WORLD JOURNAL OF PHARMACEUTICAL RESEARCH
SJIF Impact Factor 8.453
Volume 13, Issue 19, 144-154. Review Article ISSN 2277–7105

MEDICINAL PLANTS WITH ANTIDIABETIC PROPERTIES IN AYURVEDA: A REVIEW

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Article Received on
06 August 2024,

Revised on 27 August 2024,
Accepted on 16 Sept. 2024

DOI: 10.20959/wjpr202419-33947

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ABSTRACT

Diabetes mellitus is a growing global health issue, and alternative treatments like Ayurveda offer promising solutions. This review explores five key antidiabetic plants in Ayurveda: Gudmar (*Gymnema sylvestre*), Bitter Melon (*Momordica charantia*), Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*), Indian Gooseberry (*Phyllanthus emblica*), and Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*). These plants help regulate blood sugar levels through various mechanisms, including insulin stimulation, improving glucose uptake, and providing antioxidant effects. Their Ayurvedic properties, such as *Rasa*, *Virya*, and *Vipaka*, also support diabetes management. Further scientific validation is needed to confirm their efficacy and safety in modern therapeutic settings.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, antidiabetic plants, Gudmar, Bitter Melon, Fenugreek, Indian Gooseberry, Turmeric, diabetes mellitus, blood glucose, traditional medicine.

INTRODUCTION

Diabetes mellitus, commonly referred to as diabetes, is a chronic metabolic disorder characterized by high blood sugar levels over a prolonged period. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), diabetes has become a significant global health concern, affecting millions of people worldwide.[1] While modern medicine offers various treatments for diabetes, including oral medications and insulin therapy, there has been growing interest

in alternative and complementary therapies, especially those rooted in traditional systems like Ayurveda.

Ayurveda, an ancient system of medicine from India, emphasizes a holistic approach to health and wellness. It uses various plants and natural substances to manage and prevent diseases, including diabetes (known as *Madhumeha*[2] in Ayurveda). Numerous medicinal plants are prescribed in Ayurvedic texts for their antidiabetic properties. This review highlights five of the most important antidiabetic plants used in Ayurveda and explores their therapeutic potential in managing diabetes.

AIM OF STUDY

This study is essential to explore Ayurvedic antidiabetic plants, validate their efficacy, and integrate traditional knowledge with modern treatments for safer, holistic, and sustainable diabetes management solutions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Antidiabetic properties refer to the ability of certain substances, including medicinal plants, to regulate blood sugar levels and improve insulin function. These properties include enhancing insulin secretion, reducing glucose absorption, improving insulin sensitivity, and offering antioxidant protection, which helps in managing and preventing complications associated with diabetes.

Mechanism of Action of Antidiabetic Plants in Ayurveda[3]

Ayurvedic herbs work through different mechanisms to control blood sugar levels. These mechanisms include:

- Enhancing insulin secretion: Certain herbs stimulate the pancreatic β-cells to secrete more insulin, thereby lowering blood glucose levels.
- Improving insulin sensitivity: Some plants help enhance the body's sensitivity to insulin, allowing glucose to be more efficiently utilized by the cells.
- Inhibiting carbohydrate absorption: Several Ayurvedic herbs delay or reduce the absorption of carbohydrates in the intestines, which helps in maintaining postprandial (after meals) blood sugar levels.
- Antioxidant effects: Many of these plants also possess strong antioxidant properties, which help reduce oxidative stress—a major factor in the progression of diabetes.

Top 5 Antidiabetic Plants in Ayurveda

1. Gudmar (Gymnema sylvestre)[4]

Plant Description

Gudmar is a perennial woody vine found in tropical regions of India and Africa. Its leaves are commonly used for medicinal purposes. Gudmar is called *Madhunashini* in Sanskrit, which translates to "destroyer of sugar."

- Active Compounds: Gymnemic acids, saponins, and flavonoids.
- Mechanism of Action: The gymnemic acids in Gudmar have a unique ability to inhibit sugar absorption in the intestines, thus reducing postprandial blood glucose levels. These acids also interact with taste receptors, dulling the sweet taste perception, which may help reduce sugar cravings. Additionally, Gymnema has been shown to stimulate insulin secretion and support the regeneration of pancreatic β-cells, which enhances endogenous insulin production.
- Scientific Evidence: Clinical studies have demonstrated that regular consumption of Gymnema sylvestre reduces fasting blood sugar levels, improves lipid profiles, and supports overall metabolic health in diabetic patients.

Ayurvedic Properties

- Rasa (Taste): Tikta (bitter), Kashaya (astringent)
- Virya (Potency): Ushna (hot)
- Vipaka (Post-digestive effect): Katu (pungent)

Effectiveness in DM

Gudmar's *Tikta* (bitter) and *Kashaya* (astringent) tastes help to pacify *Kapha* dosha, which is aggravated in diabetes. Its *Ushna* (hot) potency aids in digestion and metabolism, counteracting the sluggish metabolism seen in diabetes. By balancing *Kapha* and stimulating insulin production, Gudmar is highly effective in reducing blood sugar levels and managing diabetes symptoms.

