

Review

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Bovine colostrum: an emerging nutraceutical

Abstract: Nutraceutical, a term combining the words “nutrition” and “pharmaceuticals”, is a food or food product that provides health benefits as an adjuvant or alternative therapy, including the treatment and prevention of infectious diseases in children and adults. There is emerging evidence that bovine colostrum (BC) may be one of the promising nutraceuticals which can prevent or mitigate various diseases in newborns and adults. Immunity-related disorders are one of the leading causes of mortality in the world. BC is rich in immunity, growth and antimicrobial factors, which promote tissue growth and the maturation of digestive tract and immune function in neonatal animals and humans. The immunoglobulins and lactoferrin present in colostrum are known to build natural immunity in newborns which helps to reduce the mortality rate in this population. Also, the side-effect profile of colostrum proteins and possible lactose intolerance is relatively less in comparison with milk. In general, BC is considered safe and well tolerated. Since colostrum has several important nutritional constituents, well-designed, double-blind, placebo-controlled studies with colostrum products should be conducted to widen its therapeutic use. The objectives of this review are to create awareness about the nutraceutical properties of colostrum and to discuss the various ongoing alternative treatments of colostrum and its active ingredients as well as to address colostrum’s future nutraceutical and therapeutic implications in humans.

Keywords: bovine colostrum dietary supplements, colostrum as nutraceutical, colostrum-induced immunity, human and bovine colostrum benefits, immunoglobulins and lactoferrin

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Introduction

Immunity-related diseases are one of the major causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide. An efficient immune system results in self-healing [1]. Currently, the number of microbial agents that have developed resistance against various antibiotics is increasing, and antibiotic-induced resistance has become a major challenge in the medical world [2–6]. Nowadays, health-care practitioners have been talking a great deal about the healing properties of BC, and colostrum-derived new food supplements are intended to boost the immune systems in both healthy and chronically ill patients [7–9].

Colostrum also known as beestings, bisnings or first milk is the mammary secretion that all mammals provide for their newborns during the initial 24–48 h post-parturition [10, 11] with most species producing colostrum just prior to giving birth. Human newborns only get colostrum from their mothers during the first few hours after birth, and that creates the foundation of lifelong immunity. Human colostrum and bovine colostrum (BC) is a thick, sticky, yellowish liquid containing several antibodies at a higher concentration than that of ordinary milk [12].

Newborns have a very small and immature gastrointestinal (GI) system, and colostrum provides naturally produced nutrients in a highly concentrated low-volume form. In neonates, it proves to be a laxative and assists in the passage of the baby’s initial stools called meconium, and also helps to remove excess bilirubin from the infant’s body to prevent jaundice [13, 14]. Antibodies present in colostrum not only provide protection to neonates against infectious diseases [15] but also provide passive immunity and growth factors for the GI development [16–18].

Colostrum has been known for centuries for its health benefits [19]. Research has also shown that colostrum constituents from bovine (cow and buffalo) sources are 100-fold to 1,000-fold more potent than that of human colostrum. This means that even human infants can rely on cow or buffalo colostrum to gain health benefits [9, 20, 21]. In 1950, Dr Albert Sabin, who developed the polio vaccine, eventually found that BC contained antibodies against polio virus and hence recommended it for therapy in children at risk for contracting polio [22].

Colostrum derivatives were also tried against rheumatoid arthritis [23].

Colostrum is regarded to be safe in the majority of the human population. Although side effects like nausea and flatulence might occur initially, they decline with time. It seems that colostrum should be off bounds only to individuals who have an allergy to milk or milk-based products.

Colostrum should be produced organically and should be free of adulterants like pesticides, herbicides, anabolic hormones, antibiotics and other chemicals [24]. It should not be processed at high temperatures and pressures because its biological activity is decreased by such actions [25]). The highly concentrated solid dosage form of colostrum is preferred than the liquid dosage form. Colostrum has a short shelf-life and therefore addition of preservatives is a must for its storage at warm ambient temperatures. However, even the addition of preservatives cannot completely prevent the loss of active ingredients [26, 27]. Removal of fats, whey and lactose is done to create an optimum dosage form [21]. Synthetic manufacturing processes include low-heat pasteurization [28] and indirect steam drying [29].

