

Botanicals for treatment of atherosclerosis

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ABSTRACT

Atherosclerosis is a large artery disease that leads to heart and stroke disease. It is characterized in the large arteries by the accumulation of lipids and fibrous elements. Atherosclerosis conventional treatments are statins, fibrates, niacin, and ezetimibe that work through various mechanisms. All these therapeutic agents are associated with one or more side effects, and none of the current therapies can accomplish the ultimate therapeutic target, i.e. they defend against atherosclerosis and reverse it partially. Herbal remedies are an alternative source of relieving symptoms of clinicians with atherosclerosis as well as addressing the risks associated with conventional methods of treatment. Approximately 80 percent of the world's population depends on herbal remedies because of more safety and less disadvantages reported by the World Health Organization (WHO). Herbal remedies are widely preferred to treat patients with atherosclerosis, as in many other diseases. Some of the important natural compounds reported to exhibit anti-atherosclerosis potential include tannins (*Terminalia arjuna*), thymoquinone (*Nigella Sativa*), polyphenols (*Astragalus membranaceus*), volatile oil (*Osimum basilicum*), saponins (*Panax notoginseng*). In present date, many researches are performed on medicinal, herbal and natural products globally for the treatment and prevention of atherosclerosis. Although a number of herbal medicines are recommended for Atherosclerosis, further research is required to investigate their safety, efficacy, and potential drug interactions.

Keywords: Disease modifying anti-atherosclerotic agents; herbal medicines; statins; fibrates; tannin; saponins; atherosclerosis

INTRODUCTION

Atherosclerosis is a progressive disease characterized by the accumulation in the large arteries of lipids and fibrous elements [1]. The word atherosclerosis is of Greek origin, which means intimate artery surface thickening and fat accumulation. In the central core of the plaque, fatty material is covered by a fibrous cap [2]. The term atherosclerosis consists of two parts, i.e. atherosis, meaning deposition of fat, macrophages whereas sclerosis means formation of fibrotic layer involving smooth muscle cells, leukocyte and connective tissue [3]. It is triggered by lipid deposition, oxidation of deposited fats and alteration which ultimately lead to thrombosis caused by chronic inflammation. One of the main triggers for atherosclerosis is hypercholesterolemia. Along with the same, low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C), high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C), triglycerides (TG) and lipoprotein (a) are other causative agents involved in pathophysiology of atherosclerosis [4].

Atherosclerosis starts to develop at the age course of 50, beginning in the early 13-19 age. It has been also suggested that in most of the cases the pathology of arterial lesion development lasts >40 years.

Globally, there were around 422.7 million prevalent cases of cardio vascular disorder and 17.92 million cases leads to deaths as per the data from 1990 to 2015 [5-6].

RISK FACTORS

- Unhealthy blood cholesterol level
- Diabetes
- Genetic
- Air Pollution
- Overweight
- High blood pressure

PATHOPHYSIOLOGY

The causative agents responsible for etiology of acute coronary syndromes involves hypercholesterolemia and atherosclerotic plaque rupture with luminal thrombosis which may further lead to sudden coronary failure [7]. Atherosclerosis is a complex series of events, which may share has symptoms similar to a chronic inflammatory process, hence, results in the formation of atherosclerotic plaque. The utmost step in the process is damage to the artery's endothelial cell, resulting in endothelial cell dysfunction. Endothelial cells attract leukocytes and smooth muscle of vascular cells, which grow in the wall of arteries and proliferate. This entire cellular component collectively leads to overproduction of amount of matrix of connective tissue and at the end; a mature fibrous plaque gets created [8].

