Chapter
17

IMPACT OF BEETROOT JUICE ON ENDOTHELIAL FUNCTION AND BLOOD PRESSURE REGULATION: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

B. ASWINI*[1], V. MANIKANDAN[2], M. DHARAN KUMAR[1] AND Y. MANISANKAR[1]

[1]Department of Pharmacology, Adhiparasakthi College of Pharmacy, Melmaruvathur, Tamil Nadu, India.
[2]Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Swamy Vivekanandha College of Pharmacy, Tiruchengode, Tamil Nadu, India.

ABSTRACT

Hypertension is a major risk factor for cardiovascular diseases and is closely linked to endothelial dysfunction and reduced nitric oxide (NO) availability. Beetroot juice, a rich source of inorganic nitrates, has emerged as a promising dietary intervention for improving vascular function and lowering blood pressure. Dietary nitrates are converted into nitrites and subsequently into nitric oxide through the nitrate–nitrite–NO pathway, enhancing vasodilation and reducing vascular resistance. In addition to nitrates, beetroot contains bioactive compounds such as betalains and polyphenols, which possess antioxidant properties that protect nitric oxide from oxidative degradation and improve endothelial function. Clinical studies, including randomized controlled trials and meta-analyses, have demonstrated that beetroot juice supplementation results in modest but significant reductions in systolic and diastolic blood pressure, particularly in individuals with hypertension. However, its efficacy may vary due to factors such as differences in oral microbiota, variability in nitrate content, and the need for regular consumption to maintain effects. Beetroot juice is best considered as an adjunct to conventional therapy rather than a replacement. Overall, it represents a safe and cost-effective approach for supporting cardiovascular health.

KEYWORDS: Hypertension, Beetroot Juice, Nitric Oxide, Endothelial Function.

INTRODUCTION

Hypertension is a major global public health concern and a leading risk factor for cardiovascular morbidity and mortality. It is closely associated with structural and functional abnormalities of the vascular endothelium, commonly referred to as endothelial dysfunction. The endothelium plays a crucial role in maintaining vascular homeostasis by regulating vasodilation, vascular tone, platelet activity, and inflammatory responses. One of the key mediators of endothelial function is Nitric oxide, a potent vasodilator that promotes relaxation of vascular smooth muscle and ensures adequate blood flow. Reduced bioavailability of nitric oxide is a hallmark of hypertension and contributes significantly to increased vascular resistance and elevated blood pressure. In recent years, there has been growing interest in dietary interventions aimed at improving endothelial function and managing hypertension. Among these, beetroot juice has emerged as a promising functional food due to its high content of

inorganic nitrates. Dietary nitrates undergo a series of bioconversion steps in the body, known as the nitrate–nitrite–nitric oxide pathway, ultimately leading to increased production of nitric oxide. This pathway provides an alternative mechanism for nitric oxide synthesis, especially under conditions where endogenous production is impaired. Beetroot juice supplementation has been shown to exert beneficial effects on vascular health by enhancing endothelial function, improving arterial compliance, and reducing blood pressure levels. The bioactive components of beetroot, including nitrates, antioxidants, and polyphenols, work synergistically to reduce oxidative stress and prevent the degradation of nitric oxide. Consequently, this leads to improved vasodilation and overall cardiovascular function. A growing body of clinical and experimental studies has investigated the impact of beetroot juice on blood pressure regulation and endothelial performance in both healthy individuals and hypertensive patients. However, variations in study design, dosage, duration, and population characteristics have led to heterogeneous findings. Therefore, a systematic review of the available evidence is essential to critically evaluate and synthesize current knowledge regarding the efficacy of beetroot juice as a non-pharmacological intervention for hypertension. This review aims to comprehensively assess the impact of beetroot juice on endothelial function and blood pressure regulation, with a focus on underlying mechanisms, clinical outcomes, and its potential role in cardiovascular disease prevention and management.

NITRATE TO NITRIC OXIDE PATHWAY:

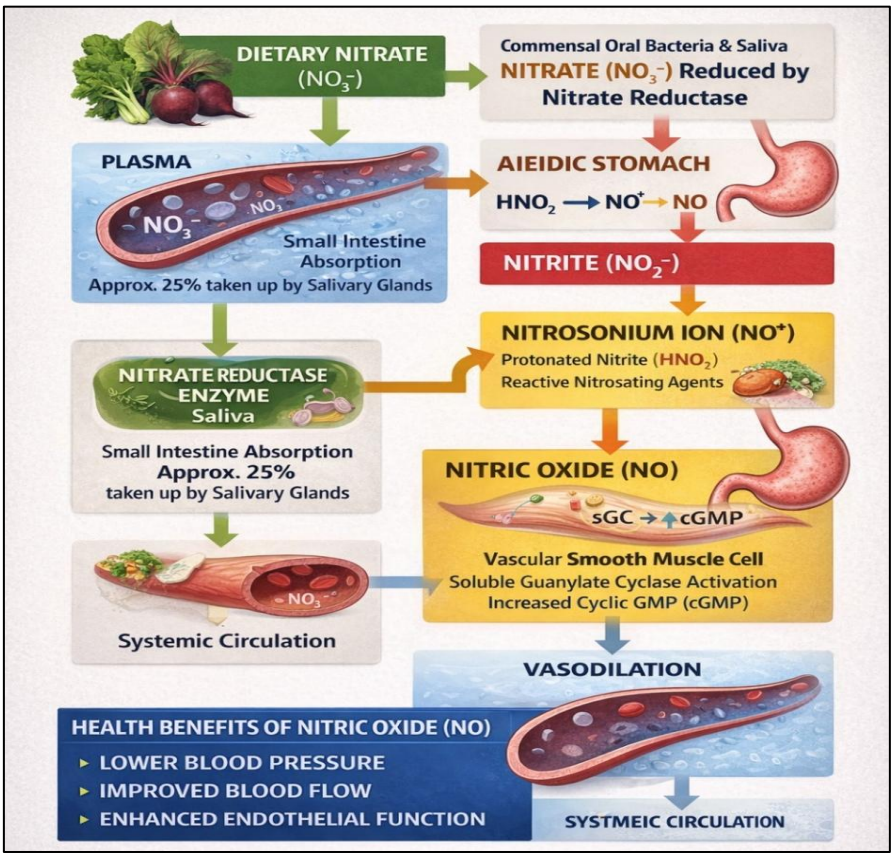

Figure 1: Nitrate to Nitric Oxide Pathway

Dietary nitrates (NO_3^-), abundant in beetroot and leafy vegetables, are metabolized in the body through the nitrate–nitrite–nitric oxide pathway (Fig.1), an alternative route to endogenous NO production. After ingestion, nitrate is absorbed in the small intestine and circulates in the plasma. Approximately 25% of

plasma nitrate is actively taken up by salivary glands and concentrated in saliva. In the oral cavity, commensal bacteria on the tongue reduce nitrate to nitrite (NO_2^-) via the enzyme e Nitrate reductase. Upon swallowing, nitrite reaches the acidic environment of the stomach, where it is protonated to form nitrous acid (HNO_2). Nitrous acid decomposes into reactive nitrosating agents, primarily Nitrosonium ion, which further generates nitric oxide (NO). In systemic circulation, NO diffuses into vascular smooth muscle cells, activating soluble guanylate cyclase (sGC). This increases cyclic GMP (cGMP) levels, resulting in smooth muscle relaxation, vasodilation, and reduction of blood pressure. This pathway is particularly important under conditions of endothelial dysfunction, where the classical L-arginine–NO synthase pathway is impaired. Dietary nitrate thus provides a non-pharmacological means to enhance NO bioavailability and improve vascular function.

COMPOSITION, ACTION AND ENDOTHELIAL FUNCTION

Beetroot juice is a nutrient-rich functional beverage containing inorganic nitrates (NO_3^-), betalains, polyphenols, flavonoids, vitamins (C, B-complex), minerals (potassium, magnesium, iron), and dietary fiber (Fig. 2).

