A comparison study on the anti-leech effects of onion (*Allium cepa* L) and ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) with levamisole and triclabendazole

Mahmoud Bahmani1,*, Naiema Vakili-Saatloo2, Majid Gholami-Ahangaran3, Seyed Ahmad Karamati4, Ebrahimkhalil Banihabib1,5, Ghader Hajigholizadeh1, Sayfollah Borjian6

1Food and Beverages Safety Research Center, Urmia University of Medical Sciences, Urmia, Iran
2Department of Food Safety, Faculty of Public Health, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran
3Department of Poultry Diseases, Veterinary Medicine Faculty, Islamic Azad University, Shahrekord Branch, Shahrekord, Iran
4Department of Parasitology and Mycology, Faculty of Medicine, Urmia University of Medical Sciences, Urmia, Iran
5Faculty of Traditional Medicine, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran
6Medical Plants Research Center, Shahrekord University of Medical Sciences, Shahrekord, Iran

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**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** Leech may indwell in mucosa of the pharynx, tonsil, esophagus, nose, nasopharyngeal and rarely in larynx of hosts, however, the effective drugs against this parasite is scarce. This study was aimed to evaluate and compare the anti-leech effect of methanolic extract of onion (*Allium cepa* L) and ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) with levamisole and triclabendazole.

**Materials and Methods:** In this study, 60 leeches (*Limnatis nilotica*) were collected from south of Ilam. The anti-leech effect of methanolic extract of onion and ginger in comparison with levamisole and triclabendazole drugs (positive controls) were evaluated. Distilled water was used as negative control. Paralysis and death of leeches were recorded in 720 minutes.

**Results:** Lethal effect of methanolic extract of ginger against *Limnatis nilotica* was equal to levamisole and more than triclabendazole and methanolic extract of onion.

**Conclusion:** Ginger equal to levamisole has anti-leech activity and its methanolic extract might be used against *Limnatis nilotica*.

**Implication for health policy/practice/research/medical education:**
Ginger has anti-leech activity equal to levamisole and its methanolic extract might be used against *Limnatis nilotica*.


**Introduction**

Leeches are blood-sucking hermaphroditic parasites that vary in color and range in length from a few millimeters to half a meter. They are cylindrical or leaf-like in shape, depending on the contraction of their bodies (1). By drinking water that contains leech, it can indwell in mucosa of the tonsil, pharynx, nose, esophagus, nasopharyngeal and rarely in larynx of host and may have serious even lethal complications (2). Aquatic leech infestation occurs rarely, but should be considered as an important cause in the differential diagnosis in endemic areas (3). The clinical symptoms in scorpion sting are typically varied, depending on factors such as scorpion’s species, amount of injected venom, season, age and physical conditions of injured patient that may be weak as brief local responses or as dangerous as severely physiological changes that are led to death (4). There is no chemical drug that eliminates leech population without side effects on environmental biology of aquatic animals such as fish (3). World Health Organization suggests investigation on...
control of infection in developing countries (5). In traditional
culture of Iranian nomads onion (Allium cepa L) used for leech
eclipse. Onion has special importance because of vitamins and
minerals that it contains and can be used as medicinal plant (6).
Onion has been shown to have applications as antimicrobial,
antithrombotic, antitumor, hypolipidaemic, antiarthritic and
hypoglycemic agents (7). It is used in the treatment and
prevention of a number of diseases, including cancer, coronary
heart disease, obesity, hypercholesterolemia, diabetes type 2,
hypertension, cataract and disturbances of the gastrointestinal
tract (e.g. colic pain, flatulent colic and dyspepsia). These
activities are related to the thiosulfinates, volatile sulfur
compounds, which are also responsible for the pungent of these
vegetables (8). Ginger (Zingiber officinale) was found in Asia and
Europe many years ago (9). Biological-activity-guided searching
for active components showed that zingerone (vanillyl acetone)
was the likely active constituent responsible for the antidiarrheal
efficacy of ginger (10). Ginger is said to be anti-parasite plant
in Iranian herbal medicine (11). The purpose of this study is to
evaluate the anti-leech effect of methanolic extract of onion and
ginger.