Synthetic colostrum is termed as “fake” colostrum. Milk, egg yolk, cod liver oil and sugar are used to manufacture fake colostrum. This formulation is utilized to feed young animals if the mother is unable to produce sufficient colostrum. While it serves as a temporary substitute, chronic usage should be discouraged since synthetic colostrum lacks the antibodies present in natural colostrum [30, 31]. Synthetic colostrum manufactured for human neonates utilizes accurately measured ingredients that include carbohydrates, amino acids, fats, vitamins and trace elements [32]. This formula is used to feed neonates whose mothers are unable to produce colostrum.

Components of colostrum

The components of BC can be classified into three major categories, namely nutritional components [33], immune factors [8] and growth factors [7]. These are given in Table 1.

Other immune factors such as IgA-specific helper factor, β -lactoglobulin, secretory IgA, lactalbumin, α_1 -fetoprotein, albumin, α_1 -antitrypsin, α_2 -macroglobulin, complements C3 and C4 and orosomucoids are also present in colostrum.

Comparative study between the constituents of cow, human, buffalo and goat colostrum

A comparison was done to determine the health benefits of the constituents of human, cow, buffalo and goat colostrum. It can be noted in Tables 2–4 [34–36] that the cow’s colostrum (BC) has more important natural constituents than the other three species. Values depicted in Table 2 clearly show that the percentage of lactose in cow colostrum (2.5%) is far lesser than that of human (6.9–7.2%), buffalo (4.7%) as well as goat (4.7%) colostrum. Therefore, cow colostrum may be given to a person having intolerance to lactose.

Quantity of immunoglobulins present in BC

Immunoglobulins are responsible for building the immunity in animals and humans. The immunoglobulins present in BC are IgG1, IgG2, IgA, IgM and lactoferrin. IgG1 being the major component can be seen in Table 5 [8, 35, 36].

Quantity of fat-soluble vitamins present in BC

Fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E and K) are essential for the maintenance and promotion of good health. The fat-soluble vitamins are not reduced when colostrum is commercially processed. Table 6 shows the content of vitamins present in colostrum [35, 37, 38].

Manufacturers of colostrum-derived nutraceuticals

Colostrum is commercially processed into capsules, tablets and powder by various nutraceutical manufacturing industries. Some of these manufacturing companies are listed in Table 7 [39–41]. According to the manufacturers, colostrum is utilized after the needs of the newborn calves are fulfilled. Processing and storing at high temperatures degrades colostrum and results in the loss of nutrients, hence, these companies utilize processes like low-heat pasteurization and low-pressure processing. It is a point to be noted that only APS BioGroup have written about their manufacturing plants being FDA approved.

Table 1: Components of bovine colostrum.

Components	Uses
Nutritional components	Health, vitality and growth of the newborn
Vitamins (A, B ₁₂ and E)	
Minerals	
Amino acids	
Essential oil	<p>Regulates the thymus gland.</p> <p>IgG neutralizes toxins and microbes in the lymph and circulatory system</p> <p>IgM destroys bacteria</p> <p>IgE and IgD are highly antiviral [77]</p> <p>An antiviral, anti-inflammatory and antibacterial iron-binding protein with therapeutic effects in cancer, HIV, Cytomegalovirus [88], herpes, chronic fatigue syndrome, Candidiasis and other infections [77]</p> <p>Regulates the duration and intensity of the immune response, responsible for cell-to-cell communication boost T-cell activity and the production of immunoglobulins</p> <p>It aids hydrolysis and boosts the immune system and is capable of destroying bacteria and viruses on contact</p> <p>Lactoperoxidase-thiocyanate, xanthine oxidase and peroxidase oxidize bacteria through their ability to release of hydrogen peroxide</p> <p>Stimulates interferon production</p> <p>Protease inhibitors – prevent the destruction of immune and growth factors in colostrum</p> <p>Mediates the immune response</p> <p>Attract and bind to pathogens preventing them from attaching or entering the mucous membranes</p> <p>Prevents haemolytic anaemia</p>
Immune factors	
Proline-rich polypeptide (PRP)	
Immunoglobulins (A, D, E, G and M)	
Lactoferrin	
Cytokines	
Lysozyme	
Enzymes	
Leukocytes	
Trypsin	
Lymphokines	
Oligopolysaccharides and glycoconjugates	
Orotic acid	
Growth factors	
Epithelial growth factor (EGF)	
Insulin-like growth factor-I and II (IGF-1 and IGF-II)	
Fibroblast growth factor (FgF)	
Platelet-derived growth factor (PDGF)	
Transforming growth factors A (TgA) and transforming growth factor B (TgB)	
Growth hormone (GH)	