2. Bitter Melon (Momordica charantia)[5]

Plant Description

Bitter melon, also known as *Karela*, is a tropical and subtropical vine widely grown in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean for its edible fruit. The unripe fruit, seeds, and leaves are used medicinally.

- Active Compounds: Charantin, polypeptide-p, vicine, and alkaloids.
- Mechanism of Action: Bitter melon exerts its antidiabetic effect by increasing glucose uptake in the cells and enhancing insulin secretion. Polypeptide-p, a compound found in

bitter melon, has insulin-like activity and lowers blood glucose levels. Charantin is known for improving glucose tolerance and has a blood sugar-lowering effect.

- Scientific Evidence: Clinical studies have shown that bitter melon extracts can significantly lower blood sugar levels in diabetic patients when consumed regularly.

Ayurvedic Properties

- Rasa (Taste): Tikta (bitter), Katu (pungent)
- Virya (Potency): Ushna (hot)
- Vipaka (Post-digestive effect): Katu (pungent)

Effectiveness in DM

Bitter melon's *Tikta* (bitter) taste is particularly beneficial in clearing *Kapha* from the body, a key factor in diabetes management according to Ayurveda. Its *Ushna* (hot) potency enhances digestion and metabolism, further helping in blood sugar regulation. Its ability to mimic insulin and improve glucose metabolism makes it an effective remedy for managing both type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

3. Fenugreek (Trigonella foenum-graecum)[6]

Plant Description

Fenugreek, or *Methi*, is an annual herb native to the Mediterranean region. Its seeds are used both as a spice and for medicinal purposes.

- Active Compounds: Soluble fiber (galactomannan), trigonelline, and 4-hydroxyisoleucine.
- Mechanism of Action: Fenugreek seeds contain a high amount of soluble fiber that slows carbohydrate absorption and reduces postprandial blood glucose levels. 4-

hydroxyisoleucine enhances insulin secretion, while trigonelline improves insulin sensitivity, making it beneficial for diabetes management.

- Scientific Evidence: Research suggests that fenugreek seeds can significantly lower fasting blood sugar levels and improve overall glucose tolerance in diabetic patients.

Ayurvedic Properties

- Rasa (Taste): Tikta (bitter), Katu (pungent)
- Virya (Potency): Ushna (hot)
- Vipaka (Post-digestive effect): Katu (pungent)

Effectiveness in DM

Fenugreek's *Tikta* and *Katu* properties are effective in pacifying *Kapha* and improving digestion, which is critical in managing diabetes. Its high fiber content delays sugar absorption, while its *Ushna* potency enhances metabolic function, making it an ideal remedy for controlling blood sugar levels.

4. Indian Gooseberry (Phyllanthus emblica)[7]

Plant Description

Indian gooseberry, or *Amla*, is a small to medium-sized tree found throughout India. Its fruit is highly valued in Ayurvedic medicine for its antioxidant and rejuvenating properties.

- Active Compounds: Vitamin C, tannins, polyphenols.
- Mechanism of Action: Amla enhances insulin secretion and improves glucose metabolism, making it highly effective in managing blood sugar levels. Its strong antioxidant properties help reduce oxidative stress, which plays a crucial role in the complications associated with diabetes.
- Scientific Evidence: Studies suggest that regular consumption of Amla helps lower fasting and postprandial blood glucose levels in diabetic patients.

Ayurvedic Properties

- Rasa (Taste): Amla (sour), Madhura (sweet)
- Virya (Potency): Sheeta (cold)
- Vipaka (Post-digestive effect): Madhura (sweet)

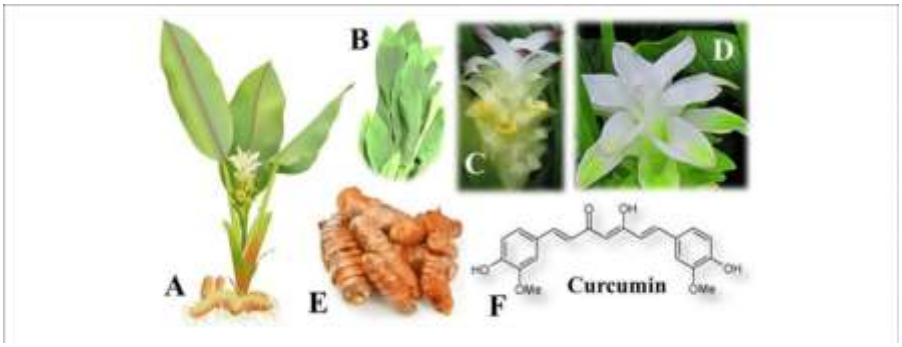
Effectiveness in DM

Amla's *Madhura* (sweet) and *Amla* (sour) tastes help pacify *Vata* and *Pitta* doshas, while its *Sheeta* (cooling) potency balances *Pitta*, which can be aggravated in diabetes. Its antioxidant action helps protect against diabetes-related complications, making it a valuable remedy for long-term management of diabetes.

