

Abstract

In Silico Identification of Bioactive Proteins and Peptides in Insects for Human Consumption

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† Presented at the First Canadian Peptide and Protein Community Virtual Symposium, 27–28 May 2021; Available online: <https://cppc2021.sciforum.net/>

Published: 27 May 2021

Abstract: Insect consumption has nowadays become a new research field in food science and nutrition. Insects have been proposed as a promising alternative to cover the growing demand for protein by the population. This study aimed to evaluate the protein content and profile of six insects and peptide release during gastrointestinal digestion, assessing both proteins and peptides' physicochemical and biological properties. Protein concentrates from mealworm (*Tenebrio molitor*), beetle (*Phyllophaga rugosa*), caterpillar (*Nudaurelia melanops*), ant (*Oecophylla smaragdina*), locust (*Locusta migratoria*), and cricket (*Acheta domesticus*) flours were characterized by SDS-PAGE. Identified proteins were hydrolyzed (pepsin, trypsin, and chymotrypsin) *in silico* to obtain the potential peptides released. Physicochemical properties and biological activity were evaluated using . Protein content varied from 36 to 42%, and the main proteins identified among insects were cytochrome c oxidase subunit I, acyl-CoA Δ -9 desaturase, and α -amylase. Insect proteins were rich in Leu, Ala, Gly, and Ile and deficient in Cys and Trp. Locust tropomyosin exhibited shared allergenic 22 epitopes with lobster tropomyosin. Gastrointestinal hydrolysis of each insect protein mainly released free amino acids (22–55%), di- and tri-peptides (22–55% and 17–31%, respectively) being peptides longer than four amino acids less (12–42%). Peptides presented antioxidant and DPP-IV and ECA inhibitory potential. Results revealed the feasibility of insect proteins as sources of bioactive peptides. Forthcoming studies are required to expand the knowledge on insects' proteins and peptides and validate their use by the food industry and gastronomy.