In addition, the rise in plasma cholesterol levels results to alter arterial endothelial permeability that permits the relocation of lipids into the wall of arteries, particularly LDL-C particles. Circulating monocytes gets conferred to endothelial cells and results in expression of adhesion molecules such as vascular adhesion molecule-1 and selectins migrating by transferring into the sub-endothelial space. On getting loaded in the endothelial area, the monocytes attain the characteristics of the macrophage and get converted into foamy macrophages. On oxidation of LDL particles, these develop into potent chemo attractants in the sub-endothelial space. All these mechanism leads to accelerate the growth of large intracellular cholesterol by macrophages; therefore bind with native, altered lipoproteins and anionic phospholipids through the scavenger receptors (A, B1, CD36, CD68, for phosphatidylserine and oxidized LDL). The end result is a series of changes in the vascularity. Clinically atherosclerosis can be diagnosed by symptoms like contracting arteries and appearance of acute coronary syndromes owing to plaque instability [9].

CONVENTIONAL DRUGS USED FOR TREATMENT OF ATHEROSCLEROSIS

The goals of anti-atherosclerotic drugs currently used are to reduce triglyceride levels, LDL levels and inflammatory mediator inhibition along with alterations of certain receptors that are responsible for cholesterol synthesis and metabolism and ultimately improve patient life and expectation. Most of these targets were accomplished by adding non-steroidal anti-inflammatory

medications, calcium channel blockers, statins and fibrates.. The various classes of drugs used for treatment of Atherosclerosis along with their molecular targets and complications have been summarized in the Table 1.

Table 1: Therapeutic agents used in Atherosclerosis and their complications

Pharmacological class (drugs)	Molecular target	Side Effects	References
Statins (atorvastatin, fluvastatin, lovastatin, pitavastatin, simvastatin)	HMG-CoA reductase	Urinary tract infection, diarrhea, stomach discomfort or pain	[10]
Fibrates (gemfibrozil, fenofibrate)	TG	Rash, itching, HSSD, impotence, blurred vision	[11]
NSAIDS (aspirin)	Phospholipase A ₂	Gastrointestinal toxicity, kidney disease, reduce glomerular filtration rate,	[12, 13]
Steroids (hydrocortisone, Methylprednisolone, Beclamethosone)	Steroid receptors	Electrolyte imbalance	[13]
Beta Blockers (propranolol, alprenolol, metoprolol, atenolol, pindolol, timolol)	Lipid deposition and arterial tissue hypoxia	Dry mouth, upset stomach, weakness, diarrhea/constipation	[14,15]
Calcium Antagonists (verapamil, nifedipine, darodipine, iosradipine, diltiazem)	TG	Low blood pressure, flushing, edema, constipation.	[15]

vitamin (nicotinic acid or niacin)	TG, HDL	Nausea, diarrhea, leg cramps, muscle pain, insomnia.	[16]
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NSAIDs: Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs; HSSD: hypoactive sexual desire disorder; TC: total cholesterol; HDL: high density lipoprotein; TG: triglycerides

HERBAL PRODUCTS

Herbal products are used for various disorders worldwide. A number of natural products, including tannins, thymoquinone, polyphenols, saponins, salvianolic acid, polysaccharides, and extracts of certain herbal products, have anti-atherosclerotic activity and are therefore considered to be a gold mine for atherosclerosis treatment. They target serum total cholesterol, triglycerides, low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, high-density lipoprotein cholesterol, HMG CoA (3-hydroxy-3-methyl-glutaryl-coenzyme A) and affect different receptor functions.

Magnolol & Honokiol

Magnolol (*Mangnolia officinalis*) has numerous biological activities such as anti-platelet aggregation, radical hydroxyl scavenging, Ca^{2+} -channel blocking and anti-inflammatory action [17]. Signal transducer and transcription protein activator 3(STAT3); a transcription factor and has major role in inflammatory responses and regulation of cell cycle by chemokines for example interleukin (IL)-6. *M. Officinalis* inhibited concentration-dependent effects on phosphorylation of Tyr705 and Ser727 which is induced by IL-6.[2] Thus, it has anti-inflammatory action. Honokiol; is biologically active component which is obtained from *M. officinalis*, significantly suppressed IL-6, IL-8 and MCP-1 development. The present study which aimed to examine the pharmacokinetics of magnolol after its oral administration in rats, and to determine its pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic properties showed the absorption $t_{1/2}$, the elimination $t_{1/2}$ and the maximum concentration founded to be 0.63 h, 2.33 h and 0.16 $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$, respectively. Oral bioavailability was about 4.9%, suggesting its potential in CVS disorders [18].

