

REVIEW ARTICLE

Pharmacology and Toxicology of Polyphenols with Potential As Neurotropic Agents in Non-communicable Diseases

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Abstract: Background: The central nervous system (CNS) is involved in organic integration. Nervous modulation via bioactive compounds can modify metabolism in order to prevent systemic non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Concerning this, plant polyphenols are proposed as neurotropic chemopreventive/therapeutic agents, given their redox and regulating properties.

Objective: To review polyphenolic pharmacology and potential neurological impact on NCDs.

Method: First, polyphenolic chemistry was presented, as well as pharmacology, *i.e.* kinetics and dynamics. Toxicology was particularly described. Then, functional relevance of these compounds was reviewed focusing on the metabolic CNS participation to modulate NCDs, with data being finally integrated.

Results: Oxidative stress is a major risk factor for NCDs. Polyphenols regulate the redox biology of different organic systems including the CNS, which participates in metabolic homeostasis. Polyphenolic neurotropism is determined by certain pharmacological characteristics, modifying nervous and systemic physiopathology, acting on several biological targets. Nonetheless, because these phytochemicals can trigger toxic effects, they should not be recommended indiscriminately.

Conclusion: Summing up, the modulating effects of polyphenols allow for the physiological role of CNS on metabolism and organic integration to be utilized in order to prevent NCDs, without losing sight of the risks.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, interest in investigating the functional properties of food has grown exponentially, especially related to the prevalence reduction of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Plant derivatives show a protective effect regarding health, attributed to various nutrients and phytochemicals with antioxidant activity. The emphasis on understanding the antioxidant capacity of these compounds is founded on the fact that oxidative stress is a biological process proposed as etiological factor of NCDs [1, 2]. This stress occurs when the rate of formation of free radicals overcomes the activity of protective systems. Under physiological conditions, these aggressors are controlled by the integrated and harmonious action of enzymes generated evolutionarily and can also be modulated by dietary substances such as vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals agents. Among these,

the most important group corresponds to the polyphenols, which act directly and indirectly in different biological systems [3, 4]. Concerning this, these compounds can act on centers of the central nervous system (CNS) involved in systemic regulation of metabolic homeostasis, which in turn modifies the risk of developing NCDs. Nonetheless, exogenous interventions are not free of risks. Thus, polyphenol toxicology should be considered before realizing any health recommendations. In this sense, this work revises pharmacological and toxicological effects of neurotropic polyphenols on NCDs.

2. PHENOLIC COMPOUNDS

There are more polyphenols in the diet than any other antioxidant, with consumption reaching up to 1 g/d [5, 6]. The main sources are fruits and vegetables, significant concentrations are also found in juices, tea, coffee, wine, cereals, and chocolate [7, 8]. This group of compounds has diverse and complex chemical structures and their health effects are determined by the amount consumed and their bioavailability [5].

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These phytochemicals are secondary plant metabolites and are generally involved in defending against ultraviolet radiation or pathogen aggression [8, 9]. They can be classified into different groups based on the number of phenol rings they contain and the structural elements connecting these rings together. These differences define: phenolic acids, flavonoids, stilbenes, and lignans, with the first two groups being the major ones (Fig. 1). In addition to this diversity, polyphenols can be associated with various carbohydrates and organic acids, or even with other polyphenols [3].

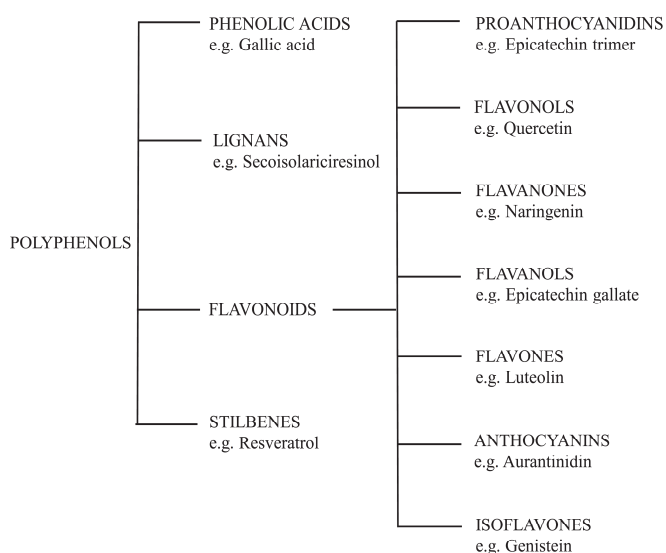


Fig. (1). Classification of polyphenols.

Phenolic acids constitute about a third of dietary phenols, they are found in plants either in free or bonded forms [10, 11]. Structurally they vary due to the differences in the number and positions of hydroxyl groups on the aromatic ring [12]. They are divided into two subgroups: hydroxybenzoic acids and hydroxycinnamic acids [13]. Hydroxybenzoic acids include: gallic, p-hydroxybenzoic, protocatechuic, vanillic and syringic acids. They have the C6-C1 structure in common. On the other hand, hydroxycinnamic acids are aromatic compounds with a C6-C3 structure, including: caffeic, ferulic, sinapic, and p-coumaric acids [13, 14].

This group of phenolic acids presents prominent antioxidant activity, which neutralizes free radicals and other reactive species [15, 16]. Gallic acid (3,4,5-trihydroxybenzoic acid) and its esters are used as antioxidant additives in food and pharmaceutical industries, given that they protect against oxidative damage induced by reactive species and free radicals [17]. Chlorogenic acids are a number of hydroxycinnamic acids (caffeic, ferulic, coumaric, sinapic) esterified with quinic acid [18, 19].