Table 2: A comparison of human, cow, buffalo and goat colostrum.

Constituents	Human colostrum	Cow colostrum	Buffalo colostrum	Goat colostrum
Fat	3–5 %	6.7 %	11.31–7.56 %	4.1 %
Protein	0.8–0.9 %	14.9 %	4.3 %	3.4 %
Lactose	6.9–7.2 %	2.5 %	4.7 %	4.7 %

Therapeutic applications of colostrum

Colostrum has many clinical or therapeutic applications and it may be used as a nutritional supplement, since it is well tolerated and seems to produce no adverse side effects.

Allergies and autoimmune diseases

Allergy is categorized as a hypersensitivity disorder of the immune system [42]. It occurs due to an improper immune response to harmless substances. Proline-rich polypeptide (PRP) present in colostrum functions as a regulatory substance of the thymus gland. Lymphocyte and T-cell overproduction, allergy and autoimmune

Table 3: A comparison of water-soluble vitamin content of human, cow, buffalo and goat colostrum.

Constituents	Human colostrum, mg/100 ml	Cow colostrum, µg/ml	Buffalo colostrum, µg/ml	Goat colostrum
Niacin	0.02	0.34	–	Approximately 0.6 µg/ml water-soluble vitamins are present
Thiamine	0.017	0.90	–	
Riboflavin	0.04	4.55	3.4	
Vitamin B ₁₂	0.03	0.60	1.59	
Pyridoxal	–	0.15	–	
Pyridoxamine	–	0.21	–	
Pyridoxine	–	0.04	3.25	

Table 4: A comparison of mineral content of human, cow, buffalo and goat colostrum.

Constituents	Human colostrum, mg/100 ml	Cow colostrum, mg/kg	Buffalo colostrum, mM	Goat colostrum, g/kg
Calcium	33	4716	47.1	0.65
Phosphorus	13–16	4452	27.7	0.36
Magnesium	4	733	7.3	–
Sodium	50	1058	20.3	1.44
Potassium	74	2845	28.7	3.38
Zinc	0.53	38	147–728	–
Iron	0.15	5.3	42–152	–
Copper	0.04	0.3	7	–
Sulphur	–	2595	15700	0.2
Manganese	–	0.1	38.2	–

Table 5: Immunoglobulins present in bovine colostrum.

Immunoglobulin	Quantity, mg/ml
IgG1	35.0
IgG2	16.0
IgA	1.7
IgM	4.3
Lactoferrin	0.8

Table 6: Fat-soluble vitamins present in bovine colostrum.

Fat-soluble vitamins	Quantity, µg/g
Retinol (vitamin A)	4.9
Tocopherol (vitamin E)	2.9
Beta-carotene	0.7
Cholecalciferol (vitamin D)	0.0305
Phylloquinone (vitamin K ₁)	4.9 µg/l

Table 7: Manufacturers of colostrum-derived nutraceuticals.

Types of colostrum	Colostrum powder manufacturer	Colostrum capsule manufacturer
Cow colostrum	APS BioGroup	APS BioGroup
Buffalo colostrum	Biostrum Nutritech Pvt. Ltd	Biostrum Nutritech Pvt. Ltd.
Goat colostrum	Mt Capra Wholefood Nutritionals	Mt Capra Wholefood Nutritionals

disease symptoms, i.e. pain, inflammation and swelling are inhibited by PRP [43]. Also, PRP has been reported to improve or eliminate symptoms of autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, myasthenia gravis, multiple sclerosis, lupus and allergies.

