Therapeutic Potential of Natural Compounds in Neurotransmitter Diseases

Pratham B, Bhalekar S

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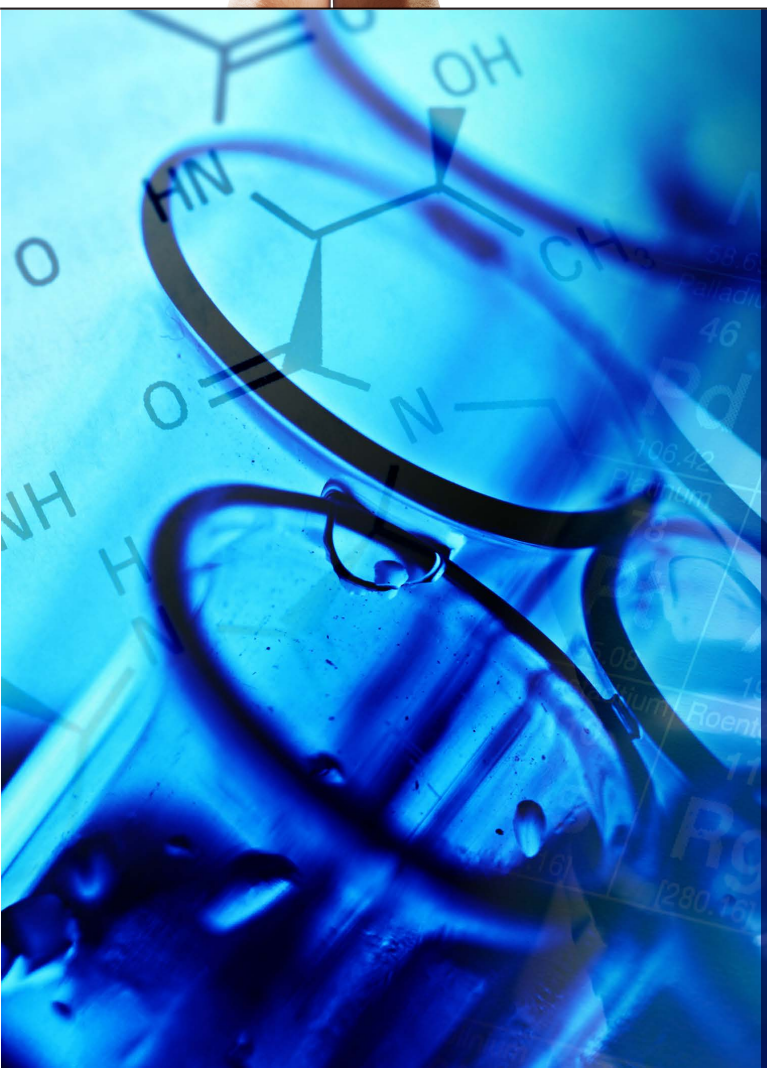

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Introduction

The World Journal of Medical Education and Research (WJMER) (ISSN 2052-1715) is an online publication of the Doctors Academy Group of Educational Establishments. Published on a quarterly basis, the aim of the journal is to promote academia and research amongst members of the multi-disciplinary healthcare team including doctors, dentists, scientists, and students of these specialties from around the world. The principal objective of this journal is to encourage the aforementioned, from developing countries in particular, to publish their work. The journal intends to promote the healthy transfer of knowledge, opinions and expertise between those who have the benefit of cutting edge technology and those who need to innovate within their resource constraints. It is our hope that this will help to develop medical knowledge and to provide optimal clinical care in different settings. We envisage an incessant stream of information flowing along the channels that WJMER will create and that a surfeit of ideas will be gleaned from this process. We look forward to sharing these experiences with our readers in our editions. We are honoured to welcome you to WJMER.

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Contact	:	wjmer@doctorsacademy.org.uk

A WELCOME MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

It is our great pleasure to present the thirty-second edition of the World Journal of Medical Education and Research (WJMER). This issue brings together a diverse collection of scholarly articles that reflect current innovations, challenges, and opportunities in medical education, health sciences, and public health across global contexts. The contributions highlight the evolving nature of healthcare education, with a particular emphasis on learner development, equity, pedagogy, and improvement at a systems level.

The opening article by Alarar et al. evaluates the effectiveness of an online scientific research methodology course for undergraduate students at Syrian universities. Using pre- and post-course assessments, the authors demonstrate significant improvements in students' research knowledge and skills, underscoring the value of structured e-learning approaches in strengthening research capacity, particularly in crisis-affected and resource-limited settings.