Chlorogenic acids are found in cell walls, esterified to polysaccharides. They are biosynthesized from phenylalanine and tyrosine [20], these acids are precursors of lignin and they affect the texture and plasticity of plants. Chlorogenic acids offer protection against microorganisms, ultraviolet light, herbivore damage and physical damage [21, 22].

Coffee, fruits, herbs, tea and vegetables are the main dietetic sources of chlorogenic acids [23].

Flavonoids are a very large group of polyphenolic compounds distributed in the plant kingdom characterized widely by possessing a benzo- γ -pyran structure [24]. Chemically they share a structure consisting of two aromatic rings (A and B) linked by three carbon atoms forming an oxygen heterocycle (C ring). These can be divided into six sub-classes according to the heterocycle involved: flavonols, flavones, isoflavones, flavanones, anthocyanidins, and flavanols (catechins and proanthocyanidins) [3].

The antioxidant activity of flavonoids emerges from a combination of iron chelating properties and scavenging of reactive oxygen species (ROS), in addition to inhibition of enzymes, such as lipoxygenase, cyclooxygenase, myeloperoxidase and NADPH oxidase; thus preventing ROS formation and organic hydroperoxides [25].

Some flavonoids, such as catechins, epicatechins, and epigallocatechins, reduce the production of free radicals by inhibiting xanthine oxidase (XO), an enzyme that catalyzes the oxidation of hypoxanthine and xanthine to uric acid [26].

3. PHARMACOKINETICS OF PHENOLIC COMPOUNDS

Although scientific publications about polyphenols have grown in the last years, there are fewer works about their bioavailability, mainly in the brain (Fig. 2). *In vitro*, polyphenols demonstrated potential of playing a useful role in the prevention of chronic diseases [27]. However, adequate amounts must reach the tissues to be effective [28].

Ingested soluble compounds are metabolized in the gastrointestinal tract. Before being absorbed, polyphenols are cleaved into aglycone and glycoside. Glycoside has increased water solubility and is rapidly absorbed, while aglycone can take up to three hours to be absorbed [29]. Free aglycones, such as quercetin, genistein and simple compounds such as ferulic, caffeic, and p-coumaric acids are absorbed through the mucosa of the small intestine and stomach in varied degrees [30, 31]. Enzymatic digestion (small intestine) and bacterial fermentation of carbohydrates (large intestine) could possibly release phenolic compounds bound to fiber. Free aglycone is absorbed in the colon, to be then conjugated with glucuronic acid or sulfate in the liver and excreted *via* urine [31, 32].

Bioavailability varies widely among polyphenols [6, 33]. Depending on the type of polyphenol, total plasma concentration of their metabolites range from 0 to 4 mM after an intake of 50 mg of aglycone equivalent [34]. The polyphenols with the highest absorption rates in humans are isoflavones and gallic acid, followed by catechins, flavanones and quercetin glycosides, with different kinetics. Polyphenols that show less absorption are proanthocyanidins and anthocyanins. Data for other polyphenols is still too limited. The plasma kinetics also differs between polyphenol classes. Peak concentrations are reached between approximately 1 to 5.5 hours depending on the intestinal absorption site [3, 35, 36].

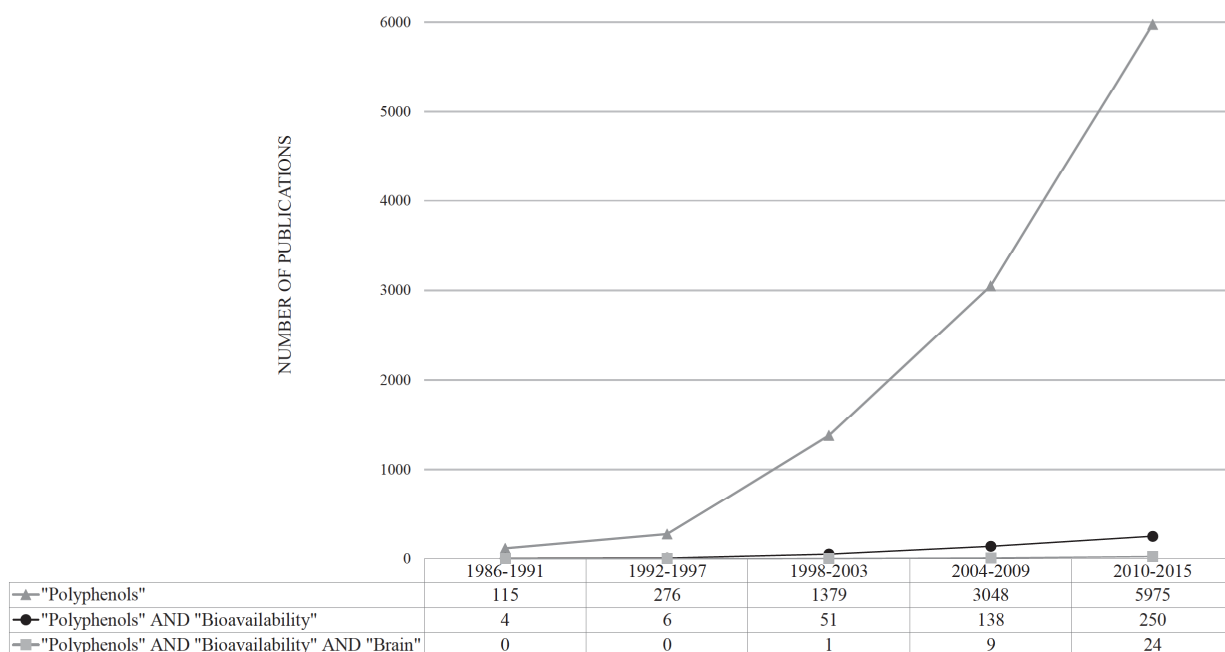


Fig. (2). Number of publications found for the search terms “Polyphenols”, “Polyphenols” AND “Bioavailability” or “Polyphenols” AND “Bioavailability” AND “Brain” in PubMed. The search field tag was limited to “Title/Abstract”.