Cardiovascular diseases

Several studies suggest that atherosclerosis and cardiovascular diseases may be caused by altered immunity. One study indicated that, in over 79% of patients with

heart disease, a type of *Chlamydia* has been linked with the formation of arterial plaques [44]. Further, it seems that immune sensitization to cardiac antigen is the cause of heart disease [44]. Colostrum may have a beneficial function in the prevention of cardiovascular diseases due to the presence of PRP, the same effect as is observed in allergies and autoimmune diseases. Also, the growth hormones (GH) and growth factors like insulin-like growth factor-1 (IGF-1) in colostrum can raise the blood levels of HDL (high-density lipoprotein)-cholesterol, while lowering LDL (low-density lipoprotein)-cholesterol. Growth factors and GH also play a significant role in repairing the damage to heart muscle and promote the growth of new blood vessels in collateral coronary circulation [44].

In vitro and ex vivo studies showed that BC possesses concentration-related antioxidant activity as revealed by significant free radical scavenging ability and marked inhibition of lipid peroxidation [45]. In addition, the combined administration of 500 mg/kg colostrum plus 0.25 mg/kg enalapril showed marked cardioprotective effects in rats after 28 days dosing. Colostrum itself was also cardioprotective at doses of 500 mg/kg against isoproterenol-induced myocardial infarction in rats. Overall, the rat study results indicated that colostrum in combination with enalapril exhibited far greater cardioprotective activity when compared with enalapril or colostrum alone [45].

Reduction of blood flow or ischemia and excessive bleeding or haemorrhage may be two side effects of certain drugs, both of which could be life-threatening consequences. Fortunately, BC is considered to be effective against both disorders. BC's antioxidant and anticytokine activity as evaluated in an intestinal ischemia/reperfusion (I/R) injured rat model [46] could also be effective against systemic inflammatory response syndrome and multiple organ dysfunction syndrome since I/R results in the production of free radicals and various pro-inflammatory cytokines, namely tumour necrosis factor (TNF)- α , interleukin (IL)-1 β and IL-6. Neurobehavioural changes mediated by these cytokines could be attenuated by lactoferrin present in BC since the aforementioned activities also seemed to be able to reverse cognitive dysfunction associated with either global cerebral ischemia or a middle cerebral artery occlusion induced ischemic stroke [47, 48]. Hippocampal neuronal cell death caused by haemorrhage-induced N-methyl-D-aspartic acid (NMDA)-mediated excitotoxicity and apoptosis was also attenuated by BC [49]. Additionally, short-term memory lapses caused by neuronal cell death were reversed by BC administration. Colostrinin, a PRP present in BC, is thought to be responsible for the reduction in the

caspase-3-mediated apoptosis that was observed by the investigators.

Further well-designed studies are warranted to evaluate the nutraceutical potential of colostrum before it can be recommended for treating cardiovascular diseases in humans.

Viral and bacterial illnesses

It has been demonstrated that colostrum is helpful in reversing infection-induced inflammation occurring in the digestive tract of HIV patients [44], possibly through improvement of mucosal integrity, tissue repair and direct antimicrobial actions [50]. Colostrum also has antiviral, antifungal and antibacterial properties which enable it to kill different pathogens like *Escherichia coli*, rotavirus and *Cryptosporidium*. BC with a high antibody titre, i.e. hyperimmune BC (HBC) is especially useful against human rotavirus (HRV) [51] and HRV-induced diarrhoea [20, 52] in children. This action may be mediated by κ -casein, a component of human and bovine milk. κ -Casein is a glycosylated protein that was found to bind directly to the viral antigens through the glycosylated residue [53]. These residues are integral for antiviral activity since deglycosylation failed to neutralize HRV. Although natural production of antibodies by vaccinating cows is cheaper than production through synthetic means, the yield is not enough to successfully cover the global requirement since over 500,000 deaths occur across the world every year due to rotavirus-induced diarrhoea [54]. Hence, a way to reduce the BC dose was required. The path was shown by Gunaydin et al., who engineered *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG, a probiotic *Lactobacillus* strain, to surface express the IgG-binding domains of protein G (GB1, GB2 and GB3). These domains help in targeting rotavirus by binding to the colostrum-derived IgG antibodies and enhancing their potency. The combination therapy was found to be more effective than BC alone in a mouse pup infection model. It is said that such a combination may result in the dose of BC being reduced 10–100-fold.