In the following article, Ponce-Garcia et al. explore microaggressions in medical education and reframe them as cumulative, identity-based trauma rather than isolated interpersonal incidents. Drawing on interdisciplinary evidence, the paper highlights the biological, psychological, and educational consequences of chronic identity-based stress and calls for trauma-informed institutional reforms to foster inclusive and supportive learning environments.

The next study by Nojoum et al. examines Iraqi medical students' perceptions of undergraduate breast curricula during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through qualitative interviews, the authors identify key themes related to e-learning, gaps in breast disease education, and barriers to clinical examination. The findings reveal widespread dissatisfaction with current teaching approaches while highlighting structural challenges that were exacerbated by the pandemic.

Farooq et al. investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance amongst undergraduate medical students in Pakistan. The study demonstrates a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic success, suggesting that emotional competencies may play an important role in student performance, stress management, and motivation within demanding medical programmes.

This issue also includes a narrative review by Pratham and Bhalekar on the therapeutic potential of natural compounds in neurotransmitter-related diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. The authors discuss emerging evidence on compounds such as curcumin and flavonoids, highlighting their neuroprotective and anti-inflammatory properties while emphasising the need for further research to translate these findings into effective clinical applications.

Singha and Majumder focus on medical education for community health workers. The paper synthesises evidence on educational strategies that enhance competencies, motivation, and public health outcomes, advocating for competency-based, digitally-supported, and rights-based approaches to professional development as a foundation for equitable health systems.

The effectiveness of integrative case-based learning and case seminar approaches in teaching pathology laboratory concepts to PharmD students is examined by Garalla and Burgeia in the next study. The findings indicate that active learning strategies significantly improve knowledge acquisition, critical thinking, and clinical preparedness compared to traditional teaching methods, reinforcing the value of learner-centred pedagogies.

In the subsequent article, Ayub Khan et al. assess alumni perceptions of a Master in Health Professions Education (MHPE) program in Pakistan. Using the RE-AIM framework, the study highlights perceived gains in teaching capacity, curriculum development, and leadership skills, while identifying areas for improvement in educational evaluation and mentorship to maximise programme impact across career stages.

The final article by John et al. explores the use of data analytics in improving health education outcomes, presenting a human-centred framework that integrates technology, pedagogy, ethics, and organisational capability. The paper offers practical recommendations for education leaders, demonstrating how analytics can enhance learner engagement, institutional decision-making, and community health literacy when implemented responsibly.

We sincerely hope that you find the articles in this edition educational, thought-provoking, and relevant to your academic and professional interests. Together, these contributions reflect WJMER's ongoing commitment to advancing scholarship that informs practice, promotes equity, and strengthens health education globally.

Ms Karen Au-Yeung
Associate Editor

Dr Rebecca Williams
Associate Editor

Review Article
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Therapeutic Potential of Natural Compounds in Neurotransmitter Diseases

Pratham B, Bhalekar S

Institution
SREIs Samarth Institute of Pharmacy Belhe
At Bangarwadi, Post Belhe, Tal Junnar, Dist Pune, State Maharashtra, Country India, Pin Code 412410

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Abstract:
Brain disorders linked to neurotransmitters, such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease, remain difficult to manage because of their complex causes and the lack of effective treatments. In recent years, scientists have started examining the role of natural compounds in treating these conditions. For instance, curcumin from turmeric has shown both anti-inflammatory and nerve-protective effects, which may help reduce nerve damage and inflammation. Similarly, flavonoids found in foods like blueberries and green tea have demonstrated protective effects on the brain, possibly supporting neurotransmitter balance and healthy nerve communication. While these results are promising, more research is still required to fully understand how these compounds work and to develop effective natural treatment approaches for neurotransmitter-related diseases.