Materials and Methods

Preparation of leeches
Sixty leeches were collected from springs of south of Ilam
province. The dark green color surface with rows of green
spots on the dorsal surface and yellowish-orange and dark
green bands on either side were the main signs for detection of
Limnatis nilotica species (12). In this study leeches that had the
length of 30–100 millimeters was used.

Selection of medicinal plant
Plants were chosen on basis of traditional use of Iranian
nomads. Underground root of onion (Allium cepa L) and
rhizome of ginger (Zingiber officinale) were used to preparation
of methanolic extract (11).

Preparation of the extracts
Voucher specimen of ginger plant was deposited in Natural
Resource Research Center of Tehran province. Rhizomes of
ginger were cleaned with water and dried under shade for 5
days until it could be grounded into a powder using an electric
grinder. Approximately 200 g was used for extraction. The
powder was boiled for 24 h in 500 ml methanolic in a Soxhlet's
apparatus. The extract was placed in small test tubes and stored
in a refrigerator until required (13).

The anti-parasite drugs
Levamisole and triclabendazole drugs were considered as
positive control and distilled water (10 ml) was used as negative
control.

The anti-leech assay
The extracts and chemical drugs were then added, their effects
were screened for 720 min, and time to paralyze, kill, and death
of each leech was recorded. The evaluation of death of a leech
was based on immobility after stimulation with a needle. The
low average paralyzing and killing time of these compounds
reflects anti-leech properties.
The severity of effect of these compounds/drugs based on time
was categorized into five groups: (1) 4+→ paralysis and death
of each leech within 1–60 min after addition of the drug, (2)
3+→ paralysis and death of each leech within 61–120 min after
addition of drug, (3) 2+→ paralysis and death of each leech
within 121–180 min after addition of drug, (4) 1+→ paralysis
and death of each leech within 181–240 min after addition of
drug, (5) negative → paralysis and death of each leech within
241–720 min after addition of drug.
The efficacy of the drugs which were able to kill leeches within
1–60 min after addition reflects the anti-leech properties of these
compounds, and therefore, they may be used in the treatment of
infestation with L. nilotica in the future (12).

Ethical issues
(1) The research followed the tenets of the Declaration of
Helsinki; (2) informed consent was obtained; and (3) the
research was approved by the institutional review board.

Statistical analyses
The differences between the control and treated groups were
analyzed using one-way ANOVA and Sigmastat 2 software
program.

Results
As is shown in Table 1, levamisole has intensity of 5.11±1.76
and methanolic extract of onion has intensity of 720±0 min. Ginger
has maximum anti-leech effect (33.33±11.40 min).

Discussion
Anti-bacterial and anti-fungal effects of onion are confirmed
before (14). In this study methanolic extract of onion had not
anti-leech effect. Our results did not confirm the traditional
belief of the anti-leech effects of onion. Ginger has suppressed
colonic tumor marker formation in rats and induced apoptosis
in colon cancer cell lines (15). Among other benefits of the
ginger, the results showed that it had anti-leech effects, too.
Decrease of the dose of triclabendazole from 500 mm to 250
mm did not cause the death of the leeches, considering this point
that triclabendazole is anti-nematode drug and has maximum
activity in high doses. According to our results, in comparison
with anti-nematodes, levamisole had more effect on the death
of the leeches and caused death in 50 mg of its concentration.
Note that ginger causes paralysis and death of the leeches in
short time, so it can be concluded that ginger is a good natural
medicine that can be used as anti-leech in order to decrease the
leech pathological effects. In future studies it is recommended
that different fractions from ginger be prepared and their anti-
leech effects evaluated. Then, from the effective fraction the
chemicals become subject to separation and test to find out the
most effective chemical for preparation of a powerful and safe
drug.
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Authors’ contributions
MB, NVS and MGA prepared the main draft. EB, GH and SB edited the paper.

Conflict of interests
The authors declared no competing interests.

Ethical considerations
Ethical issues (including plagiarism, misconduct, data fabrication, falsification, double publication or submission, redundancy) have been completely observed by the authors.

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