4. PHARMACODYNAMICS OF PHENOLIC COMPOUNDS

Phenolic compounds have several biological targets, such as cellular receptors, membrane constituents, intracellular redox-related pathways, and transcription factors [37] (Table 1). Phenols can act on these targets as agonists, antagonists, inverse agonists, or partial agonists, determining distinct biological responses [38]. In this sense, they can modulate neuron activity of different centers involved in the regulation of systemic metabolism [39] (Fig. 3).

Polyphenols may regulate food intake and satiety. There is evidence of their pro-anorectic effects, which involve down-regulation of neuropeptide Y and agouti-related protein, with up-regulation of pro-opiomelanocortin and cocaine/amphetamine-regulated transcript in hypothalamic neurons (arcuate nucleus) [40, 41]. Furthermore, other extra-hypothalamic pathways have been described, such as the serotonergic effect that increases serotonin production in the raphe nuclei with the consequent activation of the 5-HT_{2c}R and 5-HT_{1B}R receptors in the hypothalamus [42]. Also, some of the antidepressant effects of polyphenols support this serotonergic activation [43]. Experimental treatment with Ginkgo extracts increased both serotonin reuptake and prefrontal dopaminergic transmission [44, 45]. Acute and chronic exposure to curcumin favors the concentrations of serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine by inhibiting monoamine oxidase [46].

Dopamine, another relevant neurotransmitter, is a mediator involved in food intake; it is associated with serotonin to determine feeding behavior (duration, frequency and meal size) [47]. Concerning this, polyphenols modulate dopaminergic activity, e.g. the protective effect on dopamine-synthesizing neurons of curcumin derivatives [48]. Moreover, it has been found that the flavone oroxylin A inhibits dopamine reuptake, while pycnogenol decreases D₂ receptors leading to higher dopamine levels

[49, 50]. Polyphenols have additional effects on other food intake regulators. They promote the activity of tyrosine-tyrosine YY3-36 pancreatic peptide, glucagon-like peptide-1, an insulin-like growth factor-1, whereas ghrelin and leptin levels are decreased [51-58]. As consequences, insulin resistance, glycemia and metabolism-related inflammation are improved by these phytochemicals [59-62]. Overall, polyphenols enhance metabolic homeostasis by targeting multiple sites of action: prefrontal cortex (behavior), hypothalamus, nucleus accumbens, amygdala, brain stem (nucleus of the solitary tract), adipose tissue, pancreas, and gastrointestinal tract, modulating several hormones and neurotransmitters.

5. TOXICOLOGY OF PHENOLIC COMPOUNDS

Most studies of polyphenols have been designed to define their benefits, but the evidence about their toxicity is scarce (Fig. 4). Concerning this, pharmacological doses of these compounds may have deleterious effects in certain susceptible populations [63].

5.1. Pro-oxidant Activity

Although several studies have promoted dietary polyphenols as antioxidants, there is increasing evidence about pro-oxidative polyphenols [64, 65]. In this regard, tea catechins, including epigallocatechin-3-gallate, are unstable under cell culture conditions, with the consequent generation of hydrogen peroxide, which can induce oxidative stress in cancer cells [66-69]. In a previous study, biological oxidation by polyphenols from American plants, such as *Ilex paraguariensis* A. St.-Hil., *Aspidosperma quebracho-blanco* Schltdl. or *Lantana grisebachii* Stuck., was confirmed in murine spleen of BALB/C females after their oral intake, given that levels of these compounds are highly correlated to levels of lipid peroxides (Spearman's 85% correlation, $p < 0.005$) [70].

Table 1. Biological effects of polyphenols.

<i>Antioxidant Effects</i>	<i>Anti-inflammatory Effects</i>
Radical scavenging	Increase of IL-12
Inhibition of lipid peroxidation	Inhibition of cyclooxygenase and lipoxygenase
Inducible nitric oxide synthase decrease	Regulation of neutrophil signaling
Decrease of xanthine oxidase	Inhibition of VCAM
Inhibition of cyclooxygenase and lipoxygenase	Increase of CD11b
Increase of the activity of antioxidant enzymes: Catalase, hemeoxygenase-1, glutathione peroxidase and superoxide dismutase	Inhibition of NF-kB activation
Inhibition of NF-kB activation	Inhibition of ERK1/2
Inhibition of transcription factors: Sp1, AP-1, STAT1, STAT3 and FOXO1	Inhibition of p38 protein.
	Inhibition of Phospholipase A2
	Activation of Peroxisome proliferator activated receptors
<i>Anti-proliferative effects</i>	Inhibition of TNF- α
Suppression of tissue inhibitors of metalloproteinases-2	Induce NAG-1 expression
Expression of functional p21WAF1	
Prevention of Ras/JNK activation	<i>Anti-aggregating effects</i>
Negative regulation of NFkB	Decrease of platelet activation factor
Induce NAG-1 expression	Inhibition of related acetyl transferases
Inhibition of VEGF signaling	Inhibition of thrombin induced phosphorylation of p38MAPK and ERK1/2
Reduced expression of the matrix metalloproteinases	Inhibition of tyrosine phosphorylation of platelet proteins
Reduced expressions of CD31	Reduction of intracellular Ca ²⁺ level
Inhibition of the activity of DNA methyltransferase	Suppression of prostaglandin D2
Prevention of ERKs, PDK1 and p90RSK activation	Suppression of Thromboxane A2
Stabilization of tumor suppressor protein p53	
Altered expression of Bcl-2 family members	<i>Anti-atherosclerotic and anti-angiogenic effects</i>
Activation of initiator caspases	Inhibition of the expression of adhesion molecules: ICAM-1, VCAM-1 and E-Selectin
Inhibition of Bcl-X _L and Bcl-2	Increase of endothelial nitric oxide synthase
Inhibition on telomerase	Inhibition of phosphodiesterases in smooth muscle
Inhibition FAS receptor	Inhibition of the fibroblast growth factors
	Inhibition of the vascular endothelial growth factor

