

Analytical Methods

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MINIREVIEW

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Caffeic Acid: a review of its potential use for medications and cosmeticsReceived
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Besides powerful antioxidant activity, increasing collagen production and prevent premature aging, caffeic acid has demonstrated antimicrobial activity and may be promising in the treatment of dermal diseases. The relevance of this study is based on the use of caffeic acid increasingly common in humans. Thus, studies that demonstrate and clarify the functions of this substance are very important.

Introduction*Characteristics of caffeic acid*

Phenolic compounds occur universally in the plant kingdom and are part of a large and complex group of organic substances. Higher plants synthesize and accumulate a wide variety of phenolic compounds, which confer protection against the attacks of free radicals, which are by products from the process of photosynthesis and against tissue injuries.¹ The phenolic compounds can be classified into two groups: group of simple phenolic compounds and group of polyphenolic compounds which can be observed through the frame shown in Figure 1.^{2,3}

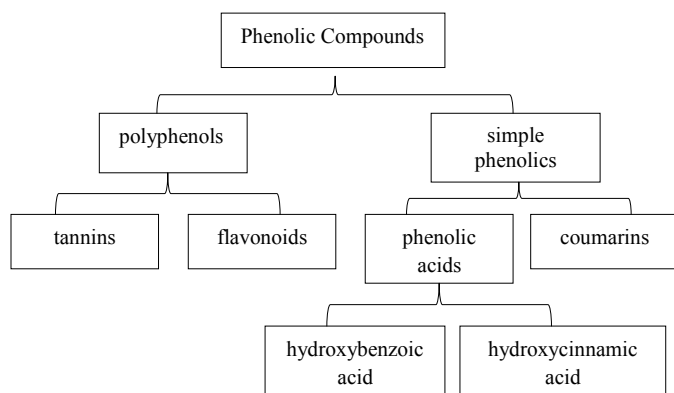


Fig. 1 Chemical classification of phenolic compounds.

Cinnamic acid derivatives, also called phenylpropanoids are nine carbon structures (Figure 2). Caffeic acid (3,4-dihydroxycinnamic) is representative of this group.

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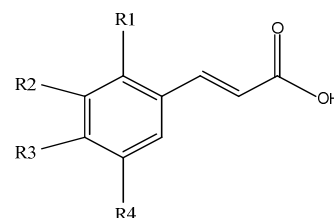


Fig. 2 Chemical structure of the main cinnamic acids. Cinnamic acid R1 = R2 = R3 = R4 = H, *o*-coumaric acid: R2 = OH, *p*-coumaric acid: R3 = OH; caffeic acid: R2 = R3 = OH; ferulic acid: R2 = OCH3 and R3 = OH.

Modern consumers increasingly demand products and foods with high quality. Cosmetics may not have as many health implications as pharmaceutical products or food, but they are chemical products that people use daily and apply on skin, hair, nails and even teeth or mouth.⁴ Allied to this, legislation is increasingly strict about quality and safety, which has challenged the industries.⁵ For this reason, natural antimicrobial compounds, such as polyphenols⁶ are being widely used.

Caffeic acid (3,4-dihydroxycinnamic) is one of the hydroxycinnamate and phenylpropanoids metabolites more widely distributed in plant tissues. This polyphenol is present in many food sources, including coffee drinks, blueberries, apples and cider⁷. Besides food, caffeic acid is present in several medications of popular use, in the majority, based on propolis.⁸ Besides acting as a carcinogenic inhibitor^{9,10}, is also known as an antioxidant and antibacterial *in vitro*, and can contribute to the prevention of atherosclerosis and other cardiovascular diseases¹¹⁻¹³.

Antioxidant Activity

Antioxidants are compounds that act by inhibiting or reducing the effects triggered by free radicals and oxidizing compounds.¹⁴

The phenolic antioxidants act as free radical scavengers and sometimes as metal chelators. They act both in the initiation step such as on the propagation of the oxidative process. The products are relatively stable due to the resonance of the aromatic ring shown by these substances. The phenolic acids are characterized by the presence of a benzene ring, a carboxylic acid grouping and one or more hydroxyl or methoxy groups of the molecule, which confers antioxidant properties.¹⁵

The phenylpropanoids act as antioxidants by eliminating oxygen free radicals^{16,17} and chelating pro-oxidant metal ions, especially iron.^{18,19} The hydroxyl groups of these molecules confer antioxidant activity, but they are not the only factors in determining the potency of their activities. There is a single hydroxyl group *para*-substituted in an aromatic ring that is linked to a side chain conjugate in the case of ferulic acid. This substitution allows the phenoxy radical free electrons to become delocalized over the entire molecule, and therefore stable.²⁰ The *ortho* substitution to the methoxy group, an electron donor, is also a contributing factor to the stability of the phenoxy radical and thus increases the efficiency antioxidant.^{21,22} The presence of a second hydroxyl group in the *ortho* position, besides the *para* position is known to increase the antioxidant activity due to a additional resonance stabilization and formation of *o*-quinone (Figure 3).^{20,21,23} This characteristic can be used to explain the fact that the efficiency of antioxidants such as caffeic acid is greater than that of ferulic acid.