Cryptotanshinone

Cryptotanshinone (CPT), a biologically active constituent obtained from Chinese herb *Salvia miltiorrhiza* bunge and has reported to possess anti-atherosclerotic activity and shows anti-tumor, anti-inflammatory and anti-Alzheimer's disease [19]. Oxidative stress caused by excessive ROS generation and inflammation caused by macrophage has crucial role in initiation, development and further advancement of endothelial dysfunction and hence leads to cardiovascular disease like atherosclerosis [2]. The oxidized form of LDL i.e. Ox-LDL which is caused by ROS, is the primary risk factor of atherosclerosis. CPT prevented the release of adhesion molecules at ox-LDL stimulation by controlling the regulated NF- π B pathway by lowering ROS production [19]. CPT significantly reduced creation of atherosclerotic plaque and ameliorates plaque stability by decreasing LOX-1 & MMP-9 expression and activating NF- π B. It has been further reported that CPT helps in treatment of CVS disorders by down-regulating pro-inflammatory mediators in the blood serum without any effect on serum lipid profile [2].

Salvianolic acid B

Salvianolic acid B (*Salvia miltiorrhiza* Bge); belongs to family Labiatae, is a phenolic acid component and has been used for treatment of number of diseases [20]. It is a potent water soluble antioxidant which targets Soluble P-selectin, NF- κ B and its subunits, Intracellular adhesion molecule-1, IL-6, IL-8, MCP-1, PTX3, I κ B and MCP-1 [20, 21].

Salvianolic acid B lowers JAK2 and STAT1 phosphorylation by persuading interferon- π (IFN- π). Monocyte adhesion to endothelial cells infected with IFN- π is also decreased with pretreatment of salvianolic acid B extract. This increases the protein blocker expression of activated STAT 1 and cytokine signaling suppressor 1 in endothelial cells. Salvianolic acid B also decreased adherence of ADP-activated platelets to endothelial cell line and alter NF- π B activation. The expression of m-RNA platelet regulated pro-inflammatory mediators was significantly lowered and further release of their corresponding proteins. Thus shows Inhibitory effects against proliferation and infiltration of VSMS [2].

Atractylenolides

Atractylenolides is a herb isolated from *Atractylodes macrocephala*. Atractylenolide inhibited dose-dependent proliferation and migration of Ox-LDL-induced VSMCs and decreased the

development of inflammatory cytokines and the expression of protein-1 (MCP-1) monocyte chemo attractant in VSMCs. It strongly inhibited activation of p38-MAPK and NF- κ B. In addition, Atractylenolide prevented the development of foam cells in Ox-LDL mediated macrophages [22].

Esculetin

Esculetin, an effective non-competitive lipoxygenase blocker, extracted from *Artemisia scoparia* plant. Multiplication of VSMC has been shown to be inhibited. Esculetin suppressed dose-dependent MMP-9 which is generated by TNF- α in VSMC. The dosage of esculetin is 12.5-25 μ g / ml [23]. It inhibit the activity of the promoter of TNF- α -induced MMP-9 and diminish the binding activities of the nuclear factor- κ B (NF- κ B) and the activator protein-1(AP-1), which are present in the promoter of the gene i.e MMP-9, in the VSMC treated with TNF- α . Thus, esculetin reduced cell migration and invasion by suppressing the expression of MMP-9, which subsequently reduces binding activities of AP-1 and NF- κ B in VSMC treated with TNF- α [23].

Farrerol

Farrerol; commonly known as 'Man-shan-hong'; is isolated from the Chinese herb (*Rhododendron dauricum* L) and has effect on fetal bovine serum (FBS)-induced spreading of cultivated vascular smooth muscle cells [24]. It has remarkably inhibited the loss of cell viability induced by H₂O₂ & increased superoxide dismutase (SOD) along with glutathione peroxidase activities. In addition, Farrerol inhibited intracellular malondialdehyde (MDA) and reactive oxygen species (ROS) levels of H₂O₂-induced elevation [25].