AP-1: Activator protein 1; Bcl-2: Apoptosis regulator Bcl-2; Bcl-XL: B-cell lymphoma-extra-large; CD-31,11b: cluster of differentiation 31 and 11b; ERK: extracellular signal-regulated kinases; FOXO1: Forkhead box protein O1; ICAM: Intercellular Adhesion Molecule 1; IL-12: Interleukin 12; JNK: c-Jun NH2-terminal kinase; NAG-1: nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug-activated gene 1; NF-kB: Nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells; p21WAF1: cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor p21; p38MAPK: P38 mitogen-activated protein kinases; p90RSK: p90 kDa ribosomal S6 kinases; PDK1: phosphoinositide-dependent kinase 1; STAT1-3: Signal transducer and activator of transcription 1 and 3; TNF- α : tumor necrosis factor α ; VCAM: vascular adhesion molecule; VEGF: Vascular endothelial growth factor.

5.2. Hepatotoxicity and Nephrotoxicity

There is evidence about the hepatotoxic potential of certain polyphenols. Treatment with epigallocatechin-3-gallate in rats reduces hepatocyte viability. Cell death is associated with increased production of reactive oxygen species and reduced glutathione depletion [71]. Laboratory studies in rodents and dogs have supported the toxic

effects of high doses of preparations derived from green tea [72]. High doses of polyphenols can induce hepatotoxicity and nephrotoxicity [73, 74]. Particularly, hepatic and renal toxicity appear to be correlated with the bioavailability of epigallocatechin-3-gallate [75]. Recent studies in humans have also shown that fasting increases its bioavailability [6, 76].

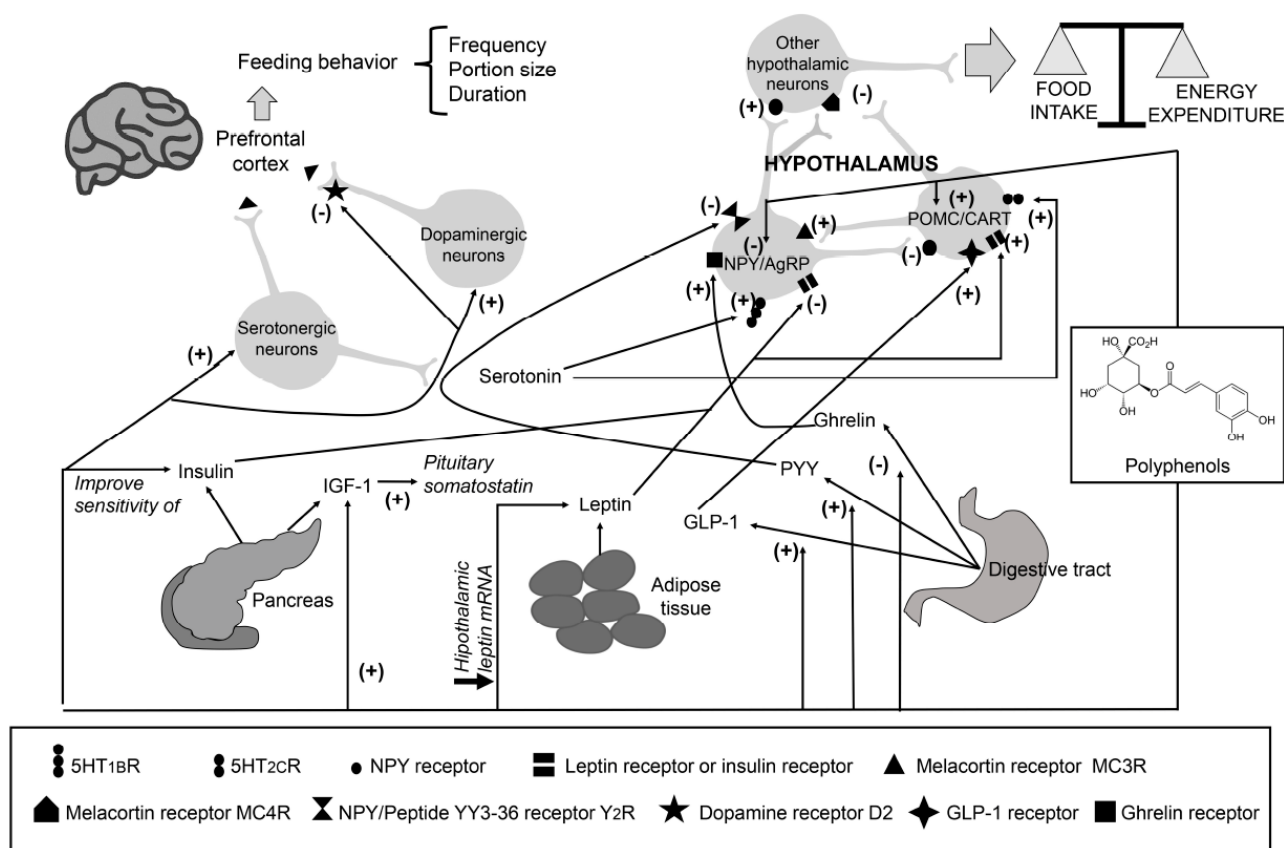


Fig. (3). Metabolic regulation by neurotropic polyphenols (AgRP: agouti-related protein. NPY: Neuropeptide Y. POMC: pro-opiomelanocortin. CART: cocaine- and amphetamine-regulated transcript. PYY: peptide YY3-36. GLP-1: glucagon-like peptide-1. IGF-1: insulin-like growth factor-1).

