Abstract

Mushrooms are higher fungi having great taste and nutraceutical properties. They are one such dietary component that can help us in addressing the issues of quality food, health, and environmental sustainability. Due to the presence of a large number of secondary metabolites mushrooms can be used as a source for biotherapeutics which in turn can help in development of new drugs. There has been a recent upsurge of interest in mushrooms not only as a health food which is rich in protein but also due to the presence of biologically active compounds of medicinal value which possess anti-oxidative, anti-cancer, anti-viral, hepatoprotective, immunomodulating and hypocholesterolemic properties. Hence, mushrooms are used as a dietary supplements as well as therapeutic agents in complementary medicine. Edible items can be fortified with mushrooms owing to their high nutritive value and such food serve as a nutrient reservoir for malnourished populations. The potential therapeutic implications of mushrooms are enormous however; detailed mechanisms of various health benefits of mushrooms to humans still require intensive investigation, especially with the emergence of new evidence of their health benefit. The paper outlines the information on all such aspects of medicinal mushrooms along with their role in various diseases and in the area of clinical nutrition.

Keywords: Mushrooms; Neutraceuticals; Active Compounds; Medicines.

Introduction

India has witnessed an enormous change in its agricultural pattern due to the continuous increase in the population rate. Henceforth, rapid rise of the population brings forward the challenge of meeting the demands of quality food and achieving nutritional security. Wide spread malnutrition necessitated the search for alternative source of protein since the production of pulses has not kept pace with the requirement of the country [1]. The rising demand for functional food free from synthetic chemicals indicates the awareness of people on quality food. The excellent texture and unique flavour of edible and medicinal mushrooms makes them universally accepted by all age groups [2]. Due to the production of a large variety of secondary metabolites with exceptional chemical structures and interesting biological actions they are reservoir of valuable chemical resources [3]. However, there is very little awareness on mushrooms as a healthy food and as an important source of biological active substances with medicinal value [4].

For hundreds of years, medicinal mushrooms as medicinal extract and essences, and are applied as alternative medicine in Korea, China, Japan and eastern Russia [5]. According to current estimates, mushrooms constitute at least 12,000 species worldwide and out of that 2,000 species are reported as edible. About 35 edible mushroom species are commercially cultivated whereas nearly 200 wild species used for medicinal purposes [6]. The most cultivated mushroom worldwide is Agaricus bisporus, followed by Lentinula edodes, Pleurotus spp. and Flammulina velutipes [6, 7]. Mushrooms contain a high moisture percentage that ranges between 80 and 95 g/100 g, approximately. They are a rich source of protein, 200–250 g/kg of dry matter; leucine, valine, glutamine, glutamic and aspartic acids are the most abundant. They are low-calorie foods because of their low fat content, 20–30 g/kg of dry matter, being linoleic (C18:2), oleic (C18:1) and palmitic (C16:0) the main fatty acids. Edible mushrooms contain high amounts of ash, 80–120 g/kg of dry matter and are rich in minerals like potassium, phosphorous, magnesium, calcium, copper, iron, and zinc. Carbohydrates present in them include chitin, glycopur, trehalose, and mannitol; besides, they contain fiber, beta- glucans, hemicelluloses, and pectic substances [8]. The nutritive value of some commonly known mushroom varieties is listed in Table 1.

Medicinal mushrooms have been demonstrated to produce ben-
Therapeutic Potential of Mushrooms

The knowledge of the relationship between diet and disease has led to the development of a new scientific discipline which is termed as “functional food science.” Functional foods can be anything like dietary supplements, medicinal foods, vita foods, phytochemicals, and mycochemicals and also pharmacofood, which could be used specifically to improve the health. Mushrooms fall very well into this category of functional foods as it has all the potential to ameliorate diseases. ‘Mushroom Nutraceuticals’ are the traditional preparations which were used in ancient times in the form of extracts, health tonics, concentrates, fermented beverages, tinctures, teas, soups, herbal formula, powders and arid healthful food dishes [16]. The term “Mushroom Nutraceuticals” has been coined by Chang and Buswell [17]. Due to their immunomodulatory action, they boosts the immune system [18] by the activation of dendritic cells, NK cells, T-cells, macrophages, and production of cytokines [19] and have curative actions against a lot of degenerative diseases without having any side effects; unlike the ones involved in the usage of synthetic drugs. Studies have shown that regular consumption of mushrooms or their products is effective both in preventing and treating specific diseases [7].

