 °C [4].

## TYPES OF TEA AND CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF TEA LEAVES

Buds and leaves from the source plant are being plucked and processed further to make different types of teas and the difference in these types arises from the processing methods. Based on the manufacturing process, tea is of four major types: unfermented green tea, moderately fermented oolong tea, completely fermented black tea, and white tea which is minimally processed.

The approximate percentage of components of tea leaves are polyphenols (30-50%) [5], chlorophyll (0.5%), thiamine (4%), lignin (6.5%), caffeine (approximately 3.5%), theophylline (0.02-0.04%), theobromine (0.15-0.2%) and other flavonoid compounds. Additionally, they have other compounds present such as flavones, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, alkaloids, and enzymes [6]. It contains flavanols too, e.g. kaempferol, quercetin, and their glycosides. Polyphenols and caffeine (3-6%) give tea its most favorable effects [7]. A tea brew prepared with water (1g leaf/100 mL) will contain tea solids approximately equivalent to 250-350 mg [8]. Soluble components of dry tea leaf are given in Table 2.

Withering, steaming, and drying of crushed tea leaves are the steps of green tea processing and it contains polyphenolic compounds such as, (–)-epicatechin (EC), 4 (–)-epigallocatechin (EGC), (–)-epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) and (–)-epicatechin-3-gallate (ECG) [9]. Out of all these catechins, EGCG is most abundantly present. The brewed green tea is typically mild, lemon yellow, or pale green.

Manufacturing of black tea starts with drying, which is a crucial step in maintaining the moisture content (<55%) when compared to the fresh leaf weight. Black tea production involves enzymatic fermentation by polyphenol oxidase and an oxidation process in fixed temperature, humidity, and aerobic conditions. The successive catechin fermentation is condensed and it then leads to thearubigins

(TRs) and theaflavin (TFs) production. It involves the conversion of monomeric polymers to polymeric polyphenols (thearubigins and theaflavins) during fermentation. Theaflavins add taste and color to black tea. Thearubigins, which is a major black tea polyphenol, account for about 20% of the solids in brewed versions [10 - 12]. Polymeric polyphenols (thearubigins and theaflavins) are not absorbed due to their higher molecular mass, whereas, catechins are monomeric polyphenols with low molecular weight [5]. Black tea contains higher concentrations of gallic acid, polymeric polyphenols, and monomeric polyphenols accounting for 3-10% [13]. The polyphenolic content of moderately fermented oolong tea comprises EGCG and epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), among others [14]. Due to its unrivaled fineness and innate flavour, white tea is widely acknowledged by tea connoisseurs. During production, it undergoes minimal processing due to which it is by far a great source of antioxidants when compared to green tea [11].

### **ABSORPTION AND BIOAVAILABILITY**

The tea polyphenols in the brew undergo a complex physiological process after consumption and are degraded into several fragments which are later assimilated in the intestine. "Bioavailability is a term to describe the degree of absorption and fate of an ingested particle that is released from food" [15]. In case of tea catechins, minute amounts are bioavailable after consuming them *i.e.* can be absorbed from the intestine and reach the tissues. Recent research shows that green tea infusions contain between 3250–4410 mg/L of catechins [16]. A laboratory experiment with rats indicated that less than 5% of tea catechins reach the blood after 6 h of oral consumption [17, 18]. After tea was given orally to rats, a pharmacokinetic study showed that around 14% of EGC, 31% of EC, and <1% of EGCG were found in the blood [19]. In humans, 3 g of green tea was administered, and it was noted that the maximal plasma levels of EGCG, EGC, and EC were 0.57, 1.60, and 0.6  $\mu\text{M}$ , respectively [20]. Auger *et al.* [21] collected ileal fluid for 24 h after 200 mg of Polyphenon E ingestion and recorded the tea catechin levels. 27% of the EC and EGC and 59% of EGCG and ECG were recovered in the ileal fluid. The parent catechins showed similar levels of recovery in the ileal fluid after the consumption of green tea [22]. Tea catechins were stable for 4 h at 37°C in the gut. These observations stipulated that in ileal fluid, based on recovery, gallated catechins are less efficiently ingested in the small intestine than nongallated catechins. Higher amounts of tea catechins pass from the small to the large intestine in humans having a fully functional colon and then they are broken down by colonic bacteria. When green tea polyphenols were administered to rats and mice at the rate of 0.6% weight per volume of drinking water, plasma catechin levels showed an increasing trend over 14 days. High concentrations of nongallated catechins were found in the rat bladder (800 ng/g), kidney (450 ng/g), large intestine (300–900 ng/g), esophagus (190 ng/g), lung