It has been reported that colostrum is capable of killing opportunistic infections caused by *Candida albicans*, *Helicobacter pylori*, five types of Streptococci and *Cryptosporidium* [55]. The immunoglobulins, lactoferrin and cytokines in colostrum are reported to show strong antiviral activity [56]. However, a double-blind, placebo-controlled study to evaluate the effect of BC on viral upper respiratory tract infections in IgA-deficient children

failed to demonstrate a difference between salivary IgA levels between the control and test group, although the BC group did record a lower infection severity score [57]. Such studies remain to be conducted in similar adult patients along with elucidation of relevant mechanisms although the ones given below could be at work.

Recently, Wong et al. demonstrated that oral administration (1.0 g/kg) of BC to C57BL/6 mice increased natural killer (NK) cell cytotoxicity, improved the immune response to primary influenza A virus (H1N1) infection and lessened viral burden in the lungs compared to controls. It was hypothesized that the small intestinal epithelial cells may be stimulated by colostrum, and the interaction between colostrum and immunity may partly depend on the colostrum components with innate receptors present in the intestinal epithelium, including toll-like receptors, namely TLR-2 and TLR-4 [58]. Skimmed and concentrated bovine late colostrum (SCBLC), i.e. colostrum obtained on the 6th or 7th day after parturition [59] and processed, was also found to be effective in reducing the symptom rate of influenza virus in mice [60]. This action was demonstrated to be mediated through an SCBLC-mediated rise in NK cell activity in Peyer's patches, splenocytes and the lungs. Additionally, it was determined through experiments conducted in murine Peyer's patch cells that SCBLC also increased IL-12 and IFN (interferon). Thus, SCBLC was found to activate both systemic and local cellular immunity mechanisms. In view of these observations, BC may be a potential alternative therapy for enhancing the activity of NK cells and subsequently boosting immune response against viral infections in human subjects, especially, non-specific responders.

BC-derived fractions rich in IgG have been successful in alleviating the symptoms of influenza in pretreated BALB/c mice [61]. These fractions were collected from cows immunized with A/Puerto Rico/8/34 (PR8) influenza virus, the IgG purified and delivered intranasally to mice. The anti-PR8 IgG preparation significantly reduced the viral load in mice and also prevented weight loss and death from a lethal dose of the virus.

Weight loss programs

Colostrum contains leptin that induces satiety or feeling of fullness and reduced desire to eat more in addition to IGF-1, which is required for the metabolism of fat and energy production occurring through Krebs cycle [44]. Leptin could work in tandem with IGF-1 to reduce elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels [62]. BC also

promotes tissue repair and regeneration of lean muscle growth, consequently escalating strength and endurance. Elderly humans and type 2 diabetics seem to suffer from inadequate production of IGF-1. Thus, BC supplementation could be an attractive therapy for weight reduction, especially among diabetic and obese populations.

Athletic performance

Athletic training and competition includes strenuous exercise which can slow down the immune system, eventually decreasing the number of T-lymphocytes and NK cells. Due to these reductions, athletes are more prone to develop chronic fatigue syndrome. For many athletes, colostrum has become a popular dietary source due to its valuable nutrient contents [63]. Athletes increase the efficiency of the digestive tract by using colostrum as a dietary supplement [64]. They usually take colostrum in powdered form and add it to shakes and drinks [65].

The possibility of infections due to physical and emotional stress in athletes can be significantly reduced by the immune factors present in colostrum or colostrum supplements. Exercise especially during winter disposes the athlete to develop an upper respiratory infection. BC was found to limit an increase in salivary bacterial load in a 12-week, randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blinded study [66]. Although an inter-group difference was not found, BC displayed bacterial load control over time.

