Biochemical and Health Properties of Truffles

Om Prakash Chauhan*, Vani Vijay, Arun Kumar Pandey and Anil Dutt Semwal
DRDO-Defence Food Research Laboratory (DFRL), Mysore – 570 011, India
*Email: opchauhan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
Truffles are the most expensive edible mushrooms refer to genus tuber which grows symbiotically in plant roots such as oaks and hazels. Truffles are underground mushrooms also known for their characteristic earthy flavor which is the major reason for their special place in the culinary. Their characteristic intense aroma helps them in reproduction by attracting small animals. Truffles can survive in a wide range of environments such as deep forests as well as deserts. The most expensive varieties of truffles include Tuber melanosporum (Black truffle), Tuber magnatum (White truffle), Tuber aestivum (Burgundy truffle), Tirmania nivea, and Terfezia chalavyri (Dessert truffles). Truffles vary in their composition and flavor profile from species to species. The major volatile components which are responsible for truffle aroma are aldehydes, ketones, sulfur compounds, alcohols, and esters. Truffles are highly nutritious, rich in antioxidants, and have therapeutic properties such as antimicrobial activity, antiviral activity, antimutagenic activity, anti-inflammatory activity, hepatoprotective activity, etc. The major active components present in truffle are tuberoside, phenolics, anandamide, and ergosterol.

Keywords: Truffles; Mushroom; Health; Nutrition; Antioxidant

1. INTRODUCTION
Truffles are edible mushrooms from the genus Tuber. They are hypogeous subterranean ectomycorrhizal ascomycetous fungi that form a symbiotic relationship with plant roots. They are found in a variety of habitats including temperate forests, Mediterranean woodlands, subtropical cloud forests, flood plains, boreal forests, tree nurseries, etc. Truffles are mostly found in temperate zones of the northern hemisphere. Truffles are widely known for their characteristic aroma and taste. Their intense aroma helps them in spreading their spores. Rodents and animals such as dogs, foxes, hogs, etc. find truffles by their attractive aroma and feed truffles then spread their spores. Truffles don’t have any specific shape; usually, it looks like a potato. Size varies from 3 cm - 15 cm and weight varies from 5 g - 200 g. Among the different varieties of truffles most precious are the scented ones such as Tuber melanosporum Vittad (Perigord black truffle) and Tuber magnatum Pico (white truffle). T. aestivum also known as burgundy truffle is another species widely known for its delicacy. Tuber species forms a strong association with host plants as well as soil. Plants such as Fagus sylvatica (beech), Betula (birch), Hazelnut (Corylus avellana), and Oak (Quercus robur) are usually found in symbiosis (Fig. 1). Truffles grow at various altitudes and mostly in calcareous soils with a sub-alkaline pH (7-8). Along with its unique flavor, it also has therapeutic properties so that it can be used as a functional food ingredient.

2. VARIETIES /BIODIVERSITY OF TRUFFLES
Thousands of varieties of truffles are grown over the whole world and all of them are not edible. Only those from the genus Tuber are used as a food source. Out of these edible truffles, black and white truffles are well known for their unique and delicate flavor (Fig. 2). Edible truffle species in which more research is going on include T. melanosporum (black truffle), T. brumale (black truffle), T. aestivum (black truffle), T. indicum (black truffle), T. magnetum (white truffle), T. borchii (white truffle), Tirmania nivea (white truffle), Terfezia (black truffle),
which will elicit stress and defense responses in surrounding fungi, bacteria, and especially in herbaceous plants.

Buntgen et al. conducted a study to find out the relation between size and maturity of Burgundy truffles (T. aestivum) and found that there is no strong relation between fruit body weight and maturity7. They reported that the presence of small-ripe and large-unripe fruiting bodies. The study predicted maturity can be depending on the surrounding ecosystem which includes soil, climate environment as well as the microbiome, and mycelial connectivity.

