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Determination of Antioxidant Activity of some Varieties of Onion (*Allium cepa L.*) grown in Sudan

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This article was published in Vol(10)-1-with some mistakes.

Abstract:

Background: Medicinal plants contain physiologically active ingredients that over the years have been exploited in traditional medicine for the treatment of various ailments.

Objectives: This study was undertaken to investigate the antioxidant activity of seven varieties of onion (*Allium cepa*) grown in Sudan.

Methods: The antioxidant capacity was conducted based on the ability of the plant extracts to scavenge DPPH radical.

Results: The extracts exhibited a notable dose dependent inhibition of DPPH radical. Shendi (Red onion local strain) exhibited the highest antioxidant activity with EC50 25.25 µg/ml followed by Kassala (Red onion local strain) and white onion with less scavenging activity was produced by Green onion.

Conclusion: It can be concluded that *Allium cepa* could be a potential source of antioxidant principles.

الخلاصة

خلفية: تحتوي النباتات الطبية علي مكونات فسيولوجية فعالة أُستخدمت لسنين عدة في الطب التقليدي لمعالجة أمراض مختلفة.

الهدف: أُجريت هذه الدراسة لاستقصاء النشاط المضاد للأكسدة لسبعة أنواع من البصل المزروع في السودان.

الطرق: تم تحديد السعة المضادة للأكسدة اعتماداً علي قدرة المستخلصات النباتية علي كنس جذر DPPH الحر.

النتائج: أظهرت المستخلصات تثبيطا معتمدا علي الجرعة لجذر DPPH الحر. أحدث بصل شندي الاحمر المحلي اعلي نشاطا مضادا للأكسدة وتبعه بصل كسلا الاحمر المحلي والبصل الأبيض بينما وجد أن البصل الأخضر يمتلك اقل نشاطا.

الاستنتاج: يمكن أن نستنتج أن البصل يمكن أن يمثل مصدراً متوقعاً لمواد مضادة للأكسدة.

Key words: Antioxidant activity; Reactive Oxygen Species; *Allium cepa*.

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Introduction:

Since very old times, herbal medications have been used for relief of symptoms of disease [1]. Despite the great advances observed in modern medicine in recent decades, plants still make an important contribution to health care. Much interest, in medicinal plants however, emanates from their long use in folk medicines as well as their prophylactic properties, especially in developing countries. Large number of medicinal plants has been investigated for their antioxidant properties. Natural antioxidants either in the form of raw extracts or their chemical constituents are very effective to prevent the destructive processes caused by oxidative stress [2]. Although the toxicity profile of most medicinal plants have not been thoroughly evaluated, it is generally accepted that medicines derived from plant products are safer than their synthetic counterparts [3]. Substantial evidence has accumulated and indicated key roles for reactive oxygen species (ROS) and other oxidants in causing numerous disorders and diseases. The evidence has brought the attention of scientists to an appreciation of antioxidants for prevention and treatment of diseases, and maintenance of human health [4]. Human body has an inherent antioxidative mechanism and many of the biological functions such as the antimutagenic, anti-carcinogenic, and anti-aging responses originate from this property [5]. Antioxidants stabilize or deactivate free radicals, often before they attack targets in biological cells [4]. Interest in naturally occurring antioxidants has considerably increased for use in food, cosmetic and pharmaceutical products, because they possess multi affectedness in their multitude and magnitude of activity and provide enormous scope in correcting imbalance [6]. The role of free radical reactions in disease pathology is well established and is known to be involved in many acute and chronic disorders in human beings, such as diabetes, atherosclerosis, aging, immunosuppression and neurodegeneration [4]. An imbalance between ROS and the inherent antioxidant capacity of the body, directed the use of dietary and /or medicinal supplements particularly during the disease attack. Studies on herbal plants, vegetables, and fruits have indicated the presence of antioxidants such as phenolics, flavonoids, tannins, and proanthocyanidins [7].

Onion (*Allium cepa* L) is a common food plant rich in several phytonutrients associated with the treatment and prevention of a number of diseases. Extracts of red onion rich in phenolic compounds exhibit antiproliferative activity, antimutagenic properties, anticancer activities, antiulcer, antispasmodic and antidiarrhoeal activity [8] .Hence, this study aimed to investigate the antioxidant capacity of seven varieties of onion grown in Sudan.

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Materials and Methods:

Materials

Chemicals and reagents:

2, 2 diphenyl-2-picryl hydrazyl (DPPH) and quercetin were purchased from Sigma –Aldrich company (UK).

Plant materials:

The fresh bulbs of *Allium cepa* were purchased from the local market in Wad-Medani, Shendi and Kassala, Sudan. The plant materials were identified by the Department of Pharmacognosy, Faculty of Pharmacy, and University of Gezira, Sudan.