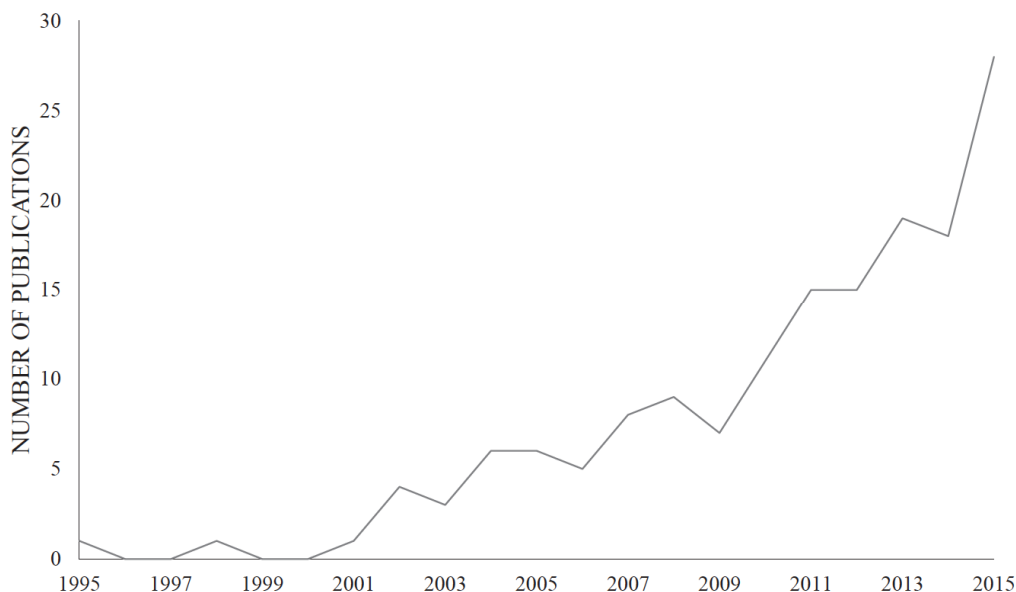


Fig. (4). Number of publications found for the search terms “Polyphenols” AND “Side effect” in PubMed. The search field tag was limited to “Title/Abstract”.

5.3. Carcinogenicity

Some polyphenols may have genotoxic, carcinogenic effects at high doses [77, 78]. Caffeic acid, for example, induces the development of tumors in the stomach and kidneys

of rats and mice [79]. In addition, catechols are postulated to mediate the induction of renal tumors by estradiol. Quercetin inhibits methylation of catecholestrogen and increases renal levels of 2- and 4-hydroxyestradiol by 60-80%. This can

result in a higher imbalance in catecholestrogen redox homeostasis and estradiol-induced carcinogenesis [80, 81].

Finally, it has been reported that catechins promote tumor development in the colon of male rats and although quercetin can reduce the proliferation of cancer cells at high doses, some studies have found that it stimulates cell proliferation at low doses [82, 83].

5.4. Other Side Effects

Several flavonoids can inhibit thyroid peroxidase and interfere with the biosynthesis of the thyroid hormone (free radical iodination) [84-86]. This is thought to be one of the causes of endemic goiter in West Africa, where millet is a staple [86, 87].

Isoflavones have estrogen-like activity [88, 89]. Due to this activity, polyphenols may present both beneficial and adverse effects [89-91]. Exaggerated consumption has been associated with reduced fertility in animals and anti-luteinizing effects in premenopausal women [92-94], although anti-tumor effects are still seen [95-97]. Also, isoflavones can produce anti-androgenic effects, impairing sexual development, as well as causing male and female infertility [98, 99].

The consumption of polyphenols can also have anti-nutritional effects [100]. Excessive consumption of polyphenols can increase the risk of iron depletion with a negative impact on iron absorption [100-102]. In addition, proanthocyanidins and ellagitannins have been considered anti-nutritional compounds, particularly in animal nutrition, as these are able to interact with certain proteins and inhibit various enzymes, *e.g.* α -glucosidase and α -amylase [103, 104].

Studies in cell lines with purified flavonoids (including quercetin, luteolin, and kaempferol) have suggested that maternal consumption of flavonoids produces inhibition of topoisomerase II in the fetus, which could increase the risk of leukemia in newborns [105, 106]. The most potent inhibitors were quercetin and fisetin.

6. NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines NCDs as pathologies of chronic evolution, representing an epidemic whose increase is due to an aging population and modern lifestyles characterized by physical inactivity and malnutrition. The main NCDs are: diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and kidney disease. They are characterized by sharing the same risk factors: tobacco consumption, malnutrition, sedentary lifestyle, and excessive alcohol consumption [107].

These risk factors trigger four metabolic/physiological changes that increase the risk of NCDs: high blood pressure, obesity, hyperglycemia and hyperlipidemia [107]. WHO studies indicate that by the year 2020, 75% of deaths worldwide will be attributable to such diseases [107, 108]. NCDs are preventable, thus public policy actions involving intervention, promotion, prevention, and treatment are effective [109].