Celastrol

Celastrol; a triterpenoid compound (*Tripterygium wilfordii* Hook F) exhibits various pharmacological activities like prevention of oxidative stress, inflammation, cancer and immunosuppression [26]. Celastrol remarkably shrink LDL-induced extreme expression of LOX-1 & formation of ROS and reduced the expression of LOX-1 & generation of superoxide [2]. Celastrol also meaningfully diminished LDL-induced expression of lectin which is induced by oxLDL like oxidized LOX-1 and prevented further generation of ROS. The possible

mechanism involved in anti-atherosclerotic effect of celastrol may be attributed to reduced level of I κ B phosphorylation, iNOS, NO, and pro-inflammatory cytokines such as TNF- α and IL-6. Additionally it is further reported to reduce size of atherosclerotic plaque leading to its importance in atherosclerosis [26].

Isorhamnetin

Isorhamnetin; a bioactive compound and can be obtained from various plant sources such as *Hippophae rhamnoides* L., *Oenanthe javanica* and *Ginkgo biloba* L., and reported to possess numerous pharmacological activities including anti-cancer, anti-inflammatory, and anti-oxidant biological properties. It substantially inhibited oxLDL-induced macrophage damage by decreasing rates of ROS, lipid aggregation, and caspase activation. Isorhamnetin also promote the activation of phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase & the induction of heme oxygenase-1 which inhibit the progression of atherosclerotic plaque [2]. The serum concentrations of cholesterol and its subunits in blood were not remarkably improved by isorhamnetin treatment; thereby it is having atheroprotective effects [27].

β -Elemene

β -Elemene; sesquiterpenoid compound extracted from the essential oils of Chinese medicinal herb *Curcuma Wenyujin* [28]. β -Elemene has up-regulated antioxidant enzyme activity. Few of them are catalase, GPx and glutathione in aorta, thus leads to minimizing oxidative damage. Macrophage penetration was significantly reduced by β -elemene. It also reduced TC, TG, and LDL-C levels along with levels of TNF- α and IL-6 in invitro studies [29]. β -Elemene also increased NO generation and up-regulated eNOS phosphorylation [2].

Bisacurone

Bisacurone; a compound which is obtained from commonly used herb *curcuma longa* Linne (Zingiberaceae) and shows anti-atherosclerosis, anti-metastatic and anti-inflammatory effects [30]. It suppresses the expression of VCAM-1 and monocyte adhesion in endothelial cells [31]. Vascular cell adhesion molecule expression & NF- κ B p65 translocate into nucleus and phosphorylation of I κ B α , thus, it also act by suppressing the progression of inflammation,

vascular cell adhesion molecule expression and translocation of NF- κ B p65 into its nucleus and phosphorylation of I κ B α , therefore reduce the risk of complications in atherosclerotic patients.

Paeonol

Paeonol; having biological source *Paeonia lactiflora* shows both anti-atherosclerotic and anti-proliferation effects on smooth muscle cells [2, 32]. Paeonol influence phosphorylation of AMPK and retards phosphorylation of mTOR as well. It also potentially slows down ox-LDL-induced proliferation [33].

Astragaloside

Astragaloside IV is the most efficacious component extracted from *Astragalus membranaceus*, which widely used to treat cardiovascular disease such as atherosclerosis [34]. AS IV strongly suppressed platelet growth factor (PDGF) BB stimulated cell proliferation and migration of human dermal microvascular endothelial cells. AS IV inhibited the expression of associated proteins in the cell cycle by PDGF BB and down regulated the function of protein kinase mediated by p38 mitogen. It is therefore useful in treating atherosclerosis [35].

Artesunate

Artesunate; an herbal compound i.e. Sweet wormwood-derived primordial plant, has anti-inflammatory and anti-malarial activity [2]. It significantly reduces pro-inflammatory cytokine, such as TNF- α and IL-6. In addition, it may also control release of pro-inflammatory chemokines: IL-8 and MCP [36].