Edible mushrooms and their constitutive active compounds have been described to have beneficial effects on hyperglycemia and hypercholesterolemia [20, 21]. Several mushrooms have high content of acidic polysaccharides, dietary fiber, and antioxidants, including vitamins C, B12, and D; folate ergothioneine; and polyphenol [22] suggesting that the mushroom may have potential anti-inflammatory, hypoglycaemic and hypcholesterolemic effects (Table 3). The significant pharmacological effects and physiological properties of mushrooms are bio regulation (immune enhancement), maintenance of homeostasis and regulation of biorhythm, cure of various diseases and prevention and improvement from life threatening diseases such as cancer, cerebral stroke and heart diseases. Mushrooms are also known to have effective substances for antifungal, anti-inflammatory, antitumor, antiviral, antibacterial, hepatoprotective, anti-diabetic, hypolipidemic, anti-thrombotic and hypotensive activities [18].

Mushrooms are known to complement chemotherapy and radiation therapy by countering the side-effects of cancer, such as nausea, bone marrow suppression, anemia, and lowered resistance. Recently, a number of bioactive molecules, including anti-tumor agents have been identified from various mushrooms. Some of the identified molecules are β-glucan, proteoglycan, lectin, phe-nolic compounds, flavonoids, volatile oils, tocopherols, phenolics, flavonoids, carotenoids, fucoides, ascorbic acid enzymes, and organic acids [23], polysaccharides, triterpenoids, dietary fibre, lentinian, schizophyllan, lovastatin, pleuran, steroids, glycopeptidides, terpenes, saponins, xanthones, coumarins, alkaloids, kinon, fenil propanoid, kalvacin, porisin, AHCC, maitake D-fraction, ribonucleases, eringyolsin, and also have been effective against various types of diseases [24, 25].

The active components in mushrooms responsible for conferring anti-cancer potential are lentinian, krestin, hispolon, lectin, calcein, illudin S, psiloycin, Hericium polysaccharide A and B (HPA and HPB), ganoderic acid, schizophyllan, laccase, etc [26]. The bioactive compounds present in mushrooms can be classified into secondary metabolites, glycopeptides and polysaccharides. Out of all these, mushroom polysaccharides are the best known and most potent mushroom-derived substances with anti-tumor and immunomodulating properties. The mushroom polysaccharide i.e β-glucans are the most versatile bioactive molecule owing to its excellent therapeutic implications and broad spectrum biological activity. Since the β-Glucans are not amagulated by humans, so these compounds are recognized by our immune systems as non-self molecules that induces both innate and adaptive immune responses [8].

Novel Mushroom Biotech Products

Mushrooms produced are not only food but are raw material for development of functional food and dietary supplements (nutraceuticals) for health and quality life of humans. Inclusion of mushrooms as functional food can help in the early intervention of sub-healthy states in humans and it might prevent the consequences of life threatening diseases. Trametes versicolor contains proteoglycan constituents like Krestin (PSK) and polysaccharide peptide (PSP). Both of these glycans have been used in cancer therapy like gastric, colorectal lung cancer and breast cancer [27,
Table 2. Some commonly consumed mushrooms along with their bioactive molecules.

| Biological name of mushroom | Active principle/constituents/extracts | Activity reported |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Agaricus bisporus           | Fibers, lectins                       | Hypocholesterolemic, Hypoglycemic |
| Boletus edulis Bull         | Extracts of fruiting bodies            | Antitumor         |
| Flammulina velutipes (Curtis) Singer | Fibers, ethanolic extracts | Antioxidant, Hypocholesterolemic, Antiallergic |
| Grifola frondosa (Dick.) Gray | MD-fraction, ergosterol                | Antioxidant, hypotensive, Hypoglycemic, Immunotherapy, Antiinflammatory activity |
| Ganoderma lucidum (Curtis) P. Karst | Ganoderan A and B, glucans, Triterpenes, ganosporeric acid A, ganopoly, the polysaccharide-containing preparation | Hypoglycemic, antioxidant and antinumor, antiviral (HIV-1), Antiallergic Anti-inflammatory antihepatotoxic, inhibit the biosynthesis of cholesterol, antioxidative and free radical scavenging effects. |
| Hypsizigus marmoreus        | Ethanolic extracts                    | Antioxidant, Antiallergic |
| Lentinula edodes (Berk.) Pegler | Methanolic and water extracts, eritadenine, lentinan, oxalic acid, ethanolic mycelial extracts. | Antioxidant, Hypocholesterolemic, Immuno-therapy, Antimicrobial, antiprotozoal |
| Pleurotus ostreatus         | Water and 30% ethanolic extract        | Antioxidant, Hypocholesterolemic |
| Pleurotus eryngii           | Ethanolic extracts                    | Antiallergic       |
| Volvariella volvacea        | Methanolic and water exopolysaccharides | Antioxidant, Hypocholesterolemic |