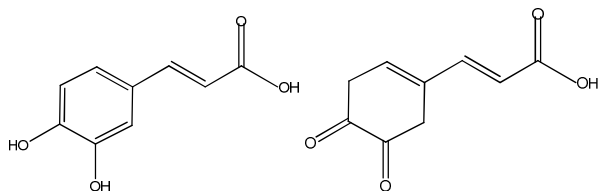


Fig. 3 Chemical structure of caffeic acid and formation of *ortho*-quinone.

Caffeic acid has been shown to be a α -tocopherol protective in low-density lipoprotein (LDL).²⁴ Furthermore, their combination with other products, such as with chlorogenic and caftaric acids showed more potent antioxidant activity in a variety of different systems.^{17,25}

Natural phenolic antioxidants including caffeic and ferulic acids, gained remarkable attention as promising photoprotective agents^{26,27} and also have been present in skin care products for its antioxidant activity. However the literature shows little evidence about the usefulness of hydroxycinnamic acids to protect the skin from photo-oxidative damage.

The normal cellular metabolism produces free radicals, including reactive species of oxygen and nitrogen, which are

derived from both normal metabolic processes and essential metabolic processes to the body (endogenous), and they can be derived from exposure to environmental factors (exogenous) such as pollution, radiation, pesticides tobacco, among others. Free radicals can cause beneficial or deleterious effects to health.²⁸⁻³⁰

The importance of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and free radicals has attracted increasing attention over the last decade. ROS, which include free radicals such as superoxide anion radicals ($O_2^{\cdot-}$), hydroxyl radicals (OH^{\cdot}) and reactive oxygen species such as H_2O_2 and singlet oxygen (1O_2). These molecules exacerbate factors of cell damage and aging.^{31,32}

ROS are continuously produced during normal physiologic events and they can easily initiate the peroxidation of membrane lipids, leading to the accumulation of lipid peroxides.^{33,34} However antioxidants cells have developed mechanisms to protect themselves from free radical toxicity. The agents considered antioxidants include: catalytic enzymes that remove radicals such as superoxide dismutase (SOD); proteins which minimizes the availability of pro-oxidants, such as iron ions and copper ions, for example, transferrins, ferritins, metallothionein and haptoglobins; low molecular weight molecules that have the ability to capture reactive oxygen species through autoxidation such as, for example, those with glutathione and thiol group (SH) or vitamins such as α -tocopherol, ascorbic acid and β -carotene.^{35,36}

When there is an imbalance between pro and antioxidant system, with a predominance of oxidants, the oxidative stress occurs^{37,38}. This stress can be associated with damage to lipids, proteins and genes and it imply a great variety of human diseases as well as in the aging process.³⁹

The free radicals also act on the skin tissue, which originate mainly by exogenous actions, such as ultraviolet radiation. Depending on the dose, exposure time, wavelength and area exposed, the ultraviolet radiation can cause skin burns, premature skin aging and even skin cell DNA damage and skin cancer.^{40,41}

Thus, the natural aging of the skin associated with the action of free radicals causes a reduction in skin hydration, pigmentation, fine wrinkles, signals from sagging and increased possibility of the occurrence of neoplasm diseases. Another change is the reduction of dermal collagen that makes the skin thinner. These changes are even more evident after menopause, in which there is a rapid decrease in the levels of collagen in skin and bone, suggesting that estrogen influences the collagen synthesis in the skin as much bone mass.⁴²

In order to maintain the skin healthier and younger-looking, thereby mitigating the effects of aging, more strategies have been suggested.³⁰ The use of natural or synthetic antioxidants in foods, cosmetics, beverages and also medicine is one of the defence mechanisms against free radicals.⁴³⁻⁴⁵

Photoaging of the skin is one of the most common dermatological concerns and can become a major health concern because it is correlated with an increased risk of skin cancer.⁴² UVA radiation can cause damage clinical, biochemical and histological changes in the skin through

1 changes in cells and in extracellular matrix proteins, including
2 collagen, responsible for the structural integrity of the skin.⁴⁶

3
4 UVA radiation (315-400 nm) has been shown to elevate
5 matrix metalloproteinase-1 extracellular (collagenase MMP-1),
6 most proteolytic enzyme produced by the skin cells, including
7 keratinocytes and fibroblasts.^{47,48} This activation is related to
8 oxidative stress, which occurs when there is excessive
9 production of reactive oxygen species and / or depletion of
10 antioxidant defences in cells.^{49,50}

11 Natural and synthetic antioxidants act as scavenger of free
12 radicals and have been shown to promote skin photo protection
13 by repealing the induction of MMP-1 activity mediated by
14 UVA radiation and expression of keratinocytes and skin
15 fibroblasts.^{48,51,52}