Methods

Extraction of plant material:

One hundred grams of each coarsely powdered bulbs of *Allium cepa* were separately extracted by maceration using ethanol (70%) in a conical flask for 72 hours in dark, filtered and evaporated by a rotary evaporator at 60 ^{o}C. The resulting solutions were dried and kept in a refrigerator until use [7].

Antioxidant activity of *Allium cepa* ethanolic extracts:

Sample stock solution (1 mg/ml) was diluted to final concentrations of 250, 125, 50, 10 and 5 µg/ml in ethanol. One ml of a 0.3 mM 2, 2 diphenyl-2-picryl hydrazyl (DPPH) in ethanol solution was added to a 2.5 ml solution of the different concentrations of the extracts and allowed to react at room temperature for 30 minutes. The absorbance of the resulting mixture was measured at 518 nm and converted to percentage antioxidant activity (AA %), using the formula below:

$$AA\% = \frac{(Absorbance\ of\ control - Absorbance\ of\ sample)}{Absorbance\ of\ control} X\ 100$$

Ethanol (1.0 ml) plus plant extract solution (2.5 ml) was used as a blank. DPPH solution (1.0 ml; 0.3 mM) plus ethanol (2.5 ml) was used as control. Stock solution (1 mg/ml) of quercetin was diluted to final concentrations of 250, 125, 50, 10 and 5 µg/ml in ethanol used as positive control (9).All experiments were done in triplicates .

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Results and Discussion

The capacity of scavenging diphenyl picryl hydrazine (DPPH) by the ethanolic extract of *Allium cepa* bulbs is presented in Table 1. The antioxidant molecules that can quench DPPH free radicals and convert them to colourless product; resulting in a decrease in UV absorbance [9, 10].In this quantitative assay the extracts exhibited a notable dose dependent inhibition of the DPPH activity. Shendi (red onion local strain) exhibited the highest antioxidant activity at the five concentrations with EC_{50} 25.25 µg/ml followed by Kassala (red onion local strain) and white onion while less scavenging activity was produced by Green onion. One parameter that has been used for the interpretation of the results from the DPPH method is the "efficient concentration" or EC_{50} value (otherwise called the IC_{50} value). This is defined as the concentration of antioxidant that causes 50% loss of the DPPH activity (colour). The higher the antioxidant activity, the lower is the value of EC_{50} [11].

The historical health benefits of dietary consumption of onions have been attributed to organosulfur compounds such as sulfides and thiosulfinates, as well as flavonoids such as quercetin.They have been focus of much research pertaining to hypoglycemic, hypolipidemic and antibacterial potentials of onions [12] and antioxidant activity with beneficial effects on cardiovascular and immune systems, inflammatory conditions and cancer prevention [8].

The high antioxidant activity of *Allium cepa* was reported by numerous investigators [13-15].

Table 1: DPPH scavenging activity of onion varieties.

Preparation	**% scavenging activity**					EC_{50} (µg/ml)
	250 µg/ml	**125 µg/ml**	**50 µg/ml**	**10 µg/ml**	**5 µg/ml**	77
Gezira (red onion local strain)	88.9	69.3	35.7	16.2	7.6	
Gezira (red onion imported strain)	87.6	69.8	41.5	31.3	15.1	72
Kassala (red onion local strain)	88.1	70.5	55.4	22	8.2	30
Shendi (red onion local strain)	88.7	81.8	58.01	28.3	11.3	25.25
Shendi (red onion imported strain)	90.5	85	65.2	36.2	15.8	52.46
Green onion	78.4	49.1	29.1	12.4	7.2	141.56
White onion	69.2	64.1	46.6	28.3	17.5	69.79
Quercetin	94.7	92.5	90.3	88.6	82.4	5

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The antioxidant activity of *Allium cepa* bulb could be attributed to the presence of thiosulfinates or related organosulfur components [7]. Flavonoids affect antioxidant capacity to a greater extent, especially quercetin and its glycoside conjugates. The mechanism of action of quercetin includes chelation of transition metal ions, free radical scavenging and inhibition of oxidation [16].

In Egypt , Elhassaneen and Sanad, (2009) [17] reported that phenolic compounds besides other elements such as selenium, vitamin C and sulfur containing amino acid play an important role in the antioxidant capacity of onion bulbs. They found that Egyptian red onion had better antioxidant activity while white onion was only effective at the early stage of oxidation process. Moreover, they attributed the low scavenging activity of green onion to the least phenolic content compared to other varieties, red, yellow and purple.

Conclusion:

It can be concluded that *Allium cepa* could be a potential source of antioxidant principles.

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