Corynoxetine

Corynoxetine (*Uncaria rhynchophylla*); a Chinese herb and has been used traditionally to treat atherosclerosis by exerting inhibitory effects on the proliferation of VSMC-induced platelet-derived growth factor (PDGF). The activation of PDGF-BB-induced extracellular signal-regulated kinase 1/2 by this drug has been substantially inhibited and beneficial in the prevention and treatment of atherosclerosis [37].

Sparstolonin B

Sparstolonin B; isocoumarin compound and can be obtained from different genus: *Sparganium stoloniferum* and *Scirpus yagara*. It reduces the activation of IL-1 β and monocyte chemo attractant protein 1 in endothelial cells at both transcription and translation levels. It effectively suppressed the extracellular -signal-regulated kinase & act phosphorylation induced by LPS in HUVECs [38].

The various herbal products and their molecular targets has been **Table no. 2**.

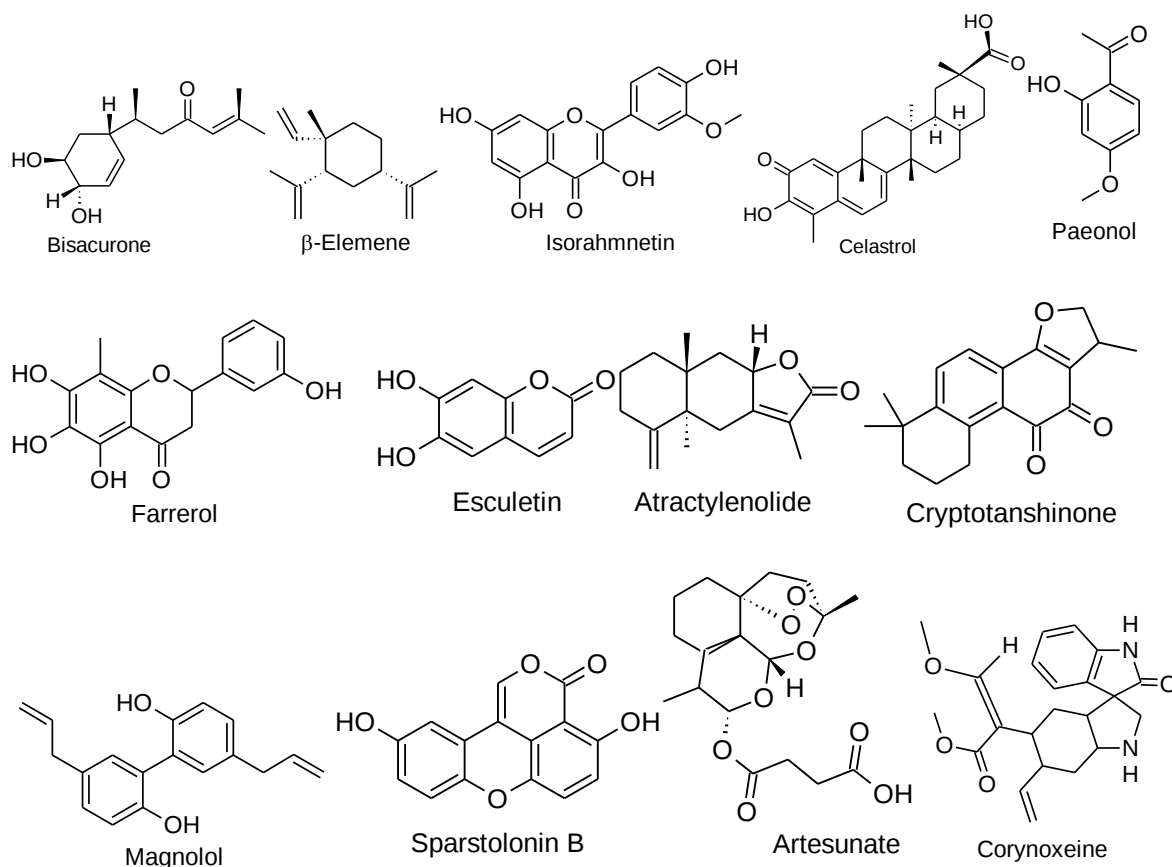
Table 2: Herbal products with antiatherosclerotic potential along with their molecular targets					
Component	Family	Chemical class	Source	Target	References
Bisacurone	Zingiberaceae	sesquiterpenoids	<i>Curcuma longa</i>	VCAM-1, NF- κ B p65, I κ B, Akt	[30]
β -Elemene	Zingiberaceae	sesquiterpenoids	<i>Curcuma Wenyujin</i>	IL-1 β , TNF- α , INF- γ , MCP-1, ICAM-1, NO	[28]
Isorhamnetin	Ginkgoaceae	Flavonoid	<i>Hippophae rhamnoides</i> L.	OxLDL, ROS, PI3K, HO-1	[27]
Celastrol	Celastraceae	Triterpenoid	<i>Tripterygium wilfordii</i>	I κ B, iNOS, NO, TNF- α , IL-6, OxLDL, LOX-1, ROS	[26]
Farrerol	Ericaceae	Flavonoid	<i>Rhododendron dauricum</i> L	NF- κ B, COX-2, LOX-5, MMP-9, SOD, GSH-Px, MDA, ROS	[24]
Esculetin	Asteraceae	hydroxycoumarin	<i>Artemisia scoparia</i>	p42/44 MAPK, c-fos and c-jun	[2,23]
Atractylenolides	Asteraceae	sesquiterpene	<i>Atractylodes macrocephala</i>	ATP release, Ser473, phospho-	[2,22]

