Plant Foods for Human Nutrition (2019) 74:223–224
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11130-019-00725-x

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Duckweed for Human Nutrition: No Cytotoxic and No Anti-Proliferative Effects on Human Cell Lines

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Published online: 18 March 2019
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Abstract

Duckweeds (Lemnaceae) possess good qualitative and quantitative profiles of nutritional components for its use as human food. However, no studies have been conducted on the probable presence or absence of any adverse effects. The extracts from seven duckweed species (*Spirodela polyrhiza, Landoltia punctata, Lemna gibba, Lemna minor, Wolffiella hyalina, Wolffia globosa*, and *Wolffia microscopica*) covering all five genera of the plant family were herewith tested for cytotoxic effects on the human cell lines HUVEC, K-562, and HeLa and for anti-proliferative activity on HUVEC and K-562 cell lines. From these assays, it is evident that duckweeds do not possess any detectable anti-proliferative or cytotoxic effects, thus, the high nutritional value is not diminished by such detrimental factors. The present result is a first step to exclude any harmful effects of highly nutritious duckweed for human.

Keywords Cytotoxicity · Duckweed · Human cell lines · Lemnaceae · Nutrition · *Wolffia*

Introduction

Duckweeds represent the fastest growing angiosperms producing large amount of biomass. In some countries, like Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, duckweeds have been used for ages as human food. Comprehensive data concerning nutritional values of several duckweed species were recently highlighted [1–3]. However, until now, studies on the probable presence or absence of toxic components in duckweeds are completely missing.

Electronic supplementary material The online version of this article (https://doi.org/10.1007/s11130-019-00725-x) contains supplementary material, which is available to authorized users.

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Materials and Methods

All plants were taken from the stock collection of the Matthias Schleiden Institute of the University of Jena, Germany. Seven species of duckweed (Table 1) were cultivated under standard conditions [4] (see also supplementary material). For each sample, 500 mg fresh weight of whole plant was freeze-dried and homogenized in methanol. The crude extracts were purified using solid-phase-extraction (Chromabond, Macherey-Nagel, Germany), dried and dissolved in DMSO. In order to analyse the DMSO solutions, we measured the cytotoxicity (cell death) and the anti-proliferative activity (retardation of cell proliferation) as described in standard protocols [5] (for further experimental details see Supplementary material 2).

Results and Discussion

Whole plant extracts of seven duckweed species were tested for the probable presence/absence of cytotoxic and anti-proliferative effects on human cell lines. Cell lines HUVEC, K-562 and HeLa were used as targets for cytotoxic assays and thereafter HUVEC and K-562 for anti-proliferative assays as *per* standardised procedures [6]. All extracts were applied in a