



Studies in Natural Products Chemistry: Chapter 13. Pharmacological Effects of Cordyceps and Its Bioactive Compounds

Jeevan K. Prasain

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The genus *Cordyceps*, which comprises a group of insect parasitizing fungi, is regarded as an important component of traditional Chinese medicines and extensively investigated for its pharmacological actions. A wide range of natural products such as proteins, cyclic peptides, polyamines, nucleosides, polysaccharides, and sterols have been reported to be present in *Cordyceps*. Nucleosides cordycepin and its analogs, polysaccharides, and sterols are the major bioactive compounds in *Cordyceps*, which are associated with multiple pharmacological effects, such as anticancer, immunomodulatory, aphrodisiac, and hypoglycemic properties. Most of the health benefits of *Cordyceps* were reported from *in vitro* and *in vivo* animal experiments and a few clinical trials. *Cordyceps* is considered as generally safe for human use and has a potential to be used as adjunctive therapy in diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and renal failure; however, no well-defined toxicological studies have been published. Because of significant structural and compositional variation among bioactive compounds and the potential of contamination/adulteration, quality control of *Cordyceps* or *Cordyceps*-based dietary supplements is critical to ensure its safety and efficacy. This review highlights the recent advances in profiling the bioactive compounds from *Cordyceps sinensis*, their pharmacological properties, and quality control of this supplement.

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