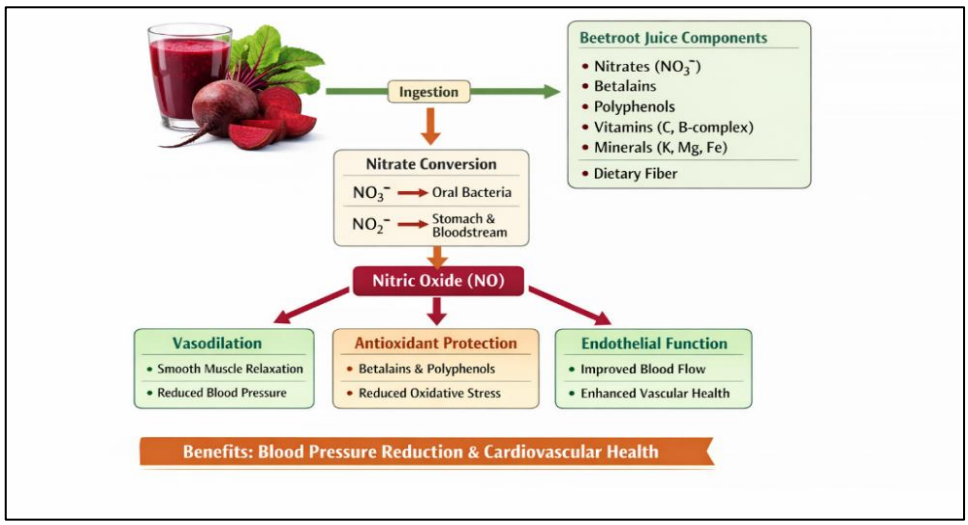

Figure 2: Composition and action of beetroot juice

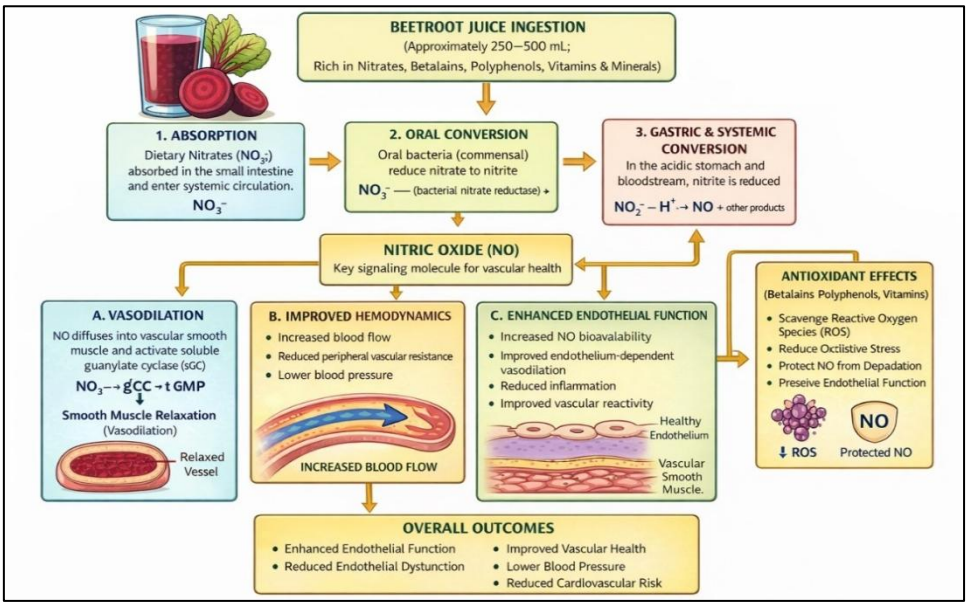

Figure 3: Effects of beetroot juice intake on endothelial function

The high nitrate content is the primary bioactive component responsible for cardiovascular benefits. Once ingested, nitrates are converted to nitrites (NO_2^-) by oral bacteria and subsequently to nitric oxide (NO) in the stomach and bloodstream. Nitric oxide acts as a vasodilator, relaxing vascular smooth muscle via activation of the soluble guanylate cyclase–cGMP pathway, which reduces peripheral resistance and lowers blood pressure. Additionally, beetroot antioxidants, including betalains and polyphenols, reduce oxidative stress and protect NO from degradation, improving endothelial function (Fig. 3). Overall, beetroot juice supports blood pressure regulation, enhanced blood flow, and vascular health, making it an effective dietary intervention for hypertension and cardiovascular risk reduction.

CLINICAL EVIDENCES

Clinical evidence supports the role of beetroot juice in lowering blood pressure (BP), primarily due to its high inorganic nitrate (NO_3^-) content. Several randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and meta-analyses have demonstrated significant antihypertensive effects following beetroot juice supplementation.

In a well-known study by Kapil *et al.* (2015), hypertensive patients who consumed daily beetroot juice (~250 mL) showed a reduction in systolic BP by approximately 7–8 mmHg and diastolic BP by 3–5 mmHg over four weeks. This effect was attributed to increased nitric oxide (NO) bioavailability via the nitrate–nitrite–NO pathway, improving endothelial function and vascular relaxation.

Another study by Webb *et al.* (2008) demonstrated that a single dose of beetroot juice could lower BP within a few hours, with peak effects observed at 3–6 hours post-consumption. This acute reduction in BP was associated with increased plasma nitrite levels, indicating efficient conversion of dietary nitrate.

Meta-analyses, such as those by Siervo *et al.* (2013) and later updates, have confirmed consistent reductions in BP, particularly systolic BP, in both normotensive and hypertensive individuals. The effect is more pronounced in individuals with elevated baseline BP.

Additionally, long-term supplementation studies indicate sustained improvements in endothelial function, reduced arterial stiffness, and enhanced vascular compliance. Beetroot juice also contains antioxidants like betalains and polyphenols, which reduce oxidative stress and protect nitric oxide from degradation, further enhancing its vasodilatory effect.

