Melanin Biosynthesis Inhibitory Activity of Compounds Isolated from Unused Parts of *Ammi visinaga*

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Received October 17th, 2013; revised November 10th, 2013; accepted November 17th, 2013

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ABSTRACT

Ten compounds have been isolated from the unused parts of *Ammi visinaga*. The isolated compounds were identified as tetracosanoic acid (1), β-sitosterol (2), visnadine (3), khellin (4), β-sitosterol glucoside (5), norkhellol (6), khellol (7), rhamnazin (8), cimifugin (9), and cis-khellactone-3’-β-glucopyranoside (10). The chemical structures of these compounds were elucidated based on spectroscopic data (NMR, UV, MS and IR spectra). This is the first report on the identification of tetracosanoic acid (1), norkhellol (6) and cimifugin (9) in the *Ammi* genus. The melanin biosynthesis inhibitory activities of khellin (4), khellol (7), visnadine (3), cimifugin (9), β-sitosterol (2) and β-sitosterol glucoside (5) were evaluated. Khellin (4) exhibited a potent melanin inhibitory effect compared to arbutin with less toxicity.

Keywords: *Ammi visinaga*; Khellin; Melanin

1. Introduction

Natural products derived from plant sources have been used extensively in traditional medicine for treatment of a myriad of diseases including various types of cancers [1]. Further evidence of the importance of natural products is provided by the fact that close to half of the best selling pharmaceuticals in 1991 were either natural products or their derivatives [2].

*A. visinaga* is a perennial herb widely distributed in the Mediterranean area. Among Egyptians people, it is called Khilla, Chellah or Kella, while in Europe the plant has often been referred to as the Toothpick Herb or Bishop’s weed [3]. Turkish people referred to this plant as “disotu”, “kîlir”, and “hîltan” [4].

*A. visinaga* extracts have demonstrated to have a broad range of therapeutic effects such as antihyperglycemic [5], vasodilator effect [6], anti-inflammatory [7], and inhibition of oxalate nephrolithiasis [8].

Previous phytochemical studies on *Ammi* genus have reported the presence of naphthoquinones, naphtopyranes, steroid, triterpene and flavanoid [4,9-11]. Mostly these phytochemical studies were done on *A. visinaga* fruit which is the official part of the plant, however little phytochemical studies were found concerning other parts of the plant, so this research was conducted to isolate the chemical constituents of the unused parts of *A. visinaga* and evaluate its potential use in pharmacy and medicine.

2. Material and Methods

2.1. Reagents

NaOH and DMSO were purchased from Wako Pure Chemical Industries, Ltd. (Osaka, Japan). The 3-(4,5-dimethyl-thiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyl tetrazolium bromide (MTT) from Sigma (St. Louis, MO), EMEM from Nissui Chemical Co (Osaka, Japan). Other chemicals are of the highest grade commercially available.

2.2. Plant Material

*A visinaga* waste represented by all the aerial parts except the fruit was collected in May 2011 from crops grown at Faculty of Pharmacy fields. The plant was identified by Prof. Ibrahim Mashaly, Systematic Botany De-
partment, Faculty of Sciences, Mansoura University. A voucher specimen (No. 865) is kept in Pharmacognosy Department, Faculty of Pharmacy, Mansoura University.

2.3. Extraction and Isolation Procedures

Dried powdered plant (2.5 kg) was percolated with MeOH till exhaustion at room temperature. The combined extracts were collected and evaporated to dryness under reduced pressure at 40°C. The residue, 273 g, was suspended in distilled water and extracted successively with pet. ether, methylene chloride and EtOAc. The different extracts were evaporated under reduced pressure to obtain pet. ether fraction (fraction A, 48 g), methylene chloride fraction (fraction B, 50 g) and EtOAc fraction (fraction C, 10 g).

2.4. Isolation of Compounds

Fraction A was dissolved totally in the smallest volume of methylene chloride (75 mL) and then mixed well with about 30 g silica gel and left at room temperature to dry and applied onto the top of a silica gel packed glass column (65 × 4.5 cm, 420 g), previously packed in petroleum ether. Elution started with petroleum ether (2 L), then using petroleum ether/ethyl acetate [2%/98% (7 L), 3/97 (4 L), 5/95 (7.5 L), 9/91 (1.5 L), 11/89 (1.5 L), 15/85 (1.5 L), 20/80 (3 L), 25/75 (0.5 L), 30/70 (3.5 L), 35/65 (6 L), 40/60 (1 L), 60/40 (4 L)] and finally washed with 100% ethyl acetate. Effluents, 200 mL fraction each, were separately concentrated, monitored by TLC plates in solvent system 5% - 40% v/v petroleum ether/ethyl acetate, and the developed TLC were heated with vanillin/sulfuric acid spray reagent. Similar fractions were pooled, concentrated and subjected to chromatographic separation and purification. These fractions are purified by chromatographic and repeated crystallization methods to afford norkhellol (6, 7 mg), khellol (7, 14 mg), rhamnazin (8, 6 mg), cimifugin (9, 9 mg) and cis-khellactone-3'-%-glucopyranoside (10, 9 mg).