Key Words:
Neurotransmitter Diseases; Natural Compounds; Therapeutic Potential

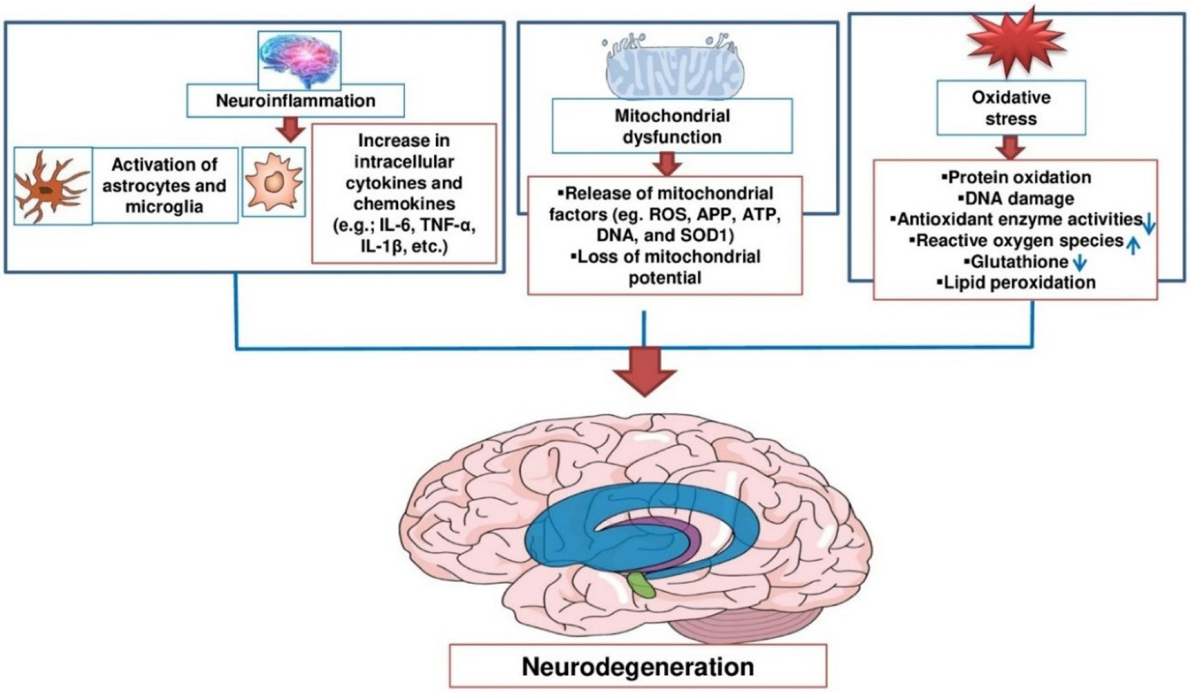
Corresponding Author:
Mr Bangar Pratham; E-mail: pai.prathambnagr2222@gmail.com

Introduction

Diseases linked to neurotransmitters, such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, put a huge strain on healthcare systems because they keep getting worse over time and lack effective cures. These disorders are caused by a mix of genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors, which makes them hard to treat. Current medicines mostly reduce symptoms or try to slow the disease, but they often have side effects and limited success.

Recently, researchers have turned to natural compounds from plants and food sources as possible treatments. These compounds are attractive because they show antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and nerve-protective properties. Curcumin, the main active compound in turmeric, has drawn much interest for its ability to affect several disease-related pathways in the brain. Similarly, flavonoids, which are found in fruits, vegetables, and drinks like green tea and blueberries, can cross into the brain and help protect nerve cells by supporting communication between them and reducing inflammation. Even though early research looks promising, turning these findings into real treatments is still difficult. Challenges such as poor absorption in the body, deciding the right dosage, and avoiding drug interactions need to be solved before these natural compounds can be used effectively in patients.

This review focuses on what is currently known about natural compounds, especially curcumin and flavonoids, in managing neurotransmitter-related diseases. It highlights their possible mechanisms of action and reviews available research to support the search for new therapies for these serious brain disorders.



Most Prevalent Neurodegenerative Diseases
The most prevalent neurodegenerative diseases include:

