

Antioxidant Activity and Ginsenoside Pattern of Fermented White Ginseng

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Ethanol and water extracts of white and fermented ginseng were prepared and their ginsenoside composition and antioxidant effects were assessed. The main ginsenosides in white ginseng were $Rb_1 > Re > Rg_1$, and those in fermented ginseng were $Rb_2 + Rb_3 > Rd > Rg_1$. Ginsenosides Rd and Rg_3 in fermented ginseng were enriched 11 and 58 times, respectively, over that in white ginseng through fermentation with five *Bacillus* spp. The greatest levels of 2-deoxyribose and superoxide anion dismutase-like activities were found in 50% ethanol extracts of fermented ginseng. Thus, these data suggest that white ginseng has the greatest free radical scavenging activity and that fermented ginseng has the highest antioxidant activity.

Keywords: White ginseng, Fermented ginseng, Antioxidant, Ginsenosides

INTRODUCTION

Ginseng (*Panax ginseng* C.A. Meyer), one of the most widely studied medicinal herbs, contains saponin, phenolic compounds, polyacetylene, alkaloids, and polysaccharides [1]. The discovery of saponins as the active substance has led to the elucidation of ginseng's many pharmacological properties, such as antidiabetic effects [2], cardiovascular system dysfunction improvement [3], liver-protective effects [4], and various types of anti-stress activities [5]. However, with polyacetylene substances in ginseng being discovered to inhibit the growth of cancer cells, studies on the physiological effects of other active substances in ginseng have flourished [6]. In addition, reports show that saponin purified from ginseng has either no or only weak antioxidant activity, leading to the suggestion that phenolic compounds rather than saponins are responsible for ginseng's antioxidant properties [7].

Ten phenolic acids, including ferulic, and cinnamic and caffeic acids have been identified in ginseng.

Maltol, a unique substance of red ginseng produced during the manufacture of red ginseng from fresh ginseng, is known to have potent antioxidant activity [8]. Also, phenolic compounds such as maltol, salicylic acid, and vanillic acid, which are of lower molecular weight than ginsenosides Rg_1 , Re , and Rb_1 , have stronger antioxidant effects [9]. Furthermore, ginseng enhances the activities of endogenous anti-oxidative enzymes such as superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase, peroxidase, and glutathione peroxidase. When ginseng extracts were administered into Sprague–Dawley rats for 24 hours, liver SOD, catalase, and glutathione peroxidase activities increased significantly [10]. Furthermore, red ginseng extract increased SOD and peroxidase and catalase activities after ICR male mice were gamma-irradiated [11]. In addition, red ginseng extract administration enhanced endogenous SOD activity and significantly decreased the serum malondialdehyde level [12,13].

Thus far, about 30 different types of ginsenosides

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have been identified in ginseng [14]. These compounds are classified as diols, triols, or according to their aglycon structural characteristics. Diols and triols account for the majority of ginsenosides, and only ginsenoside Ro (0.6% of all ginsenosides) is classified as an oleanane [15]. The most prevalent ginsenosides are the diol-type Rb₁, Rb₂, Rc, and Rd, and triol type ginsenosides Rg₁ and Re. Ginsenoside Rf is absent from *Panax quinquefolius*, or American ginseng [16]. Ginsenosides Rb₁ and Rg₁ are the main index ingredients of ginseng, and these are used for standardization and quality control of health-promoting food production [17] and Korean standard (KS H 2153) [18] nationally, as well as internationally, e.g., in the *Codex Alimentarius*.

Consumer studies suggest that quality improvement entices consumers to purchase ginseng, even at a higher cost [19]. Hence, this study aimed to enhance the nutritional and functional quality of ginseng via fermentation of white ginseng using beneficial bacteria, and to convert ginseng saponins (ginsenosides) using microbial glucose lyases.

Ginsenoside structure has been elucidated [20,21], and numerous studies have uncovered a variety of beneficial effects such as anticancer activities [22,23]. Fermented ginseng has the advantage of being able to provide probiotic bacteria, and can lyse and convert ginsenosides, allowing more efficient absorption. Bacterial conversion of ginsenosides has been well documented [24-27], and *Bacillus* sp. are known to produce a plethora of degradative enzymes [28-30].

Therefore, this study used solid fermentation with *Bacillus* rather than standard ginseng liquid culture media. For solid fermentation, *Bacillus* was inoculated and heat-treated (85°C) to eliminate non-spore-forming bacteria. This was followed by the addition of ginseng powder and fermentation for 15 days. Saponin was then extracted and analyzed to evaluate ginsenoside conversion, and the antioxidant activities of fermented ginseng were compared to those of non-fermented white ginseng.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Reagents

Ginseng powder produced from Poongi Agricultural Producers Union (Chun-Je Myoung ginseng powder; Poongi, Korea) was used in this study.