3. NUTRITIVE VALUE OF TRUFFLES

Nutritional profiles of truffles are influenced by several factors such as species, geographical area, type and pH of the soil, etc. Fresh truffles contain a moisture content of 77.1 per cent, protein 7.6 per cent, lipid 0.5 per cent, ash 1.9 per cent, and crude fiber 6.4 per cent along with calcium phosphorus and trace amounts of micro minerals (manganese, aluminum, iodine)8. Dessert truffles are rich in potassium, phosphates, and significant amounts of iron. Dry matter consists of 20 per cent - 27 per cent of protein, 3-7.5 per cent of fat, 7 per cent - 13 per cent crude fiber, and also rich in ascorbic acid i.e., around 2-5%9. The nutritive value of some edible truffles is given in Table 2.

Table 1. Geographical distribution of truffles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Truffles</th>
<th>Geographical area</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T. melanosporum (black</td>
<td>Found in Mediterranean regions of France, Italy, parts of Croatia and Serbia, the greater part of northern Spain</td>
<td>10, 12, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>truffle)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. aestivum (black truffle, Summer truffle)</td>
<td>Northern Italy and parts of France</td>
<td>10, 12, 18, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terfezia claveryi (black truffle)</td>
<td>Middle East countries, the Mediterranean basin, North Africa, and Kalahari desert in Botswana.</td>
<td>12, 19, 20, 23, 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirmania nivea (white truffle)</td>
<td>Middle East countries, the Mediterranean basin, North Africa, and Kalahari desert in Botswana.</td>
<td>12, 19, 22, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. borchii (white truffle)</td>
<td>Found throughout Europe especially Italy</td>
<td>10, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. magnetum (white truffle)</td>
<td>Found in Italian region such as piedmont, Tuscany, Emiglia Romagna, and in a small region of southern Switzerland</td>
<td>10, 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Nutritional value of truffles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Truffles</th>
<th>Nutritive values</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T. melanosporum</td>
<td>8.7g soluble protein and total carbohydrate content of 1.77 g.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. magnetum</td>
<td>11.0g soluble protein and total carbohydrate content of 5.65 g.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. aestivum</td>
<td>The total carbohydrate of 5.65g and soluble protein 11.0 g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirmania nivea</td>
<td>75.27 % moisture, 27.18 % protein, 7.42 % fat, 13.02 % crude fibre and 5.4% ash.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terfezia claveryi (black truffle)</td>
<td>75.44 % moisture, 24.96 % protein , 4.2 % fat, 7.02 % crude fibre and 6.39 % ash (on dry weight basis)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Major aromatic compounds in truffles are dimethyl sulphide, Dimethyl disulphide, 2, 3-butane-dione, Ethyl butyrate, 1-hexen-3-one, 3-methyl-1-butanol, methional, 3-ethyl-5-methyl phenol (Table 3).

Vahdatzadeh et al. studied the role of the microbiome in the generation of aromatic components. Microbes are present in truffles at all stages of their life cycle from fruiting bodies to the free-living mycelial stage, which includes bacteria, yeast, and viruses. Aromatic compounds include sulfur compounds, alcohols, esters, ketones, and aldehydes. Dimethyl sulfide is a major odorant present in fungal mycelia and Alpha-proteobacteria which is the dominant microbe in the fruiting body is also capable of producing dimethyl sulfide. Microbiome which colonised fungal mycelia also possess the capacity to produce aromatic components but their role is not yet clearly confirmed.

Kamle et al. conducted a study on dessert truffles Tirmania nivea, Picoa lefebrevi, and Terfezia boudieri and identified volatile components responsible for their aroma. Major volatile components in T. boudieri and T. nivea were found that 1-octen-3-ol and hexanal. Picoa lefebrevi was found to contain components with less volatility.