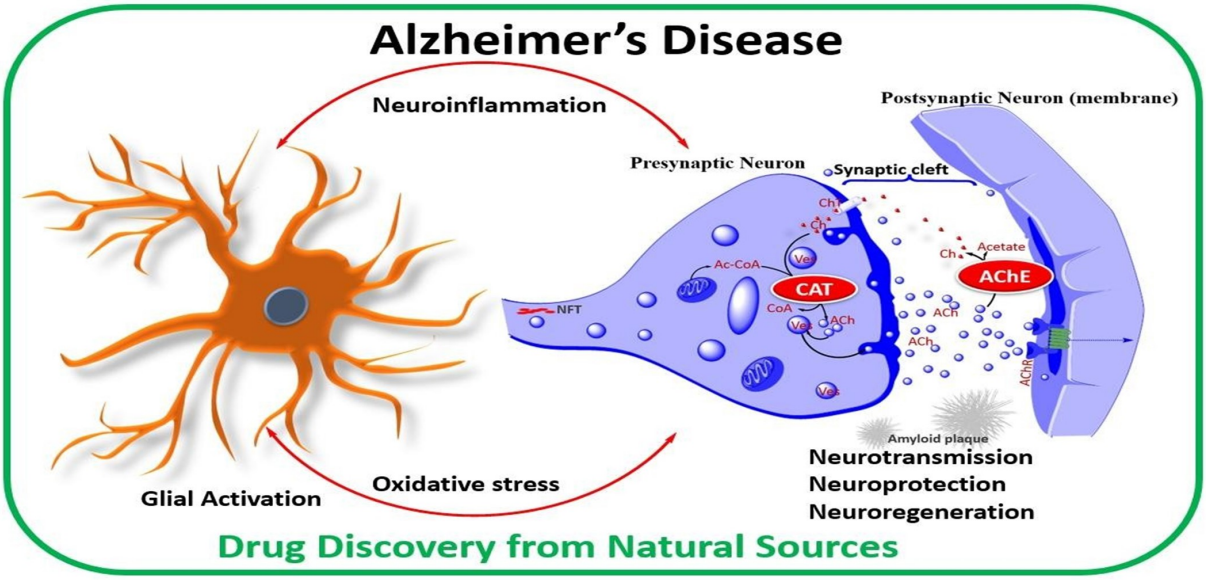
Alzheimer's disease (AD): This is the leading cause of dementia and is marked by gradual memory loss, reduced thinking ability, and noticeable changes in personality and behavior. Alzheimer's accounts for most dementia cases globally.

Parkinson's disease (PD): A long-term movement disorder caused by the breakdown of dopamine-producing brain cells. Its main symptoms include tremors, muscle stiffness, slowed movements (bradykinesia), and problems with balance or posture.

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS): Also known as Lou Gehrig' s disease, this progressive condition damages motor neurons in the brain and spinal cord. As it advances, it causes muscle weakness, paralysis, and eventually difficulty in breathing.

Huntington's disease (HD): An inherited brain disorder caused by a defect in the huntingtin gene. It leads to uncontrollable movements, decline in thinking abilities, and psychiatric issues such as mood changes.

Multiple Sclerosis (MS): An autoimmune condition where the body' s immune system attacks the central nervous system, leading to inflammation and damage of the myelin sheath around nerves.



Symptoms can vary but often include tiredness, difficulty walking, sensory problems, and memory or concentration issues.

Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD): A group of brain disorders caused by degeneration of the frontal and temporal lobes. It often results in personality changes, difficulty with speech and language, and problems with decision-making or planning.

These neurodegenerative diseases pose significant challenges for patients, caregivers, and healthcare systems worldwide. Research efforts aimed at understanding their underlying mechanisms, identifying biomarkers for early detection, and developing effective treatments are ongoing to improve the management and outcomes of these conditions.

The Role of Natural Compounds in Treating Neurodegenerative Diseases

The use of natural compounds in managing neurodegenerative disorders is gaining more attention because of their ability to influence different cellular processes involved in these conditions. Diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Huntington's, and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) are marked by the gradual loss of brain cells and problems with nerve

communication, which lead to memory decline, movement difficulties, and eventually serious disability.

Plant- and diet-based compounds are emerging as promising candidates for therapy, as they carry multiple beneficial properties such as antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and neuroprotective effects. These substances are capable of acting on key disease mechanisms, including protein misfolding, oxidative stress, inflammation in the nervous system, mitochondrial damage, and disrupted synaptic activity.

One of the most researched compounds is curcumin, a polyphenol from turmeric. Studies show that curcumin reduces inflammation, limits oxidative stress, and protects nerve cells. It also helps regulate harmful protein buildup and supports their clearance from the brain. Clinical research in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's patients suggests that curcumin may improve memory and motor functions, though challenges like poor absorption and unclear dosing still need to be resolved.

Flavonoids, found in foods such as berries, tea, and red wine, are another group of compounds with strong neuroprotective effects. They act as antioxidants, reduce inflammation, and support brain cell survival and regeneration. Regular consumption of flavonoid-rich diets has been linked with lower risks of developing neurodegenerative disorders and better cognitive performance in older adults.