Microbial stock preparation

Prior to solid fermentation, microbial stocks were prepared using *Bacillus* spp. KS-25 (KCTC 11351BP),

B. subtilis KS-29 (KCTC 11352BP), *B. licheniformis* KS-30 (KCTC 11353BP), *B. sonorensis* KS-33 (KCTC 11354BP), and *B. circulans* KS-80 (KCTC 11355BP) obtained from the Korea Gene Bank (Daejeon, Korea). Stock was prepared by adding water to a bacterial mixture (0.01 kg), rice bran (4 kg), molasses (2 kg), and brown sugar (4 kg; final mass 100 kg). The mixture was incubated at 22.5±2.5°C with a cycle of 2 hour aeration (10 m³/h) and 4 hour non-aeration for 21 days.

Ginseng fermentation

Fermented ginseng was produced by mixing stock solution (1/10,000 of ginseng powder [w/w]) and sterilized water (15% of ginseng powder [w/w]), followed by heat treatment at 85°C for 2 hours. Ginseng powder was then added, homogenized, and fermented for 15 days at room temperature. Finally, fermented ginseng was dried for 4 hours at 85°C (Fig. 1).

Saponin preparation

Samples (5 g) were transferred to the extractor apparatus. After the addition of water-saturated butanol (50 mL), samples were extracted three times at 80°C for 3 hours. After extraction, the sample was filtered (Whatman No. 2), and the filtrate transferred to a 250 mL separating funnel and washed with distilled water. The butanol layer was then vacuum-dried and concentrated *in vacuo*. Ether (50 mL) was then added and samples extracted at 36°C for 30 minutes to eliminate lipid components. The debris remaining was dried at 105°C for 30 minutes, dissolved in methanol (25 mL), filtered (0.45 µm pore size), and used for analysis of saponin composition.

Ginsenoside composition analysis

Ginsenoside analysis was performed for evaluating the sample saponin composition as described previously [31]. HPLC was carried out using µ-Bondapak™



Fig. 1. Photograph of ginseng fermented by *Bacillus* sp.

C₁₈ columns (10 μm, 3.9×300 mM; Waters) and a Jasco UV detector (203 nm). The mobile phase was a water (A) and acetonitrile (B) gradient, and with A as the standard, 80% (0 min), 80% (5 min), 67% (38 min), 20% (63 min), 20% (75 min), 80% (77 min), and 80% (90 min) were employed. Mobile phase flow speed was 1.0 mL per minute, the sample injection volume was 20 μL, and analysis was performed at 35°C.

Sample preparation for anti-oxidation activity determination

To constant amounts of ginseng powder samples (below 200 mesh), a tenfold volume of water (w/w), 50% ethanol (v/v), and pure ethanol (v/v) were added, extracted (with reflux) for 3 hours, followed by vacuum concentration. Samples (50 mg/mL) were then used for measuring antioxidant activity.

Determination of hydroxyl radical removal

Hydroxyl radical (•OH) removal activity was measured using a 2-deoxyribose oxidation assay, as described previously [32]. Then, 0.2 mL of 0.1 mM FeSO₄/0.1 mM EDTA·2Na, 0.2 mL 2-deoxyribose (10 mM), 0.2 mL sample, and 1.2 mL phosphate buffer (0.1 M; pH 7.4) were mixed. After the addition of 0.2 mL H₂O₂ (10 mM), the mixture was incubated at 37°C for 4 hours, and the reaction stopped by addition of a 1 mL trichloroacetic acid (2.8%) solution. Thiobarbituric acid/50 mM NaOH (1%; 1 mL) was then added and mixtures heated at 100°C for 10 minutes, followed by rapid cooling and measurement of OD₅₃₂. The final optical density of the sample was compared to that of the control group.

Superoxide dismutase-like activity

SOD-like activity was determined as described by Marklund and Marklund [33]. Tris-HCl buffer (pH 8.5) and 24 mM pyrogallol were added to the sample solution, and OD₄₂₀ monitored for 2 minutes. Sample activities are expressed as the auto-oxidation inhibition rate (%) of pyrogallol vs. the control group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Change in ginsenoside content

Lactic acid bacteria and *Bacillus* have been used for most studies on ginseng fermentation, especially those using liquid culture method [34]. In this work, we fermented solid pulverized ginseng and examined changes in ginsenoside content and antioxidant activity (Fig.