Studies show that colostrum helps athletes by burning body fat, boosting the immune system and accelerating healing of injuries [67]. It was also implicated in reversing exercise induced gut permeability and thus prevent heat stroke in a double-blind, placebo-controlled, crossover study [68], through upregulation of the anti-apoptotic protein Bcl-2 and HSP70 (important for maintaining homeostasis during stress, as is experienced during exercise) along with downregulation of proapoptotic Bax α and apoptosis initiators Caspase-3 and 9. It has been suggested that BC supplementation is most effective during periods of high-intensity training and recovery from training, possibly due to increased plasma IGF-1, improved intramuscular buffering capacity and increase in lean body mass [69]. Further placebo-controlled studies are needed to assess the influence of BC products on athletic performance and to determine the dosage regimens and intake duration of standardized BC supplements as well as the bioavailability of active ingredients present in the BC supplements.

Wound healing

Topical application of the colostrum constituents has depicted significant promotion for open wound healing [70]. It has been suggested that nucleotides, epidermal growth factor (EGF), transforming growth factor (TGF) and IGF-1 promote cellular and skin growth and also help in repairing DNA and RNA damage. Growth of nerve cells, skin, cartilage, muscle and bone are tissues where colostrum showed beneficial effects [29]. BC also promoted collagen gel contraction in a fibroblast populated collagen gel culture [71]. This *in vitro* model seems to mimic the wound healing process *in vivo*. A patent has also been granted for utilization of a colostrum fraction to accelerate wound healing [72]. Additionally, BC was found to reduce NSAID-induced gastric injury in animals [73] and probably humans [50] by enhancing the growth of intestinal villi possibly due to the action of IGF and TGF- β present in SCBLC [59]. The bioactive components such as fibroblast growth factors and lactoferrin present in BC are thought to mediate the wound healing actions [50].

Apart from wound healing, lactoferrin was also found to be capable of protecting the skin from ultraviolet B (UVB)-induced photodamage in hairless mice [74]. Oral administration of 1,600 mg/kg lactoferrin resulted in a decrease in transepidermal water loss and epidermal thickening, two markers of skin damage. The protective effect could have been due to inhibition of UVB-stimulated IL-1 β production. IL-1 β , IL-6 and TNF- α are implicated in recruiting inflammatory leukocytes as well as matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs) resulting in inflammation and skin damage. While the drawback of this study was the failure to measure IL-6 and TNF- α in the skin due to inadequate concentrations; nevertheless, IL-1 β provided the required link between UVB and skin damage.

The leaky gut syndrome

The leaky gut syndrome is associated with many autoimmune diseases like chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes, inflammatory and irritable bowel disease and multiple sclerosis [75]. Antibodies produced by the biological system in response to stressors can get attached to tissues throughout the body and cause inflammation [76]. Progressively generated auto-antibodies result in chronic inflammatory disorders [77]. The immune system enhancers present in colostrum have revealed markedly beneficial effects on clinical and subclinical GI infections and chronic pain disorders. Thus, BC supplements may provide GI and immunological benefits and help to improve

gut mucosal integrity and immunological status [78]. Colostrum supplements not only possess anti-inflammatory properties but also appear to enhance nutrient bioavailability and prevent subclinical leaky gut syndrome in patients who use colostrum as a dietary supplement [79].

BC's ingredients may keep the intestinal mucosae sealed and make them impermeable to exo- and endo-toxins. This intestinal sealing capacity was attributed to BC mediated induction of intestinal barrier strengthening cytokine TGF- β [80]. The aforementioned mechanism was elucidated when a counteracting process to BC mediated induction in claudin-2 expression was sought. Claudin-2 is a tight junctional protein that forms cation-selective intestinal pores resulting in increased intestinal permeability and lower transepithelial electrical resistance (TER) [81]. Therefore, theoretically BC should have decreased TER but did not do so because TGF- β balanced claudin-2 overexpression resulting in reduced intestinal permeability and high TER.