Given that obesity is a risk factor for NCDs, it is pertinent to promote the incorporation of dietary compounds that modulate weight gain [110]. Current nutrition is oriented towards promoting the consumption of biologically active compounds that provide additional benefits. Based on this premise, the concept of Functional Foods arises: foods that naturally possess or have added bioactive components such as carotenoids, lipids, and polyphenols. In this sense, their regular consumption has a positive association with decreased risk for NCDs [111].

7. OXIDATIVE STRESS

The human body maintains a constant redox balance, preserving the homeostasis between the production of pro-oxidant factors of cellular metabolism and antioxidant defense systems [112, 113]. Oxidative stress refers to a situation of serious imbalance between the production of reactive species and antioxidant defense [114, 115]. Sies in 1991 defined it as "an alteration in the pro-oxidant/antioxidant balance in favor of the former, leading to potential harm" [116]. Oxidative stress can result from:

- A decrease in antioxidants. For example: mutations affecting antioxidant defense enzymes, toxic agents depleting these defenses, or the lack of dietary antioxidants.
- Increased production of reactive species, especially reactive oxygen species (ROS) and reactive nitrogen species (RNS). This happens in exposure to high levels of reactive toxins, or substances that are metabolized to generate ROS, as well as by excessive activation of natural systems, such as the inappropriate activation of phagocytes in chronic inflammatory diseases [117].

When levels of free radicals and reactive species cannot be offset by antioxidant defense systems, cell damage and death occur [118]. This is the physiopathological mechanism of many diseases, such as NCDs [119]. Free radicals are atoms or molecules containing one or more unpaired electrons. This characteristic makes them highly reactive and able to damage other molecules, which become reactive leading to an oxidative cascade in cells and tissues [113, 120].

Oxidative stress, in its most severe form, causes serious disturbances in cell metabolism such as: DNA rupture, increased concentration of intracellular calcium, changes in membrane transport of ions and specific proteins, and lipid peroxidation [113]. The reversibility or lack thereof, of the damage depends on factors like the duration of the stress, the effectiveness of antioxidant defenses of the organism, age, nutritional status, and genetic factors involved in encoding antioxidant systems [115].

ROS are the final products of oxygen used by the cells. They are responsible for the detrimental oxidative stress causes in biological systems [121]. ROS are formed during aerobic mitochondrial respiration in which oxygen undergoes an incomplete, one-electron reduction generating reactive and unstable molecules such as superoxide anion, hydrogen peroxide, and hydroxyl radical [122]. It is currently known that other reactive species besides ROS exist, including: reactive iron species, reactive copper species, and RNS [113].

Ninety percent of intracellular ROS are of mitochondrial origin [123]. Other endogenous sources include the peroxisomal β -oxidation of fatty acids, the activation of phagocytes, and the action of certain enzyme systems such as cytochrome P450. Certain external stimuli generate ROS, such as pro-inflammatory factors, environmental toxins, UV light, ionizing radiation, *etc* [124].

Although the deteriorating effects of excessive ROS production are well known, low concentrations are essential to ensure proper functioning of intracellular processes and signaling mechanisms. In this sense, they modulate migration, proliferation, survival, and apoptosis [122].

8. ANTIOXIDANT DEFENSE

The body has antioxidant defense systems responsible for minimizing the formation of ROS as well as eliminating them; however, they are not completely effective [115]. This antioxidant protection system is composed of enzymes and low molecular weight compounds. A biological antioxidant is defined as a substance, present at low concentrations compared to an oxidizable substrate, which inhibits or retards the oxidation of said substrate [125]. Antioxidants prevent other molecules from binding to oxygen by interacting faster with free radicals and ROS [126].

There are different ways of classifying antioxidants:

I. By position [127]:

- Membrane antioxidants (α -tocopherol)
- Intracellular antioxidants (superoxide dismutase, catalase, glutathione peroxidase).
- Plasma antioxidants (β -carotene, ascorbic acid, ceruloplasmin, transferrin).

II. By nature [128]:

- Enzymatic antioxidants (superoxide dismutase, catalase, glutathione peroxidase, glutathione reductase).
- Non-enzymatic antioxidants: subdivided into nutrients (Carotenoids, polyphenols, ascorbic acid) or metabolites (glutathione, albumin, bilirubin).

III. By their effect on lipid peroxidation:

- Preventive: those that block the initial production of free radicals (catalase, glutathione peroxidase).
- Disruptors: those involved in the propagation of lipid peroxidation (superoxide dismutase, vitamin E, uric acid).

8.1. Endogenous Enzymatic System

Catalase is the predominant component of the antioxidant system [129]; it is responsible for catalyzing the decomposition of hydrogen peroxide generated by cellular metabolism into water [130]. It also has peroxidative activity [131]. Catalase is present predominantly in the peroxisomes and mitochondria. The levels of catalase are high in liver and kidneys, lower in epithelial and connective tissue, and practically null in nervous tissue [132]. For the catalytic reaction, the donor is another hydrogen peroxide molecule. To accomplish this function, the enzyme must present its tetrameric form [133].

In peroxidative reactions, the enzyme can use methanol, ethanol, formic acid, phenol, or formaldehyde as hydrogen donors. This function can be performed by monomers, dimers and tetramers [133].

Glutathione peroxidase is a selenium-dependent enzyme that uses reduced glutathione and reduces peroxides in cytosol (erythrocytes) and lysosomes (neutrophils, macrophages and other cells of the immune system) [134]. Three forms of glutathione peroxidase have been categorized: the cellular form, which has more affinity for hydrogen peroxide than the lipoperoxide; the extracellular form, it has similar affinity for both substrates; and the PH form which has specific affinity for lipid peroxides [126].