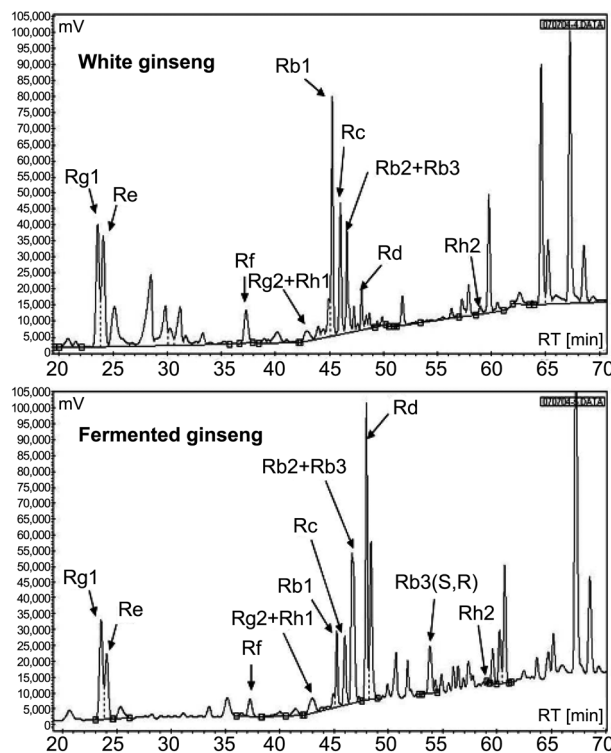


Fig. 2. HPLC chromatograms showing ginsenosides extracted from white and fermented ginseng.

2) Ten ginsenosides, Rg₁, Re, Rf, Rg₂+Rh₁, Rb₁, Rc, Rb₂+Rb₃, Rd, Rg₃, and Rh₂, were analyzed (Table 1). Ginsenoside content was altered significantly after *Bacillus* fermentation. More specifically, ginsenoside Rb₁ and Rc content decreased from 4.93 and 3.03 mg/g to 2.46 and 2.62 mg/g, respectively, after fermentation. In contrast, ginsenoside Rd increased from 0.66 to 7.21 mg/g. Ginsenoside Rb₁ is known to be converted to Rd

Table 1. The effect of fermentation on the ginsenoside content of white ginseng

Ginsenosides	Contents (mg/g)	
	White ginseng	Fermented ginseng
Rg ₁	3.21	4.04
Re	3.48	3.14
Rf	0.99	0.80
Rg ₂ +Rh ₁	0.38	0.82
Rb ₁	4.93	2.46
Rc	3.03	2.62
Rb ₂ +Rb ₃	2.11	7.65
Rd	0.66	7.21
Rg ₃	0.03	1.76
Rh ₂	0.09	0.07
Sum	18.91	30.57

by β -D-glucosidase, and Rc to Rd by L-arabinofuranosidase [35]. Therefore, the decrease in Rb₁ and Rc and increase in Rd content may have been due to *Bacillus*-secreted β -D-glucosidase and α -L-arabinofuranosidase. Our data are similar to those in a previous report [36] showing that liquid fermentation of ginseng with 21 *Bacillus* spp. resulted in a decrease in Rc content, although fermentation by 16 *Bacillus* spp. caused an increase in Rd levels. However, our solid culture showed a greater decrease in Rb₁ and increase in Rd levels compared to liquid fermentation [36]. Solid fermentation resulted in a markedly different ginsenoside content than liquid fermentation, since swelling of ginseng in liquid culture increased Rd content to 20%, although no effect occurred on Rb₁ and Rc content [37].

Ginsenoside Rd represses differentiation of preadipocyte 3T3-L1 cells. Also, AMP-activated protein kinase, an inhibitor of adipocyte differentiation and essential for metabolism [38], was activated by Rd in a concentration-dependent manner. Therefore, an increase in Rd content may contribute to inhibition of adipocyte differentiation. Solid culture fermentation increased Rg₃ content from 0.03 to 1.76 mg/g through hydrolysis of Rb₁ glucose at the carbon 20 position. Therefore, solid culture fermentation converted ginsenosides in the sequence Rb₁, Rc→Rd→Rg₃. Ginsenoside Rg₃ has anticancer and anti-metastasis activity *in vivo* [39]. Also, Rg₃ produced by microbial conversion has greater anticancer activity than Rg₃ from natural ginseng. When *Phellinus linteus*, a mushroom traditionally used in Northeastern Asia for gastroenteric disorders, lymphatic diseases, and cancer, was used for microbial conversion of ginsenosides, anticancer activity increased significantly [40,41]. Heat processing of *Panax notoginseng* converted ginsenosides into Rg₃, which inhibited proliferation of SW-480 human colorectal cancer cells [42]. Therefore, these data suggest that solid fermentation of ginseng with a mixture of five *Bacillus* spp. may enhance the health-promoting properties of ginseng.

