

CHAPTER 2

FUNCTIONAL FOODS FOR OBESITY MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Obesity is a global health problem in both developed and developing countries. The prevalence of obesity, which is related to many metabolic disorders, such as diabetes mellitus, metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular diseases, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease and some cancers-, is increasing among all fractions of the population, including children, adolescents and adults. Aside from these diseases, it may also lead to some psychological problems, such as depression. At the same time, it is also a social problem, which adds a significant burden on health care systems. Quite many pharmacological and/or surgical solutions to treat obesity are in current use. Within this context, some drugs such as orlistat and bariatric surgery may be mentioned. However, especially in the presence of cardiovascular diseases, they may aggravate the clinical picture. ¹⁻⁵

In the meantime, alternative medicine offers some medicinal herbs to prevent and even, in some cases, to treat obesity. Each of these plants contains many bioactive compounds, which have been suggested as safe anti-obesity resources. Upon investigation of their action mechanisms, various routes have been clarified. Inhibition of enzymes concerning lipid and carbohydrate metabolisms, modulation of some certain signaling pathways are some of these mechanisms. ^{1, 6-10}

Recently, the interrelationship between white and brown adipose tissues has gained importance. The association between the amount of brown adipose tissue and the amount of energy expenditure is well-known. Therefore, the participation of bioactive components found in some plants into the brown adipose tissue and white adipose tissue metabolisms has drawn attention. Adipocyte browning is a promising strategy for obesity prevention. The plants, which stimulate the conversion of white adipocytes to brown adipocytes or inhibit the differentiation of

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The people with chronic diseases may prefer to proceed with phytotherapeutic applications during their treatments. They may believe that such a therapy will be less harmful for their body. However, if a plant has a pharmacological effect, it will also have side effects. For instance, flavonoids, alkaloids, terpenes, have been reported to possess hypoglycemic effects.⁶⁴ Onion ameliorates hyperglycemia and insulin resistance.⁶⁵ Garlic causes significant decreases in fasting blood glucose and glycated hemoglobin levels.⁶⁶ Garlic also demonstrates a hypotensive effect.⁶⁷ Cinnamon, due to its coumarin content, acts as a powerful anticoagulant. Coadministration of cinnamon and ginger with dabigatran significantly increases the risk of bleeding.^{68,69}

In conclusion, the benefits and importance of bioactive components in medicinal plants cannot be underestimated when obesity prevention and treatment are taken into consideration. However, their multi-target activities should also be widely investigated.

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