Other compounds — such as resveratrol (from grapes), epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG) (from green tea), and quercetin (from apples and onions) — have also shown positive effects in laboratory models. They help protect nerve cells, maintain synaptic health, and reduce inflammation in the brain.

In summary, natural compounds provide multiple pathways for treating neurodegenerative diseases and hold great potential for future therapies. However, more research is required to improve their absorption, identify safe and effective doses, and confirm their benefits in clinical settings. If these challenges are overcome, natural compounds could play an important role in improving treatment outcomes for these debilitating conditions.

Natural Compounds in Clinical Trials for Neurodegenerative Diseases

Natural Compounds in Clinical Trials for Neurodegenerative Diseases Natural compounds are gaining growing attention in clinical research for treating neurodegenerative disorders because they offer protective effects on nerve cells and generally show lower toxicity compared to many synthetic drugs. Clinical trials have examined several of these compounds in conditions such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and Huntington's disease.

1. Curcumin

Curcumin, the active polyphenol in turmeric, has been one of the most widely studied compounds. In Alzheimer's disease, it has been tested for its ability to improve memory and reduce inflammation in the brain. Although results are encouraging, its limited absorption in the body has led researchers to develop new formulations that can reach the brain more effectively. Key therapeutic actions of curcumin include:

Neuroprotection: Acts as a strong antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent, helping to protect nerve cells in various brain disorders.

Amyloid binding: Binds to abnormal amyloid structures (Aβ and tau proteins), reducing plaque buildup that contributes to Alzheimer's disease.

Neurotransmitter modulation: Supports healthy brain chemistry by boosting serotonin and dopamine, which may also help relieve anxiety and depression symptoms.

Inhibition of protein aggregation: Prevents the

clumping of α-synuclein, a protein strongly linked with Parkinson's disease progression.

Promotion of neurogenesis: Stimulates the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that encourages nerve cell growth and strengthens connections between neurons.

2. Ginkgo biloba

Extracts from the leaves of the Ginkgo biloba tree, especially the standardized form EGb 761, have been widely studied in Alzheimer's disease. Some clinical trials suggest improvements in memory, attention, and daily functioning, while others show little to no benefit, making the overall evidence inconclusive.

Key actions of Ginkgo biloba:

Antioxidant neuroprotection: Shields brain cells from oxidative stress and helps preserve cognitive performance.

Improved blood circulation: Enhances microcirculation in the brain, which may aid memory and reduce balance-related problems.

Glutamate regulation: Ginkgolides control glutamate release and protect neurons from excitotoxicity by modulating calcium signaling.

Boosts neurotransmission: Enhances dopamine and norepinephrine activity in the cortex, supporting cognition and mood.

Clinical evidence: While some studies report benefits in Alzheimer's disease and mild cognitive impairment, results remain inconsistent, warranting further trials.

3. Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids, primarily obtained from fatty fish and plant-based sources, have been investigated for their protective role in neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. Clinical studies have explored their ability to slow memory decline and reduce brain inflammation, though findings remain mixed.

Key actions of Omega-3s (DHA&EPA):

Structural role in brain membranes: DHA accounts for nearly 40% of the brain's polyunsaturated fats, essential for neuronal membrane integrity and neurotransmission.

Cognitive and vascular benefits: Regular omega-3 intake has been linked with better memory, learning ability, and improved blood flow to the brain, with few side effects.

Antioxidant and cell survival effects: Reduces oxidative damage in neurons and prevents programmed cell death (apoptosis).

Supports brain plasticity: Promotes the growth of new neurons (neurogenesis) and enhances synaptic connections (synaptogenesis).

Anti-inflammatory action: EPA and DHA help shift microglial cells toward an anti-inflammatory state, thereby lowering neuroinflammation.

4. Resveratrol

Resveratrol, a natural polyphenol present in grapes and red wine, has shown encouraging results in laboratory studies for conditions like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. It demonstrates strong antioxidant and neuroprotective effects, with some clinical trials reporting improvements in memory and motor functions. However, results so far have been inconsistent, and more evidence is required to confirm its therapeutic potential.

5. Epigallocatechin Gallate (EGCG)

EGCG, the main catechin found in green tea, has been widely studied for its protective role in neurodegeneration. Early research suggests it may reduce oxidative stress, block harmful protein clumping, and support better brain function. Although human trials are ongoing, further studies are necessary to validate its effectiveness.