Diabetes

Juvenile diabetes (type-1 or insulin dependent diabetes) is thought to occur through an autoimmune disorder, primarily initiated by an intense allergic reaction to the protein glutamic acid decarboxylase (GAD) found in cow's milk [29, 77]. Colostrum contains various bioactive factors, which can control and inhibit this autoimmune disorder and other similar allergies. The immunoglobulin IGF-1 found in colostrum can bind to both insulin and IGF-1 receptors present in target cells of human body. Additionally, BC was found to reduce glucose and malondialdehyde levels in alloxan-induced diabetes in rats [82]. A similar model adopted for mice showed that both BC and HBC were able to significantly reduce glucose and lipid levels [83] with HBC being the superior one. Apart from the obvious helpful actions of IGF-1, BC-mediated β -cell regeneration leading to insulin release and peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor- α (PPAR α) like actions of conjugated isomers of linoleic acid (CLA) could be the mechanisms behind the antidiabetic actions of BC [82, 83]. The antioxidant effect of BC could be mediated by its non-enzymatic components such as lactoferrin and A, C, E vitamins.

HIV-associated immunomodulation

HIV infection suppresses vital cells in the human immune system such as helper T cells (specifically CD4⁺ T cells) [84], many dendritic cells and macrophages, thus reducing their levels in the body. Further, diarrhoea is a

common complication in AIDS patients, and HIV-associated diarrhoea may result in discomfort and malnutrition. People with a healthy immune system do not experience this GI complication. It has been reported that intake of human milk increases helper T cells in the body, thus assisting in improving the immune system [85]. BC supplements may be useful in patients infected with HIV to restore the immune system and regulate the loss of T helper cells as well as GI system immune activation and mucosal integrity. Nevertheless, placebo-controlled studies are needed to ascertain if BC can effectively ameliorate HIV-associated gut inflammation and suppression of immune function.

To further enhance the utility of BC against HIV, Kramski et al. found that colostrum-derived IgG fractions possessed HIV-1 neutralizing activity [86]. These fractions were obtained by vaccinating cows with recombinant HIV-1 gp140 antigens, which resulted in the envelope proteins stimulating the production of gp-140-specific polyclonal antibodies. These antibodies bind to the CD4-binding site and thus grant BC its HIV-1 neutralizing action. This study provides a relatively cheap alternative for the production of anti-HIV antibodies as opposed to the expensive synthetic processes utilized today.

Anticancer properties of BC

Lactalbumin present in colostrum is responsible for inducing apoptosis (physiological cell death) of the cancerous cells [87]. Lactoferrin could prove to be beneficial as an anticancer substance [44, 77]. Indeed, metal ion-saturated lactoferrin has been granted a patent for displaying potent anticancer properties [87]. This lactoferrin increases treatment responsiveness, stimulates the immune response via Th-1 and Th-2 activation and also increases the leucocyte and erythrocyte count. Cancer metastasis could be inhibited by the growth and immune factors present in colostrum [44]. NK cells found in colostrum provide resistance against tumours; therefore, they have reduced cytotoxic properties. Based on these observations, the immunomodulatory components and anticancer factors present in BC supplements may be employed as an alternative remedy or adjunct therapy for curing some cancers besides radiation and chemotherapy.

Conclusions

It has been reported that colostrum mitigates a wide variety of diseases, and could be a promising nutraceutical in the

future. The primary advantage of colostrum supplements is that they have negligible side effects and are well tolerated. As opposed to milk, BC has lesser amount of lactose, and therefore may be suitable for patients suffering from lactose intolerance. The immunoglobulins present in colostrum have the potential to enhance the immune function and well-being of healthy persons and patients. Limited number of human and animal studies done with colostrum supplements are indicative of future prospects for helping in curing diseases like AIDS, cardiovascular and GI disorders, infectious diseases, wound healing, and certain cancers. As colostrum has numerous naturally occurring important nutritional components, well-designed, double-blind, placebo-controlled studies with colostrum products need to be conducted to widen their therapeutic role. It indeed seems to be a treasure trove which if tapped could eventually reveal many health benefits and cost-effective cures in humans.

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