Superoxide dismutase is group of metalloenzymes distributed widely throughout in the body. They utilize different metals as cofactors: copper, zinc, magnesium, and iron [126]. These enzymes catalyze the conversion of superoxide into hydrogen peroxide and molecular oxygen [135].

8.2. Exogenous Antioxidants

In recent years, interest in researching plant-derived compounds with antioxidant capacity and their implications in human health has been growing constantly. Bioactive compounds in fruits and vegetables are able to interact with other compounds in redox reactions. Dietary antioxidants are defined as substances in foods that significantly decrease the adverse effects of reactive species generated in normal physiological processes [136]. Dietary antioxidants are bio-compounds that cannot be synthesized by animals, and therefore must be acquired in the diet [137]. Of these substances, the following stand out:

- Tocopherols (Vitamin E): lipophilic antioxidant that neutralizes reactive species and protects lipids from peroxidation to protect cell membranes [138].
- Ascorbic acid (Vitamin C): Vitamin involved in multiple metabolic reactions. It is a water-soluble antioxidant that neutralizes free radicals and inhibits lipid peroxidation. It also promotes regeneration of α -tocopherol [139].
- Carotenoids: Natural compounds with lipophilic properties. There are about 500 identified types of carotenoids, β -carotene being the most important. They possess antioxidant properties [140].
- Selenium: Transient essential element with important antioxidant power. It reacts along with vitamin E in the process of neutralizing free radicals. It is also essential to the functioning of the glutathione peroxidase enzyme [141].

Also, other antioxidants are found in different plant species, denominated phenolic compounds, for example: isoflavones, flavonoids, quercetin, and other polyphenols [142].

9. NCD MODULATION BY PHENOLIC COMPOUNDS

Phenolic phytochemicals include a large group of compounds that have been extensively studied as preventive agents for chronic diseases such as cancer, arteriosclerosis, and neurological disorders [143, 144].

Oxidative stress is a major contributing factor in cardiovascular disease. Clinical studies have shown significant positive associations between oxidative stress and inflammation, as well as indicators of vascular damage such as impaired endothelial function [145, 146].

Dietary polyphenols seem to be effective in cardioprotection [147], in this context, they reduce the size of atherosclerotic lesions and increase serum paraoxonase activity (antioxidant enzyme associated with HDL) [148-150].

Induction of protective factors, such as nitric oxide and the endothelium-derived factor, has been proposed as the mechanism of action. This promotes vasodilatation and prevents platelet activation [151]. Also, phenolic compounds can improve the function of vascular smooth muscle and tend to maintain the redox balance [152, 153]. Polyphenol treatments are associated with reduced expression of NADPH oxidase, a vascular source of superoxide anions, as well as reduced action of the angiotensin system [154, 155]. Decreased oxidative stress prevents degradation of nitric oxide by superoxide anion, along with vasoconstrictive and pro-inflammatory responses. Therefore, the actions of polyphenols on endothelial and smooth muscle cells can promote vascular health [156].

Polyphenols are potentially neuroprotective through their ability to inhibit and modulate several neurodegenerative processes [157]. The proposed mechanisms of action inhibit inflammation, lipid peroxidation, endothelial activation, and modulate nitric oxide activity [157, 158].

Among them, catechins suppress neuroinflammation and inhibit activation of microglia and astrocytes associated with the production of mediators related to neuronal apoptosis [159]. Catechins also have a protective effect against neurotoxins involved in the development of Parkinson's disease [160]. Furthermore, catechin derivatives can delay the occurrence of neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease [161, 162]. Quercetin exerts significant protection against ischemic injury [163, 164]. Anthocyanins reduce oxidative stress associated with age and improve cognitive function [165, 166].

Furthermore, polyphenols have shown potential of possessing chemopreventive activity. Chemoprevention is defined as pharmacological intervention used to stop or reverse the process of cancer development before invasion and metastasis occur [167]. Although the health benefits of polyphenols come from their antioxidant effects, this cannot explain all ones, such as specific inhibition of signal transduction [168].

Dietary polyphenols can interfere with the initiation, development, and progression of cancer through modulation of various cellular processes, such as: cell cycle arrest by inhibiting cyclins, induction of apoptosis through the liberation of cytochrome C, caspase activation and up or down regulation of members of the family of anti-apoptotic proteins, inhibition of proliferation and survival signaling, modulation of inflammation (cyclooxygenase-2, tumor necrosis factor, etc.), and deletion of key proteins involved in angiogenesis and metastasis [169].

Diets rich in polyphenols are epidemiologically associated with a lower risk of developing cancer [170-172]. Fruit

consumption is linked to a lower risk of cancers of the digestive and urinary tracts [173-175]. Intake of whole grain foods is also associated with a reduced risk of developing colorectal cancer [176].

Numerous studies in cell cultures and animal models have been performed to assess the ability of specific edible plants to prevent cancer [177, 178]. This chemopreventive activity has been demonstrated for green tea, black tea, and their constituents in different tissues of animal models: skin, lung, oral cavity, esophagus, stomach, liver, pancreas, bladder, small intestine, colon, mammary and prostate gland tumors [179-181].

In light of the high levels of polyphenols in the diet, the biological activity of these compounds is an important topic for scientific research. The chemopreventive potential of these compounds compels the design of future studies based on discovering the mechanism. This could facilitate a better understanding of the potential beneficial dietary polyphenols [182].