Key mechanisms of EGCG include:

Balancing synaptic transmission: Restores healthy communication between nerve cells by regulating glutamate and GABA signaling, thereby reducing excitotoxicity.

Antioxidant defense: Neutralizes free radicals, lowers lipid peroxidation, and enhances protective antioxidant enzymes such as SOD, CAT, GPx, and GR.

Anti-inflammatory action: Suppresses overactive microglia and lowers inflammatory mediators (TNF-α, IL-1β, IL-6) while inhibiting key inflammatory pathways (NF-κB, Akt, mTOR).

Prevents cell death: Reduces activation of caspase-3 and preserves mitochondrial function, which helps protect neurons from apoptosis in disease models.

6. Nicotinamide Adenine Dinucleotide (NAD^+) Precursors

Compounds such as nicotinamide riboside and nicotinamide mononucleotide, which act as precursors of NAD^+, have recently gained interest in the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases. Since NAD^+ is vital for energy production and

cellular repair, its supplementation may help improve neuronal health and delay dysfunction.

Ongoing clinical trials are evaluating the safety and effectiveness of these compounds in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

Natural Compounds in Clinical Trials for Multiple Sclerosis

While these natural compounds hold promise as potential therapeutic agents for neurodegenerative diseases, it is essential to interpret clinical trial results cautiously and await further evidence from well-designed studies with larger sample sizes and longer follow-up periods. Additionally, addressing issues such as bioavailability, optimal dosing regimens, and potential drug interactions will be critical for the successful translation of natural compounds into clinical practice for the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases.

While there is ongoing research on the therapeutic potential of natural compounds in multiple sclerosis (MS), clinical trials specifically focusing on natural compounds are limited. However, some studies have investigated dietary interventions and supplements that may impact MS symptoms and disease progression. Here are a few examples:

Low-fat, plant-based diet: A randomized controlled trial (RCT) examined the effects of a low-fat, plant-based diet on MS symptoms and disease progression. The study found that participants following this diet experienced improvements in fatigue, quality of life, and other clinical outcomes compared to those following their regular diet[1].

Vitamin D supplementation: Several clinical trials have investigated the effects of vitamin D supplementation on MS. While not considered a traditional natural compound, vitamin D is synthesized in the body through sunlight exposure and is also found in some foods. Research suggests that maintaining adequate vitamin D levels may help reduce the risk of developing MS and may have beneficial effects on disease activity and progression[2].

Omega-3 fatty acids: Omega-3 fatty acids, commonly found in fatty fish and certain plant sources, have anti-inflammatory properties that may be relevant to MS. While clinical trials specifically focusing on omega-3 supplementation in MS are limited, some studies suggest potential benefits in reducing inflammation and improving clinical outcomes in autoimmune conditions[3].

Herbal supplements: Certain herbal supplements, such as ginkgo biloba and turmeric, have been studied for their potential neuroprotective and anti-inflammatory effects in MS. However, evidence from clinical trials specifically evaluating these supplements in MS is limited, and more research is needed to determine their efficacy and safety[4].

Overall, while natural compounds hold promise as potential adjunctive therapies for MS, further research, including well-designed clinical trials, is necessary to establish their effectiveness and safety profiles in the management of MS.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, while there is growing interest in the therapeutic potential of natural compounds for multiple sclerosis (MS), particularly in dietary interventions and supplements, clinical trials specifically focusing on natural compounds are limited. Research suggests that interventions such as low-fat, plant-based diets and vitamin D supplementation may offer benefits in managing MS symptoms and disease progression. Additionally, omega-3 fatty acids and certain herbal supplements have been studied for their potential neuroprotective and anti-inflammatory effects, although evidence from clinical trials in MS is limited.

However, it is important to note that the evidence base for natural compounds in MS treatment is still evolving, and further research, including well-designed clinical trials, is needed to establish their efficacy, safety, and optimal dosing regimens. Additionally, given the complex nature of MS and its heterogeneity among patients, personalized approaches to treatment that consider individual patient characteristics and preferences are essential.

Overall, while natural compounds hold promise as potential adjunctive therapies for MS, they should be considered within the context of a comprehensive treatment plan that includes conventional disease-modifying therapies and management strategies tailored to the needs of each patient. Collaborative efforts between researchers, healthcare providers, and individuals with MS will be crucial in advancing our understanding of the role of natural compounds in MS treatment and improving outcomes for patients living with this challenging condition.

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