5. Turmeric (Curcuma longa)[8]

Plant Description

Turmeric is a rhizomatous herbaceous perennial plant native to the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. It is widely used in Ayurvedic medicine for its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and antiseptic properties.



- Active Compounds: Curcumin, volatile oils, and alkaloids.
- Mechanism of Action: Curcumin, the active compound in turmeric, helps lower blood glucose levels by improving insulin sensitivity and protecting pancreatic β-cells. Its anti-

inflammatory and antioxidant properties also help prevent complications associated with diabetes, such as neuropathy and retinopathy.

- Scientific Evidence: Research shows that curcumin improves insulin sensitivity and lowers blood sugar levels, making it a beneficial supplement for people with diabetes.

Ayurvedic Properties

- Rasa (Taste): Tikta (bitter), Katu (pungent)
- Virya (Potency): Ushna (hot)
- Vipaka (Post-digestive effect): Katu (pungent)

Effectiveness in DM

Turmeric's *Tikta* and *Katu* tastes help reduce *Kapha* and *Pitta* doshas, which are often imbalanced in diabetes. Its *Ushna* potency enhances metabolism, improving insulin sensitivity and promoting the breakdown of glucose, making it a highly effective remedy for controlling blood sugar levels.

DISCUSSION

1. **Efficacy of Ayurvedic Plants Compared to Modern Therapies**
   - How do the antidiabetic properties of the selected Ayurvedic plants compare with modern pharmaceutical treatments such as insulin and oral hypoglycemic agents?
   - Can these plants be used as standalone treatments, or are they more effective as complementary therapies?

2. **Mechanisms of Action in Managing Diabetes**
   - The various mechanisms by which these plants lower blood glucose levels (e.g., improving insulin secretion, enhancing insulin sensitivity, inhibiting carbohydrate absorption).
   - How do the plants' effects on glucose metabolism align with Ayurvedic principles, particularly in terms of balancing the *Kapha*, *Pitta*, and *Vata* doshas?

3. **Ayurvedic Concept of *Madhumeha* and Holistic Diabetes Management**
   - Ayurveda's holistic approach treats not just the symptoms but the root cause of diabetes. How does the use of these plants integrate into the overall Ayurvedic management of *Madhumeha*?

- Discussion on how lifestyle changes, dietary modifications, and use of these herbs contribute to long-term management and prevention of complications in diabetic patients.

4. Potential of Ayurvedic Plants in Preventing Diabetic Complications

- Many of the studied plants (e.g., Amla, Turmeric) have potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, which are key in preventing complications like diabetic neuropathy, nephropathy, and retinopathy.
- How might these properties provide an advantage over conventional treatments that primarily focus on lowering blood glucose without addressing oxidative stress and inflammation?

5. Scientific Validation of Traditional Uses

- How do recent clinical trials and scientific research validate the traditional uses of these plants in managing diabetes?
- Discussion of gaps in scientific research, including the need for large-scale clinical trials and studies to confirm the long-term safety and efficacy of these plants.

6. Safety, Dosage, and Standardization Issues

- A critical look at the standardization of herbal formulations and the variation in active compound concentrations in these plants.
- Are there any known side effects or interactions with conventional diabetes medications, and how can these be mitigated?

7. Sustainability and Accessibility of Ayurvedic Herbal Remedies

- Considering the growing popularity of herbal medicine, are these antidiabetic plants sustainably cultivated, and how accessible are they to populations in need?
- Ethical considerations regarding the commercial use and bioprospecting of these traditional plants.

8. Personalized Approach in Ayurveda

- Unlike conventional medicine, Ayurveda emphasizes a personalized approach to treatment based on an individual's constitution (*Prakriti*). How does this impact the use of these antidiabetic plants, and can such a personalized approach be incorporated into mainstream diabetes care?

9. Integration of Ayurvedic and Modern Medical Systems

- Discussion on the potential for integrating Ayurvedic medicine with modern diabetes treatment protocols. What are the challenges and opportunities in creating a synergistic model of care?

10. Limitations of the Study

- Highlight the limitations in the existing research on these plants, including the variability in plant quality, patient responses, and the reliance on traditional knowledge that may lack rigorous scientific backing.
- Future directions for research to explore the long-term efficacy, safety, and mechanistic pathways of these herbs in diabetic populations.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda offers a comprehensive approach to managing diabetes through the use of medicinal plants, many of which have been validated by modern scientific research. Gudmar, Bitter Melon, Fenugreek, Indian Gooseberry, and Turmeric are among the most effective antidiabetic plants, each possessing unique properties that target the root causes of diabetes and help in managing its symptoms. By balancing the doshas, improving metabolism, and regulating blood sugar levels, these plants offer a holistic solution for diabetes management. However, it is essential to consult a healthcare.

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