There is increasing evidence to suggest that plant polyphenols may help combat the risk factors linked to the development of metabolic syndrome [183]. Among the polyphenols associated with prevention of metabolic syndrome, epigallocatechin-3-gallate has shown benefits because it inhibits the nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells, increases the production of nitric oxide, vasodilatation, and induces apoptosis of adipocytes [184, 185]. It also interferes with the regulation of insulin secretion and blood pressure [186-188].

Finally, polyphenols may have implications for the treatment of chronic respiratory diseases [189]. It is known that oxidative stress is involved in the pathogenesis of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It can also be associated with resistance to therapy in some clinical forms of exacerbations and remodeling of the airways [190]. Resveratrol present in red wine, has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties that inhibit inflammatory cytokine release from alveolar macrophages [191, 192].

10. METABOLIC INVOLVEMENT OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Energy metabolism is defined as the set of processes and physicochemical reactions involved in attaining and transforming energy from food intake to maintain vital cell functions [193]. The mechanisms involved in maintaining weight stability and body composition are very complex. They respond to central control, represented by the different brain regions (cerebral cortex, hypothalamus and brainstem) and peripheral control from the digestive organs and endocrine system [194, 195].

Brain regions are interconnected through a network of neural circuits communicating the satiety and appetite centers, emitting both afferent and efferent signals that determine intake regulation. Among these centers are hypothalamic regions such as the arcuate nucleus, paraventricular nucleus, the ventromedial and lateral hypothalamic areas, and extra hypothalamic regions such as the nucleus of the solitary tract, which belongs to the brainstem [196]. Also, various peripheral modulators are involved in controlling

intake, especially the digestive tract, liver, and adipose tissue [197]. Food consumption is influenced by social, psychological, and environmental factors [198].

The relationship between the various regulatory components of energy homeostasis and intake is mediated *via* nerve signals, hormones, neuropeptides, nutrients, and metabolites [199]. Meanwhile, stomach distension and contractions produce gastric satiety signals and decreased appetite, in addition to specific neuroendocrine and metabolic signals [200]. In this regard, certain orexigenic and anorexigenic factors, such as ghrelin, insulin, leptin, *etc.*, are generated in the gastrointestinal tract in function of nutritional status [201]. These signals interact with central neuropeptides involved in the regulation of appetite and energy expenditure such as: neuropeptide Y, agouti-related protein, orexin, melanin-concentrating hormone, proopiomelanocortin, and transcribers related to cocaine and amphetamines, corticotrophin-releasing hormone, among others [193].

Therefore, nutritional, nervous, endocrine, and metabolic signals produced by different organs and systems regulating energy homeostasis are released in response to the nutritional and metabolic state of the body. The integration of this conglomerate stimuli influences weight stability and body composition through regulation of the energetic balance, with the gastrointestinal tract and the central nervous system interacting through specific nerve signals [193, 202].

11. NEUROTROPIC PHENOLIC COMPOUNDS

Phenolic bioavailability in the central nervous system depends on the ability of these compounds to cross the blood-brain barrier [203]. With studies confirming this ability, polyphenols with higher lipophilicity as well as those of small molecular weight and size, polar polyphenols and their metabolites, achieve higher concentrations in encephalic tissue. They include anthocyanins, cyanidin glycosides, penidins, and cyanidin [204].

Also, permeability of certain polyphenols (*e.g.* flavonoids) is influenced by efflux transporters, such as P- glycoprotein and their stereochemistry [205]. A non-region-specific accumulation below 1 nmol per tissue gram has been proposed [204, 206], including quercetin, epigallocatechin-3-gallate and catechin [207-209].

Then, these phytochemicals exert the redox bioactivities previously described. In this regard, anthocyanins and flavonoids are neuroprotective antioxidants [210, 211]. Furthermore, they can modulate physiology of neurons and glial cells, thus modifying neurotransmission and neuroimmune response [210-213]. In consequence, phenolics might affect the metabolic involvement of the nervous system. Concerning this, resveratrol and curcumin are ligands of cannabinoid receptors by acting as antagonists/inverse agonists, which give them the capacity to reduce body weight and adjust energetic metabolism [214]. Additionally, resveratrol, a neurotrophic agent, affects behavior and improves of neuroendocrine recovery [215]. Meanwhile, a tetrahydroxystilbene glycoside regulates different molecular pathways in hippocampus, which are relevant for nervous functions [216]. Another interesting target of polyphenols is the brain derived neurotrophic factor, given its participation structural and

functional characteristics of the central nervous system [217].

Despite their numerous health benefits, these biomolecules are also risky. In fact, both low and excessive levels of polyphenols in different areas of the encephalon can break redox homeostasis leading to tissue damage [218]. Moreover, preliminary data suggest that an elevated dose of chlorogenic acid triggers neurotoxicity [219]. Thus, equilibrium is a major concern to obtain positive effects.

CONCLUSION

Phenolic compounds modulate redox state of nervous cells and their tissue environment, which can functionally modify neurotransmission. If it happens in nervous centers involved in metabolic regulation, several systemic effects can be triggered in order to restore homeostasis and prevent NCDs. Thus, psychoneuroimmunoendocrine modulation by polyphenols might be an integrative approach to combat these pathologies, which requires further assessment.

Nonetheless, researchers and physicians should be objective and careful in order to avoid overdose and side effects. Furthermore, scientific literature is mainly focused on beneficial effects, but pharmacokinetic and toxicological studies are scarce with neurotoxicological potential of polyphenols possibly being underestimated.

Further studies are encouraged to confirm therapeutic potential of neurotropic polyphenols, in order to identify their plant sources, bioactivity and biological risks after use.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Not applicable.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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