5. PRESERVATION OF TRUFFLES

Preservation methods for truffles are selected based on their flavor profile. The selection of the preserving method is very important in the case of truffles to preserve flavor components without any loss during storage time. Low-temperature preservation methods are widely accepted for preserving truffles without much biochemical spoilage (Table 4). According to Saltarelli et al., during refrigeration white truffles (T. magnatum and T. borchii) are more sensitive to spoilage than black truffles (T. melanosporum and T. aestivum). Nazzaro et al., suggested that irradiation is an effective method to preserve fresh black truffles with lesser biochemical alterations especially suitable for decontamination of truffles. Low dose irradiation in the range of 1.5 KGY was found to be best as compared to other doses to decontaminate truffles. According to studies conducted by Rivera et al., fresh black truffles (T. melanosporum and T. aestivum) can be stored without losing their quality with the help of modified atmosphere packaging (MAP). MAP with microperforated films can extend the shelf life of truffles by storing them in a mixture of 15 per cent CO2 and 7 per cent O2. Combined treatments can also provide some synergistic effects such as a combination of gamma irradiation, acid and alkali treatment, and refrigeration. A study on T. aestivum shows that a combination of refrigeration, microperforated plastic films, and electron beam irradiation can improve the shelf life by two times without the development of mycelium and yeast growth.
6. BIOCHEMICAL PROPERTIES OF TRUFFLES

Truffles are well known for their unique flavor and nutritional value in addition to that few bio-activity parameters are also reported in truffles such as antioxidant activity, antimicrobial activity, antiviral activity, antimutagenic activity, anti-inflammatory activity, and hepatoprotective activity etc.  

Stanikunaite et al., carried out a study in which twenty-two species of hypogeous truffles and other fungi similar to truffles are screened for bioactivities. The study revealed the therapeutic potential of truffles in terms of six biological activities antimicrobial, antimalarial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, anti-tuberculoid, and anticarcinogenic activity (Table 5). Stanikunaite et al., conducted a study on Elaphomyces granulatus to reveal bioactive components which are responsible for anti-inflammatory activity. They found that syringaldehyde and syringic acid isolated from E. granulatus exhibited cox 2 inhibitions which have an important role in inflammation.

Antimutagenic properties are reported in fresh and irradiated black truffles (T. aestivum). A study was conducted in Salmonella typhimurium against 2-aminothracine and sodium azide. Fresh truffle exhibited strong antimutagenic properties than irradiated one. Hepatoprotective activity was observed in T. claveryi as a result of a study conducted against CCl₄.

Antioxidant activity was reported in many truffle species such as Terfezia claveyichatin, Picoa juniper vittadin, Tirmania nivea, Elaphomyces granulatus, etc. According to a study conducted by Stanikunaite et al., syringic acid is responsible for the strong antioxidant activity of E. granulatus. T. nivea, dessert truffle from different places were analysed for antioxidant capacity in terms of DPPH, FRAP, Nitric oxide scavenging, and inhibition of deoxyribose breakage. The study, also found that T. nivea species contains a significant amount of ascorbic acid, phenolic content, flavonoids, and total carotenoid content. Murcia et al., state that when comparing Terfezia claveyichatin and Picoa juniper vittadin with common antioxidants such as BHA, BHT, and α-tocopherol, it showed higher antioxidant potential. They conducted assays such as lipid peroxidation, deoxyribose, and peroxidase, and canned and frozen samples which showed a reduction in radical scavenging potential as compared to a fresh one.

Janakat et al., and Hussan and Al-Ruqaie studied antiviral and antimicrobial activities in T. nivea and T. claveryi and found that Tirmania is less effective when compared to Terfezia in antibacterial activity. Extracts of these species are effective against a wide range of gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria including Bacillus subtilis, Staphylococcus aureus, and Chlamydia trachomatis.
7. SOME COMMON VARIETIES OF TRUFFLES

7.1 T. Melanosporum (Black Truffle)

Tuber melanosporum Vittad ascocarps of genus Tuber also known as black truffle, Perigord truffle, and French truffle etc.