**SUBJECT INDEX****A**

Absorption activity 37  
Acetic anhydride 209  
Acetonitrile 190, 192  
Acetyl-cholinesterase activity IC50 62  
Acetylation 111, 224  
    genetic 224  
Acrostichum aureum 44, 53  
Activating protein 124  
Activation 7, 33, 114, 131, 137, 138, 143 151,  
    189, 194, 198, 200, 218  
    attenuate caspase 143  
    beta 114  
    inhibited CRS-induced 137  
    thiol-dependent cellular 198  
Administration method 224  
Adolescents 110, 128, 136, 150  
Adrenal glands 115, 149  
Adriatic Sea 25, 26, 28  
Amyloid beta protofibrils 201  
Anti-atherosclerosis 200  
Anti-inflammatory activity 10, 29, 46  
    exhibited strong 46  
    strong 10  
Antifouling 60  
Antifungal activities 25  
Autophagy 131, 138, 144, 159  
    enhanced 159  
    increasing 138

**B**

Behavioral experiments 211  
Bioactive catechin 199  
Blood-brain barrier (BBB) 131  
Brain injury 131  
Brewing time 188  
Bronchial asthma 160  
Bruch's membrane 159  
Butanoic acid molecule 219  
BVDV antigen 154

**C**

C-ring 4, 14  
    three-carbon heterocyclic 4  
Caffeine aids 215  
Calcium channels 136, 138  
Calcium homeostasis 146  
Cancer cell lines 23, 32, 33, 61, 62, 213  
Canonical roles 125  
Cardiovascular disorders 218  
Catalyze oxidation 203  
Cell death 131, 138, 196, 204, 212, 213, 220  
    induced 213  
    induced neuronal 196  
    inhibited 212  
    programmed 204, 212  
Cerebroside asperiamide 54  
Cerebrospinal fluid 112  
Chronic rhinosinusitis 150  
Chronic stress 149  
Chronotype 136, 150  
    late 136, 150  
Circadian system 125  
Cytotoxic 21, 23, 24, 25, 47, 34, 58  
    displayed moderate 34

**D**

D-phenyllactic acid residue 41  
Damaged catechins 202  
Dansyl chloride 210  
Dawn stimulation 125  
Depression scores 131  
Depression severity 221  
Descriptors 101, 102, 103  
    perceptible 102  
Deubiquitinating enzyme A20 138  
Diagnostic biomarker 145  
Difference tests 79  
Direct antiviral effects 6  
Disseminated candidiasis 199  
Drimane sesquiterpenoids 25, 39

Drug doxorubicin 213  
Duplicate tests 99

## E

EC50 values 35, 39  
ECG and EGCG solubility 187  
Edulis galloprovincialis 34  
Ejaculated spermatozoa 141  
Electromagnetic pollution 109  
Endothelial cells 9, 131, 145, 156, 197, 206  
    gastric 145  
    vascular 140  
Epidemiological studies 224  
Estuarine sediment 47  
Excessive resorption 154  
Extrapineal tissues 156

## F

FAME (fermented Aronia melanocarpa extract) 222  
FAS (fatty acid synthases) 195, 200, 218  
Fatty liver phenotypes 157  
Festuca arundinacea 118  
First-pass metabolism 15, 117  
    avoiding 117  
Fluorescent detection (FD) 120, 122  
Form serotonin 111  
Formative factors 223  
Fumarate reductase 31  
Fungi Aspergillus 24, 26, 28, 32  
    derived 24, 26, 30  
    sponges-derived 28

## G

Gallic acid 185, 192, 202  
    glucosylated 192  
Gastric endothelial cells (GECs) 145  
Gastrocnemius muscles 146  
Gene expression 127, 139  
    myocardial 139  
Genus Aspergillus 21, 22, 23  
Glucose intolerance 135  
Gorgonian Melitodes squamata 27, 28, 29  
Granulosa cells 140, 149  
    luteinizing 142  
Gustatory sensations 102

Gut microbiome 157, 206

## H

Haemonchus contortu 47  
HDL cholesterol 135  
Heart diseases 197, 218, 226  
    coronary 218  
    developing coronary 197  
Helichrysum bracteatum 11  
Hepatic encephalopathy 158  
Hepatocellular carcinoma 41, 158, 205  
Hippocampal neurogenesis 130, 161  
Histone acetyltransferase 199  
Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) 152  
Hydrophilic orientation 224  
Hypotensive effects 148  
    melatonin's 148  
Hypothalamus 110, 114, 149  
    lateral 114

## I

IC50 values 4, 10, 11, 25, 27, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 201  
    acetylcholinesterase activity 46  
    enzymatic 4  
    higher 10  
    lesser 201  
Immune responses 9, 150, 151, 153  
    increased 150  
Improved pathological damage 154  
Induced melatonin 132  
Influenza vaccination 214  
Inhibitory activity 11, 13, 27, 43, 45, 62, 199  
    aromatase 27  
    exhibited 43  
    significant 11  
Intensive care unit 137, 153

## K

Kinase 127, 136, 151, 157  
    inhibiting extracellular signal-regulated 151  
    monophosphate-activated protein 136  
    signal-regulating 157  
Kidney failure 131, 147  
Kyoto rats 115