p38

Salvianolic acid B	Labiatae	phenolic acids	<i>Salvia miltiorrhiza</i>	MMP-2, MMP-9, JNK, NF-κB, ICAM-1, IL-1β, IL-6, IL-8	[20]
Cryptotanshinone	Labiatae	diterpene quinone	<i>Salvia miltiorrhiza</i>	LOX-1, MMP-9, ROS, NF-κB, ICAM-1, VCAM	[19]
Magnolol	Magnoliaceae	Biphenols	<i>Mangnolia officinalis</i>	STAT3, ICAM-1, Tyr70, Ser727, cyclin D1, MCP-1	[17]
Paeonol	Paeoniaceae	Phenol	<i>Paeonia lactiflora</i>	ICAM-1, NF-κB, IκBα, p38, ERK	[2,32,33]
Astragaloside IV	Leguminosae	Triterpenoid	<i>Astragalus membranaceus</i>	TC, TG, LDL-C, HDL-C	[2,34]
Artesunate	Daisy	sesquiterpenoid	<i>Sweet wormwood</i>	TNF-α, IL-6, IL-8, MCP-1	[2,36]
Corynoxene	Rubiaceae		<i>Uncaria rhynchophylla</i>	VSMCs, ERK1/2	[2,37]
Sparstolonin B	Typhaceae	Polyphenol	<i>Sparganium stoloniferum</i>	CCNE2, CDC6,	[38]

HO-1: heme oxygenase-I; ROS: reactive oxygen species; P13K: phosphatidy-3-kinase; NF-κB: Nuclear factor kappa B cells; MMP-9: matrix metalloproteinase-9; LOX: lipooxygenase; ICAM-1: Intracellular adhesion molecule-1; VSMC: vascular smooth muscle cells; TC: total cholesterol; TG: triglycerides; LDL: low-density lipoprotein; HDL: high-density lipoprotein; IL: interleukin; TNF: tumor necrosis factor; VCAM: vascular cell adhesion molecule

The bioactive principles with antiatherosclerotic potential have been depicted in **Figure 1**.



CONCLUSION

Although many conventional and non-conventional treatments for atherosclerosis have been identified, all of these are associated with few limitations such as long-term efficacy, safety, and cost. Herbal medicines relieve symptoms in atherosclerosis patients as well as to overcome the drawbacks associated with present treatment methods. Although a number of herbal medicines are recommended for atherosclerosis, further research is required to investigate their safety, efficacy, and potential drug interactions.

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