Rathee et al., 2012 [15]

Table 3. Nutraceutical potential of the some important mushrooms.

| Mushroom Species       | Active Constituents                                                                 | Type of polysaccharides | Medicinal Properties                                                                 |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Agaricus bisporous     | Lectins                                                                            | Heteropolysaccharides   | Enhance insulin secretion, anti-aging property.                                        |
| A. auricula            | Acidic Polysaccharides                                                            | Homopolysaccharides     | Anti-tumour activities, lowers cholesterol, triglycerides, and lipid levels; decrease blood glucose, beneficial in coronary heart disease, immune tonic. |
| Cordyceps sinensis     | Cordycepin                                                                         | Heteropolysaccharides   | Cure lung infections, hypoglycemic activity, cellular health properties, anti- depressant activity. |
| Flammulina velutipes   | Polysaccharide, flammulin, FVP (Flammulina polysaccharide protein), peptide glycans, prolamin (active sugar protein), Proflamin (glycoprotein) | Heteropolysaccharides   | Antioxidant, anti-cancer activity, anti-aging property; immuno-modulatory, anti-viral action. |
| Ganoderma lucidum      | Polysaccharides, triterpenoids, germanium, nucleotides and nucleosides, Ganoderic acid, Beta-glucan, | Heteropolysaccharides   | Augments immune system, liver protection, antibiotic properties, inhibits cholesterol synthesis; immunomodulatory, anticancerous properties. |
| Grifola frondosa       | Grifloan, Lectins                                                                  | Heteropolysaccharides   | Increases insulin secretion, decrease blood glucose, improves ovulation.              |
| Lentinula edodes       | Eritadenine, Lentinan                                                              | Heteropolysaccharides   | Lower cholesterol, anti-cancer activity.                                              |
| P. florida             |                                                                                    | Homopolysaccharides     | anti-hyperglycaemic; anti-hypercholesterolemia effect                                  |
| Pleurotus sajor-caju   | Lovastatin polysaccharide                                                         | Homopolysaccharides     | Lower cholesterol, prevents cardiovascular disorders.                                 |
| Trametes versicolor    | Polysaccharide-K (Krestin), Coriolon and glycoproteins                             | Heteropolysaccharides   | Decrease immune system depression, prevents cancer, inhibits growth of Candida albicans, anti-viral activity by inhibiting the replication of HIV, liver protective functions. |
| Volvariella volvacea   | Glycoproteins                                                                      | Heteropolysaccharides   | Cardioprotective, lowers blood pressure.                                               |

Lakhanpal and Rana, 2005; [5]
Table 4. Overview of some mushroom dietary supplements.

| Product            | Content                                                                 |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Organic cordyceps  | C.sinensis Alohaensis hybrid strain                                       |
| Gano super         | Concentrated Reishi extracts                                             |
| Levolar Forte      | Extract of C.sinensis, fraction of G.fremius, extract of Agaricus comatus, cinnamon extracts |
| Fine Agaricus Gold | Highly concentrated micropower active ingredients, protein bound polysaccharide of Agaricus     |
| Fine Mesima        | Micropulverized powder of dried Phellinus linteus mushroom               |
| Breast Mate        | Phellinus linteus fraction, Maitake PSX fraction, Glycoprotein SX fraction, Broccoli sprouts extract, Green Tea extract, Vitamin D_3 |
| Shiitake Gold      | Lentiana, Beta glucan polysaccharide                                      |

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