Hydroxyl radical removal activity of ginseng

Steaming ginseng causes alterations in free sugar, polyphenol compound, acidic polysaccharide, and ginsenoside content, and increases antioxidant activity [43]. Moreover, Kang *et al.* [44] reported the removal of hydroxyl radicals by 20(S)-Rg₃, 20(R)-Rg₃, Rk₁, and Rg₅ produced from steamed ginseng.

The •OH is a highly reactive free radical that oxidizes various tissues and membranes [45]. As Fig. 3 shows, we determined the hydroxyl radical removal activity of

white ginseng solvent extract and the highest antioxidant activity (>90%, similar to the positive control) was present in the post-solid fermentation solvent extract. The solid-fermented water extract showed the lowest antioxidant activity, and solvent extracts of both white and solid fermented ginseng possessed similar antioxidant activity. Moon *et al.* [46] reported that 20 mg/mL of hot water extract of citrus side-products, fermented with *B. subtilis*, inhibited more than 50% of the oxidative activity of 2-deoxyribose. These results suggest that both white and solid fermented ginseng could be used as antioxidants, since the hydroxyl radical is responsible for oxidative tissue damage.

Superoxide dismutase-like activity

SOD, an anti-oxidative enzyme with activity against reactive oxygen species (ROS), protects cells and tissues by converting the toxic superoxide radical anion (O₂⁻) to hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂) and O₂. SOD is involved in a variety of diseases, such as degenerative neurological and heart and artery diseases [47,48]. The anti-oxidative activity of solvent extracts of white and solid fermented ginseng was determined using the colorimetric pyrogallol auto-oxidation reaction (Fig. 4). The B-1 fraction of the fermented ginseng ethanol extract had the greatest SOD-like activity, followed by the B-3 fraction of the water extract. Lee [49] reported that 0.4% of the biopolymer produced by mixed *Bacillus* species was responsible for 59.4% of the total SOD-like activity. Therefore, solid fermented ginseng could be used as an antioxidant due to its marked SOD-like activity. SOD is present in tissue and blood, and removes ROS. Substances with SOD-like activity protect cells by inhibiting the activity of the superoxide radical [50].

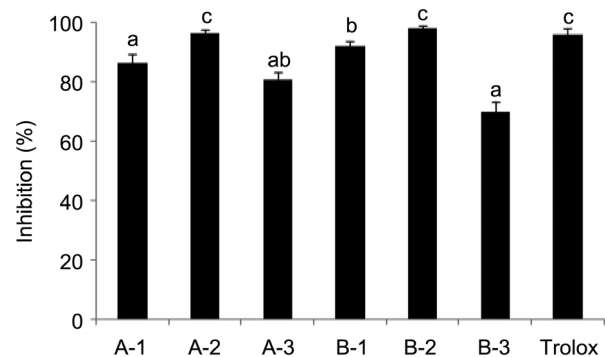


Fig. 3. Hydroxyl radical scavenging by white and fermented ginseng. A, white ginseng (1 mg/mL); B, fermented ginseng (1 mg/mL); 1, absolute ethanol; 2, 50% ethanol; 3, water. Data are expressed as the mean±SD. Column superscripts indicate a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) by Duncan's multiple range test.

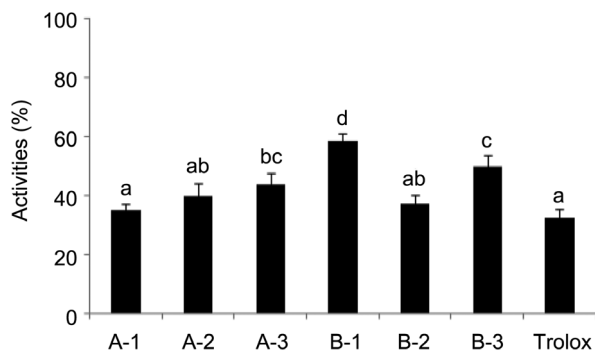


Fig. 4. Superoxide dismutase-like activity of white and fermented ginseng. A, white ginseng (1 mg/mL); B, fermented ginseng (1 mg/mL); 1, absolute ethanol; 2, 50% ethanol; 3, water. Data are expressed as the mean±SD. Column superscripts indicate a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) by Duncan's multiple range test. NS, not significant.

Therefore, the SOD-like activity of solid fermented ginseng may be due to phytochemicals, e.g., phenolic compounds. Moreover, the antioxidant activity of solid fermented ginseng may also be attributable to Rg₃, which is known to possess neuroprotective and anti-oxidative activities. Furthermore, these data suggest that solid fermented ginseng could be developed as a functional raw material after further *in vitro* and *in vivo* studies.

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