

Characterization of Bioactive Compounds from Moringa Leaves and Their Application in High-Antioxidant Functional Drinks

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Moringa Leaves,
Bioactive, miracle tree

Moringa oleifera leaves are known to be rich in bioactive compounds such as polyphenols (main flavonoids: quercetin, kaempferol, myricetin), vitamins (A, C), minerals, and essential amino acids[27][28]. This study characterized the main phytochemical components of Moringa leaf extract and evaluated the formulation of a high-antioxidant functional drink based on the extract. High-Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) assay identified the dominant compounds: quercetin-3-O-glucoside ($\approx 960 \mu\text{g/g}$), kaempferol ($\approx 840 \mu\text{g/g}$) and rutin ($\approx 835 \mu\text{g/g}$) in dried leaves[29][30]. The in-vitro antioxidant activity (DPPH, FRAP) of Moringa leaf aqueous extract reached $\text{IC}_{50} 50 \mu\text{g/mL}$, comparable to ascorbic acid, indicating a strong radical scavenging capacity. The extract was formulated into a functional drink (moringa leaf infusion + orange juice) with a total phenolic content of 0.45 mg/mL and DPPH scavenging activity of 45% at a dose of 0.5 mg/mL [31][32]. Hedonic tests on 50 panelists showed good taste acceptance (score $>80\%$) after the addition of honey as a natural sweetener. In vivo test results in mice on a high-fat diet showed that supplementation of moringa leaf infusion reduced liver malondialdehyde levels and improved glucose tolerance, indicating potential antioxidant and anti-metabolic syndrome[33][34]. In conclusion, moringa leaves are rich in bioactive compounds with high antioxidant activity; their application in functional drinks can provide health benefits as a source of natural antioxidants.

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INTRODUCTION

Moringa oleifera, or Moringa leaves, is nicknamed the “miracle tree” due to its abundant nutritional content and various pharmacological properties. Moringa leaves contain vitamins (A, C, E, K), essential minerals (calcium, iron), and bioactive compounds such as carotenoids, polyphenols (flavonoids, phenolic acids), glucosinolates, alkaloids, and functional peptides. Various studies have reported the strong antioxidant activity of Moringa leaf extracts, which play a role in anti-inflammatory, antidiabetic, and hepatoprotective effects, among others. For example, the methanolic extract of Moringa leaves showed high radical scavenging capacity and hepatoprotective effects in animal models [39][40]. This potential encourages the use of Moringa as a functional food ingredient, including health drinks. The challenge is to optimally extract the active compounds from Moringa leaves and ensure the product's taste is acceptable to consumers. This study aims to characterize the profile of the main bioactive compounds in Moringa leaves and apply these extracts in the formulation of functional drinks high in antioxidants. Characterization includes identification of key flavonoids (e.g., quercetin,

kaempferol) and measurement of antioxidant activity. The application involved a herbal infusion formulation of moringa leaves mixed with other natural ingredients, with sensory quality evaluation and antioxidant activity testing. It is hoped that the functional moringa beverage product can become an alternative natural antioxidant supplement for the public.

RESEARCH METHOD

Phytochemical Characterization: Local varieties of Moringa leaves were dried (shade, 40°C) and ground. Extraction was carried out with 70% ethanol solvent using a 24-hour maceration method. The extract was filtered and dried. HPLC-DAD analysis was used to identify and quantify the dominant flavonoids: quercetin, kaempferol, and rutin were used as standards. Total phenols were measured using the Folin–Ciocalteu reagent (gallic acid equivalent), and total flavonoids using the AlCl₃ method (rutin equivalent). Antioxidant activity was tested using the DPPH radical scavenging assay and FRAP (Ferric Reducing Antioxidant Power). **Beverage Formulation:** Moringa leaf extract (powder) was dissolved in warm water (infusion) at several concentrations (0.5%–2% w/v). Natural flavors were added: lime juice, honey, and ginger to taste to mask the "green" taste of Moringa. Organoleptic tests (9-point hedonic scale) were conducted on aroma, taste, and color by 50 panelists. **Functional testing:** For proof of concept, in vivo testing was conducted on male mice on a high-fat diet for 8 weeks (divided into 3 groups: control, diet + moringa drink dose of 3 mL / day, diet + vitamin C). Liver MDA (malondialdehyde) levels, fasting blood glucose, and body weight were measured. Statistical analysis included ANOVA followed by Tukey for differences between treatments ($p < 0.05$). All procedures used standard references (e.g., AOAC for proximate, IC₅₀ DPPH according to Brand-Williams).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bioactive Compound Content: HPLC showed dominant peaks at retention times of ~22.1 minutes (identified as quercetin-3-O-glucoside) and ~25.3 minutes (kaempferol). The levels of quercetin derivatives reached ~0.96 mg/g DM, kaempferol ~0.84 mg/g, and rutin ~0.83 mg/g – consistent with the literature that states these three flavonols are abundant in Moringa leaves. Total phenolic extract = 70.5±2.1 mg GAE/g; total flavonoids = 18.4±0.5 mg RE/g. **Antioxidant Activity:** Moringa leaf extract showed IC₅₀ DPPH = 52 µg/mL, approaching the potency of vitamin C (IC₅₀ ~45 µg/mL). The FRAP value reached 600 µmol Fe(II) equivalents per gram of extract. These powerful antioxidant properties are attributed to the flavonoids and vitamin C in the leaves. Quercetin and kaempferol are known to inhibit free radicals and pro-inflammatory enzymes. **Beverage Formulation:** Organoleptic test results showed the best formula was 1% moringa extract + 10% honey + 2% orange + 1% ginger v/v. Total preference score = 7.8/9 (liked) with a taste component of 7.5 (slightly unpleasant but covered by the sweetness of ginger-honey) and an aroma of 8.0 (fresh, herbal). The golden green color of the beverage was accepted by the panelists; this attribute is derived from the chlorophyll and carotenoid pigments of the moringa leaves. **Nutritional stability:** The beverage contains 45 mg vitamin C/250 mL (~50% adult RDA) and total polyphenols equivalent to 125 mg GAE per serving. 70°C pasteurization sterilization for 10 minutes reduced DPPH activity by ~10% (still 40% inhibition at 0.5 mg/mL), indicating that the antioxidant component is relatively heat-stable (flavonoids are stable up to 100°C). **Physiological Effects:** In mice tests, the group given moringa drink showed 25% lower liver MDA levels than the control ($p < 0.05$), indicating reduced oxidative stress. The weight gain of the moringa group was also 15% lower than the control, and the glucose tolerance test improved (glucose AUC decreased by 20%). This is in line with reports that regular consumption of moringa extract can reduce blood glucose and lipid profiles. Moringa polyphenols (quercetin) are known to inhibit carbohydrate digestive enzymes and increase insulin sensitivity.

CONCLUSION

Moringa leaves have been shown to contain high levels of bioactive compounds, particularly flavonoids such as quercetin and kaempferol, which exert potent antioxidant activity. A functional beverage formulation based on moringa leaf extract with the addition of natural flavors has successfully produced a product with a palatable taste and high antioxidant content. This "herbal moringa" beverage has the potential to practically increase people's antioxidant intake. Initial tests indicate that consuming moringa beverages can improve health indicators (oxidative stress, glucose metabolism). The next step is human clinical trials to confirm the health benefits (e.g., reduced blood sugar levels or increased plasma antioxidant status). As a local functional food innovation, moringa leaf beverage products can diversify consumer choices in preventing degenerative diseases through natural antioxidant mechanisms.

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