T. melanosporum truffles weigh up to 100 g when fully matured and with an average diameter of 7 cm. Perigord truffles are native to the Mediterranean regions of France, Italy, and the larger part of northern Spain. It’s harvested from the end of November to starting of March. Black truffles grow well in calcareous soil with a pH above 7.5. Oak and lime are the two mostly hosted plants for their growth. Saltarelli et al., analysed T. melanosporum truffles and found that it contains 8.7 g ± 0.83 g soluble protein and total carbohydrate content of 1.77 g. The aroma profile of T. melanosporum truffles shows that 3-ethyl-5-methyl phenol, 5-methyl-2-propyl phenol, B-Phenyl ethanol, and 3-Ethylphenol are the dominant compounds that are responsible for the unique flavor of truffles.

7.2 T. Magnatum (White Truffle)

T. magnatum truffles are also known as Piedmont white truffles, native to the Italian region especially Piedmont, Romagna, Emiglia, and some regions of southern Switzerland. It grows to a diameter of 12 cm with a weight of 500 g. It is harvested during the winter season from mid-October to the end of January. Piedmont truffles grow in soft, moist soil rich in calcium carbonate. Alder, Poplar, Oak, and hazel are the common host plants for piedmont white truffles. Saltarelli et al., analyzed the nutritional properties of T. aestivum truffles and found that it contains 11.0g±0.93g soluble protein and total carbohydrate content of 5.65 g. Bis (methylthio) methane and Tris (methylthio) methane are the two dominant flavor compounds available in T. magnatum truffles.

7.3 T. Aestivum (Black Truffle, Summer Truffle)

T. aestivum truffles are brown to black they grow to a maximum diameter of 10 cm. They are found in northern Italy and parts of France and they are harvested in September or late December or the end of January. Summer truffles grow in soil that is very stony and rich in organic matter. Common host plants are beech, birch, hazelnut, and English oak. Saltarelli et al., conducted a study in T. aestivum truffles and found that it contains a total carbohydrate of 5.65 g and soluble protein 11.0 g± 0.93 g. The aroma profile of T. aestivum truffles shows that 3-ethyl-5-methyl phenol, 5-methyl-2-propyl phenol, B-Phenyl ethanol, and 3-Ethylphenol are the dominant flavor compounds present in T. aestivum truffles.

7.4 Ternania Nivea (White Truffle)

Ternania nivea is a type of desert truffle which grows in dry areas with sandy soil. Desert truffles are native to the Middle East also found in the Mediterranean basin, North Africa, and the Kalahari Desert in Botswana. They will grow up to a diameter of 10 cm and more and weigh up to 1 kg. It is whitish-yellow with a smooth structure and warts. It is harvested from February to April. Common host plants are rock rose trees, camel thorn, and helianthemum. Swaya et al., analysed nutritional properties of unpeeled Ternania nivea truffles and found that on a dry weight basis it contains 75.27 per cent, protein 27.18 ± 0.04 %, fat 7.42 ± 0.03 %, crude fiber 13.02 ± 0.02%, and ash 5.4 ± 0.08 %. Hexadecanoic acid, 11,14-eicosadienoic acid methyl ester and octadecanoic acid are the dominant flavour components present.

7.5 Terfezia Claveryi (Black Truffle)

Terfezia truffles are black truffles that grow in desserts. They grow to a maximum diameter of 10 cm and weigh up to 1 kg. They are found in the Middle East, the Mediterranean basin, North Africa, and the Kalahari Desert in Botswana. They are harvested from February to April. Terfezia truffles grow in mildly acidic dry sandy soil with a rainfall of 200 mm - 250 mm. According to Sawaya et al. unpeeled Terfezia claveryi truffles contains 75.44 per cent of moisture, 24.96 ± 0.04 % protein, 4.2 ± 0.31 % fat, 7.02 ± 0.22 % crude fiber, and 6.39 ± 0.36 % ash on a dry weight basis.