*Subject Index*

**L**

L-phenylalanine 192  
  enzyme deaminates 192  
L-pyrrolidone carboxylic acid 209  
Label claims 118  
Lachnospiraceae 206  
Lactarius deliciosus 121  
Lactate dehydrogenase activity 199  
Lactic acid bacteria types 220  
LH (luteinizing hormone) 139, 140  
Limited prevalence 225  
Lipid accumulation 157, 200  
  hepatic 157  
  high-fat diet-induced 157  
Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) 135, 195, 218  
Lysosomotropic agent 10  
Lysteria monocytogenes 201

**M**

Macrophages 9, 10, 140, 143, 150, 151, 197  
  anti-inflammatory M2 151  
  pro-inflammatory M1 151  
Macular degeneration 159  
  age-related 159  
Malignant stroke-prone 197  
Mass spectrometry assays 121  
Mechanical ventilation pain 153  
Medical problems 148  
Mediterranean basin 80  
Melatonin deficiency 136  
Membrane blebbing 204  
Metabolic phenomenon 117  
Microbiota variability 157  
Mitochondrial biogenesis 125  
Monitoring compliance 99  
Muscular contraction 146

**N**

Arylalkylamine N-acetyltransferase 115  
NADH oxidase activity 25  
Natural products 21, 22, 57, 58, 141  
  plant-derived 2  
Negative impact 225  
Neurological system 218  
Nitrogen elements 195  
Non-mutagenic 211  
Nucleus pulposus (NP) 145

*Frontiers in Natural Product Chemistry, Vol. 12 263*

Nutrient restriction 112  
  maternal 112

**O**

Oil classification 98, 99  
Oleic acid 81, 82, 83  
Olive fruits 80, 86, 87, 88, 104, 105  
  damages 104  
  healthy 88  
Oral administration 14, 134, 221  
  chronic 134  
  following 14  
Organoleptic assessment 79, 83  
Osteoclast precursor cells 207  
Oxidase activity 25  
Oxidative damage 140, 142, 206, 213  
  ischemia-induced 142  
  neural mitochondrial 140

**P**

Pain syndromes 145  
Panel leader 79, 92, 93, 94, 95, 98, 102  
  deputy 95  
Patient mortality 131  
Paulownia tomentosa 11  
Percentile Variation 100  
Phosphorylation status 144  
Phytochemical contents 183  
Placental barrier 128  
Platelet physiology 154  
Postprandial thermogenesis 196  
Potent antioxidant effect 9

**Q**

Quality control 122  
Quercetin 144, 184, 216, 217, 218  
  chemical 216  
  administration 217  
  hinders 218

**R**

Radiculopathy 145  
  alleviated 145  
Rapid eye movement (REM) 225  
Receptor affinity 13

Reduced discomfort 215  
Reinforcing rhythmicity 126  
Replication enzymes 15  
Ruegeria atlantica 24, 58  
    marine bacterium 24

## S

Saccharomyces cerevisiae 25, 47, 58  
    yeast 47  
Scavenging ROS 150  
SCI-induced alteration 158  
Secondary metabolites 21, 22, 23, 25, 57  
    numerous 21  
Seed-cotyledon 120  
Self-induced errors 84  
Sensory attributes 83, 84, 94  
    perceptible 83  
Serum levels 124, 144, 162  
    high 144  
Signaling cascade 137  
Sleep disruption 129, 153, 154, 162, 221  
Staphylococcus epidermidis 30  
Stimulus energy 84  
Synovial fibroblasts 155  
Synthesis procedures 209

## T

T-cell receptor 199  
Tactile sensations 96  
Targets NADPH oxidase 158  
Tea polyphenols 185, 187, 196, 198, 199, 202,  
    226  
    resolvable green 187  
    total black 202  
Temperature variation 126  
Theaflavins group 202  
Theanine concentration 207  
Therapeutic activities 189, 201, 226  
    high 189  
Threshold concentration 94  
TLC (Thin-layer chromatography) 122  
Toxicological profiling 15  
Transcripts encoding 127  
Tryptophan hydroxylase 111

## U

UDP-glucuronosyltransferases 186

Ultrasound-assisted extraction (UAE) 190  
Uncontrolled malaxation 105  
Unrivalled fineness 185  
UV detector 210

## V

Valproic acid 128  
Vascular diseases 137, 214  
Viral infections 6, 7, 8, 153, 217  
Vitro fertilisation 135, 140  
Vivo bioactivity 14  
Volatile components 95, 97, 104  
    higher temperature form 95  
    precept aromatic 97

## W

Waist circumference 135  
Walnut seed juglans 119  
Water extraction 188, 190  
Water solubility 5, 13  
    poor 13  
Weak cytotoxicity 34,47  
    displayed 34  
World federation 132

## Y

YAP (Yes-associated protein) 137  
YAP-Hippo pathway 137  
Yellow Sea 41, 50

## Z

Zücker diabetic fatty (ZDF) 134  
Zwitter ion 208



## SHAZIA ANJUM

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