Fraction C was dissolved totally in the smallest volume of methanol and then mixed well with about 9 g silica gel and left at room temperature to dry and applied onto the top of a silica gel packed glass column (60 × 4.5 cm, 325 g), previously packed in petroleum ether and developed by gradient elution using petroleum ether/ethyl acetate [10%/90% (2.5 L), 15/85 (2 L), 25/75 (3 L), 30/70 (2 L), 35/65 (3 L), 40/60 (1 L), 50/50 (2 L), 60/40 (2 L), 70/30 (1 L), 80/20 (1 L), 90/10 (1 L), 100/0 (0.5 L)], then the elution was continued using methanol/ethyl acetate [5%/95% (0.5 L), 10/90 (2 L), 30/70 (1.5 L), 50/50 (2 L), 70/30 (1 L)] and finally washed with 100% methanol. The effluents, 200 mL fraction each, were separately concentrated, monitored by TLC plates in solvent system 30% - 90% ethyl acetate/petroleum ether, and the developed TLC were heated with vanillin/sulfuric spray reagent. Similar fractions were pooled, concentrated and subjected to chromatographic separation and purification. These fractions are purified by chromatographic and repeated crystallization methods to afford visnadine (3, 14 mg), khellol (7, 2 mg) which were previously isolated from other fractions.

2.5. Cell Line

A mouse melanoma cell line, B16, was obtained from RIKEN Cell Bank. The cells were maintained in EMEM supplemented with 10% (v/v) fetal bovine serum (FBS) and 0.09 mg/mL theophylline. The cells were incubated at 37°C in a humidified atmosphere of 5% CO₂.

2.6. B16 Melanoma Cell Line Assay

This assay was determined as described previously [12]. The cells were placed in two plates of 24-well plastic culture plates (one plate for determining melanin and the other for cell viability) at a density of 1 × 10⁵ cells/well and incubated for 24 h in media prior to being treated with the samples. After 24 h, the media were replaced with 998 µL of fresh media and 2 µL of the test sample at maximum solubility (n = 3). At the same time, negative control (2 µL DMSO) and positive control; Arbutin at concentration 50 mg/mL in DMSO were tested. The cells were incubated for an additional 48 h, and then the medium was replaced with fresh medium containing each sample. After 24 h, the remaining adherent cells were assayed. To determine the melanin content (for one plate)
after removing the medium and washing the cells with PBS, the cell pellet was dissolved in 1.0 mL of 1 N NaOH. After overnight keeping in dark, the crude cell extracts were assayed by using a microplate reader at 405 nm to determine the melanin content. The results from the cells treated with the test samples were analyzed as a percentage of the results from the control culture. On the other hand, cell viability was determined by using MTT assay which provides a quantitative measure of the number of viable cells by determining the amount of formazan crystals produced by metabolic activity in treated versus control cells. So, for the other well plate, 50 μL of MTT reagent in PBS (5 mg/mL) was added to each well. The plates were incubated in a humidified atmosphere of 5% of CO₂ at 37°C for 4 h. After the medium was removed, 1.0 mL isopropyl alcohol (containing 0.04 N HCl) was added, and the absorbance was measured at 570 nm after overnight keeping in dark.

3. Results and Discussion

Ten compounds have been isolated from the aerial parts (except fruit) of *A. visinaga*. They were identified by comparative study to those cited in the literature [13-18]. These compounds (Figure 1) are tetracosanoic acid (1), β-sitosterol (2), visnadine (3), khellin (4), β-sitosterol glucoside (5), norkhellol (6), khellol (7), rhmnazin (8), cimifugin (9) and cis-khellactone-3’-β-glucopyranoside (10).

Figure 1. Chemical structures of isolated compounds.

Figure 2. Chemical structures of isolated compounds.

Biological Activity

In ancient Egypt, vitiligo lesions were treated with extracts of the *Ammi* genus plant followed by exposure to the sun whereby UVA irradiations are given 2 h after administration of 8-methoxypsoralen, a photosensitizer [19]. In present study, we evaluate anti melanogenesis property of β-sitosterol (2), visnadine (3), khellin (4), β-sitosterol glucoside (5), khellol (7) and cimifugin (9). The yield of other compounds is very low having no further amounts for biological evaluation. These compounds were assayed by using B16 melanoma cells in order to evaluate the inhibition of melanin formation and cell viability at their maximum solubility. For khellin and β-sitosterol, the maximum solubility was 20 μg/mL while for other compounds the maximum solubility was 40 μg/mL. In Figure 2, the inhibition of these compounds on melanin formation in B16 melanoma cells was shown at various concentrations.

Taking into consideration of the cytotoxicity to cell lines, the most active compound exhibiting melanin synthesis inhibition (~37%) and at the same time with low cytotoxicity (~1%) was khellin (4) at 20 μg/mL, followed by khellol (7) (~28% inhibition) but with a toxic effect to some extent (~20% cytotoxicity). Visnadine (3) at concentration of 40 and 20 μg/mL showed cytotoxicity on B16 melanoma cells rather than melanin formation inhibition, but at a concentration of 10 μg/mL, it showed about 8% melanin inhibition with less toxicity. Also ci-
of our knowledge, we obtained this compound from the toxicity even than the standard drug arbutin. To the best hyperpigmentation, as a skin-whitening agent with less promising compound which could be useful for treating prevention of stone formation associated with hyperoxaluria [8], while in our study we concluded that khellin (4) is cal effects such as smooth muscle relaxant [20] and pre- side (5) had no effect on melanin inhibition. to toxic-ity on B16 melenoma cells rather than melanin for- mation inhibition;

4. Acknowledgements

The Egyptian Government is acknowledged for the fel- lowship support to Ahmed Adel Ashour. We are thankful to Dr. Miyamoto for optical rotation measurement.

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