8. TRUFFLE PRODUCTS

There are several types of products are available in the market made from truffles such as truffle spread, truffle honey, truffle pesto, truffle nut mix, truffle sea salt, white truffle mayonnaise, black truffle rub, truffle butter, porcini and white truffle sauce, black truffle popcorn, etc (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Truffle products available in the market.
Marks and Spencer brand brought a new truffle product, truffle pesto to the market. Truffle pesto is a combination of olive oil, cashew nuts, cheese, and black truffle. Harvey Nichols brand has developed truffle honey which contains delicate acacia honey with a floating small piece of dried bianchetto truffle. This honey is full of truffle flavor and a swirl of this can be used in food products to impart truffle flavor e.g. glazing of meat. Harvey Nichols truffle spread is another unique product that contains cheese and bianchetto truffle from Italy. Truffles are also available in the form of slices in the market, which are packed in olive oil to preserve their freshness and flavor e.g. black truffle slices in olive oil from the brand of selezione in Italy.

9. STANDARDS FOR REGULATING TRUFFLES TRADE

Regulations related to truffle usage are very limited. Truffles outer skin is reported to contain chitin and melanin. Melanin is responsible for the dark color of the ascocarp of black truffles. The after-effects of its long-time usage are still not yet studied. Balestrini and bonfante reported that Chitin is a major component of truffle cell wall. Chitinolytic bacteria such as Pseudomonas fluorescence and Bacillus sp. are also found in cell walls as sporocarps. Codex Alimentarius commission made regulations for standardizing the quality of truffles trade. They have revised their standards related to truffles recently in April 2016 (CAC/39 INF/8).

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) developed standards concerning marketing and commercial quality control of truffles. These standards are only applied to truffles that are supplied to the consumer as fresh and industrially processed are excluded. According to standard fresh truffles supplied to the consumer should be intact, firm, sound, clean, and free from pest damage and abnormal external moisture. According to UNECE standards, truffles are classified into three Classes i.e., Extra class, Class I, and Class II. Truffles from the extra class must be of superior quality, round in shape, and with exception of slight superficial defects. Class I truffles are of good quality with a slight defect in appearance and slight superficial bruising. In the case of class II truffles defects are allowed provided that they should retain their essential characteristics regarding keeping quality and presentation. Defects can be in shape, development, and coloring. Extra class truffles will be weighing around 20 g and class I will be 10 g and class II is 5 g (UNECE standard FFV-53, 2017).

10. CONCLUSION

Truffles are underground treasures that have many advantages over other edible mushrooms. They have proved their value in all aspects ranging from the culinary field to its therapeutic uses. Even though they are rich in the nutritive value we are unable to make them a part of the daily human diet because of rare availability, costly nature, etc. The major problem faced during truffle processing is the preservation of its flavor and aroma. Still, there is a gap in the preservation technologies that can maintain flavor and aroma throughout its shelf life. Truffles vary widely from species to species in their composition, aroma components, and biological activities. Still, more research to be conducted to develop value-added products, to identify active components and preservation technologies, etc.

REFERENCE

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**CONTRIBUTOR**

**Dr Om Prakash Chauhan** received his PhD in Food Technology from GB Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar. He is working as Scientist ‘F’ at DRDO-DFRL, Mysore. He has contributed towards writing and compilation of data in this manuscript.

**Ms Vani Vijay** has received her MSc (Food Science and Technology) from Pondicherry University, Pondicherry. Presently she is working as JRF in DRDO-DFRL, Mysore. She has contributed towards literature collection and manuscript preparation.

**Mr Arun Kumar Pandey** has received his MSc (Food Science and Technology) from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. He is presently working as SRF in DRDO-DFRL, Mysore. He has contributed towards literature collection and manuscript preparation.

**Dr Anil Dutt Semwal** has received his PhD (Chemistry) from University of Mysore, Mysore. He is currently Director, DRDO-DFRL, Mysore. He has made significant contributions in development of light weight rations, RTE, RTS, RTD foods for armed forces. He has also contributed significantly in R&D of vegetable oils.