Several systematic reviews and meta-analyses provide robust clinical confirmation. A large meta-analysis including 22 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) ($n \approx 1,200$ participants) showed that beetroot juice supplementation significantly reduced systolic blood pressure (SBP) by about −3.5 mmHg and diastolic BP (DBP) by −1.3 mmHg compared to controls. Importantly, greater reductions were observed with higher doses (≥500 mL/day) and longer durations (>14 days), indicating a dose- and time-dependent effect.

A more recent 2022 meta-analysis focusing on hypertensive patients confirmed that nitrate-rich beetroot juice significantly lowers SBP by approximately −4.95 mmHg, although DBP reduction was less consistent. This suggests that beetroot juice is particularly effective in individuals with elevated baseline blood pressure.

LIMITATIONS

From a pharmacological and clinical perspective, beetroot juice, despite its benefits in lowering blood pressure, has several important limitations that must be considered.

One major limitation is variability in individual response. The conversion of nitrate (NO_3^-) to nitrite (NO_2^-) depends on oral microbiota, particularly nitrate-reducing bacteria on the tongue. Factors such as

poor oral health or the use of antibacterial mouth washes can significantly reduce this conversion, thereby diminishing nitric oxide (NO) production and therapeutic efficacy.

Another concern is dose standardization. The nitrate content in beetroot juice can vary widely depending on factors such as cultivation conditions, processing, and storage. This makes it difficult to establish a consistent and reliable therapeutic dose compared to conventional antihypertensive drugs.

Short duration of action is also a limitation. While acute reductions in blood pressure can occur within hours, sustained effects require regular and continuous intake. Missing doses may quickly reduce its effectiveness, indicating a lack of long-lasting pharmacological action.

Additionally, some individuals may experience adverse effects, such as gastrointestinal discomfort, bloating, or a harmless condition called beeturia (reddish discoloration of urine and stools). In rare cases, excessive nitrate intake may raise concerns about the formation of potentially harmful N-nitroso compounds, although this risk is generally low with dietary sources.

Beetroot juice may also have limited efficacy in severe hypertension, where pharmacological interventions are necessary. It is best used as an adjunct rather than a replacement for prescribed medications.

Finally, drug and dietary interactions can influence its effectiveness. For example, concurrent use with antihypertensive drugs may potentiate hypotensive effects, requiring careful monitoring.

Overall, while beetroot juice is a promising nutraceutical, these limitations highlight the need for controlled use and further standardization in clinical practice.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

The future perspective of beetroot juice in cardiovascular therapy is promising, particularly as a nutraceutical and adjunct pharmacological intervention. Ongoing research is focusing on improving dose standardization and formulation, such as concentrated nitrate supplements or encapsulated beetroot extracts, to ensure consistent therapeutic efficacy. Advances in food technology may help develop controlled-release formulations that provide sustained nitric oxide (NO) production and longer-lasting blood pressure control. Another important area is personalized nutrition and medicine. Since the effectiveness of beetroot juice depends on oral microbiota, future strategies may include combining nitrate supplementation with probiotics to enhance nitrate-reducing bacterial activity and optimize NO bioavailability. Further large-scale clinical trials are needed to establish long-term safety, efficacy, and its role in managing chronic conditions like hypertension, heart failure, and endothelial dysfunction. Additionally, research is exploring its benefits in exercise performance, cognitive function, and metabolic disorders. There is also potential for integrating beetroot-derived nitrates into functional foods and medical nutrition therapy. With increasing interest in natural therapies, beetroot juice could become a key component in preventive healthcare. Overall, it holds significant potential as a safe, cost-effective, and accessible strategy for improving cardiovascular health.

CONCLUSION

Beetroot juice is a promising nutraceutical for improving endothelial function and regulating blood pressure due to its high inorganic nitrate content. Through the nitrate–nitrite–nitric oxide pathway, it enhances nitric oxide bioavailability, leading to vasodilation, reduced vascular resistance, and improved cardiovascular health. Clinical studies show that regular consumption results in modest but significant reductions in blood pressure, especially in hypertensive individuals, along with improved arterial

compliance and reduced oxidative stress. Additionally, it is more suitable as an adjunct therapy rather than a replacement for standard antihypertensive medications. Future outcomes are promising, with ongoing research focusing on dose standardization, development of concentrated and sustained-release formulations, and integration with personalized medicine approaches and also contains polyphenols and anti-oxidants that possesses anti-cancer property. Enhancing nitrate conversion through microbiota modulation and conducting long-term clinical trials will help establish clear therapeutic guidelines. Overall, beetroot juice has strong potential as a safe, cost-effective strategy for cardiovascular health management.

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