16 Ultraviolet A (UVA) plays a fundamental topic in the
17 pathogenesis of premature skin aging through cytotoxicity to
18 keratinocytes and degradation of collagen, a major component
19 of the extracellular matrix that provides structural support.
20 Protection against UVA damage mediated through the
21 antioxidant defence systems has been proposed as a possible
22 mechanism by which plant compounds decrease the process of
23 premature aging.⁵³

24 Furthermore, under stimulation by UVA and UVB sunlight,
25 keratinocytes from human skin can secrete nitric oxide (a
26 radical involved in oxidation reactions). Nitric oxide (NO)
27 appears to have great interest in the formation of erythema and
28 skin inflammation.^{54,55} Both caffeic and ferulic acid act as
29 sequestering radical NO.⁵⁶ In light of these observations, the
30 topical administration of antioxidants found considerable
31 interest, since it represents an effective strategy to protect the
32 skin against oxidative damage mediated by UV.^{55,57}

33 The extension of erythema caused by UVB radiation may
34 be monitored through reflectance spectrophotometry, which is
35 considered one of the most suitable models for the study *in vivo*
36 of skin damage after acute exposure to UV.^{58,59} Caffeic and
37 ferulic acids, dissolved in saturated aqueous solutions at pH 7.2,
38 proved to provide significant photo-protection to the skin
39 against UV-induced erythema.⁵⁶

40 Anti-aging products are being increasingly appreciated in
41 recent years and those with active antioxidants in its
42 composition are highlighted.⁶⁰

43 Caffeic acid was an effective antioxidant in different
44 methods for the determination of antioxidant activity *in vitro*,
45 including total antioxidant activity of the ferric thiocyanate
46 method, method of inhibition of ABTS•+ and DPPH•, the
47 superoxide anion radical and metal chelating activity when
48 compared with conventional antioxidants such as BHA, BHT,
49 α -tocopherol, a natural antioxidant and Trolox, which is a water
50 soluble analogue of tocopherol.⁶¹

51 Through the permeation study of caffeic acid, chlorogenic
52 acid and oraposide, it was found that the caffeic and
53 chlorogenic acids are able to permeate all the skin layers of pig
54 ear, which have a systemic activity, whereas oraposide
55 remained in the upper layer of the skin surface.⁶² Permeation
56 studies with human skin also confirm the ability of caffeic acid
57 and ferulic acid permeate into the skin, characteristic

independent of the pH of the receptor solution being 3.0 or
7.2.⁶³

As the solar radiation penetrates deeply into the skin, it is
necessary to ensure that topically applied substances are able to
penetrate through the corneum stratum, the main barrier against
permeation of foreign substances through the skin and reach the
deepest layers to promote satisfactory photo-protection.⁶⁴

The absorption of a compound in the skin is determined by
its physicochemical characteristics, and on the permeation
process, the lipophilicity is one of the most important
features.⁶⁵ Thus, the high lipophilicity of caffeic and ferulic
acid may explain the fact to permeate through the stratum
corneum.⁶⁶

The ferulic and caffeic acid also demonstrate efficiency to
protect phosphatidylcholine peroxidation induced by UV
radiation, which is important since the phosphatidylcholine is a
major constituent of the lipid bilayers of cell membranes.⁵⁶

Antimicrobial Activity

Every day more consumers seek more effective cosmetics,
which approximate the definition of cosmeceuticals, or actually
having some biological effect, particularly in the prevention of
premature aging and diseases such as cancers caused by the
action of free radicals in the genes of cells. Therefore, as well
as drugs, these products should also provide security to the
consumer. Allied to this, legislation is becoming increasingly
stringent, which has challenged the industries.^{4,5} Besides,
cosmetic companies are required to control the optimal
preservation of their commercial products, since microbial
contamination in cosmetics represents an important risk for
consumer health.⁶⁷ For this reason, natural antimicrobial
compounds are widely used.⁶

Besides its remarkable antioxidant activity, *in vitro* studies
have demonstrated antimicrobial properties of propolis against
various oral pathogens. Several components of propolis have
been analysed in different countries, and caffeic acid, phenethyl
ester of caffeic acid and flavonoids are the main ingredient
responsible for the antibiotic power of this resin.⁶⁸⁻⁷⁰ Thus, a
thorough search of the antimicrobial activity of caffeic acid is
promising targeting the treatment of dermal diseases, such as
acne.

Some phenylpropanoids, including caffeic acid, *p*-coumaric
acid and ferulic acid are able to inhibit the growth of bacteria,
including *E. coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Bacillus cereus*,
Listeria monocytogenes and some yeasts.⁷¹

The antimicrobial activity of these substances depends not
only on its structure but also on the environmental conditions.
Caffeic acid has a reduced ability to inhibit *Listeria* compared
to other hydroxycinnamic acid derivatives due to the presence
of a high degree of hydroxylation.⁶ Moreover, environmental
factors, including pH and concentration of sodium chloride are
important because they produce certain physiological changes
in the micro-organisms that make them more sensitive to
phenylpropanoids.⁷²

1 Antioxidant and antimicrobial activities of caffeic acid is
2 pronounced in cosmetic emulsions with acidic pH (3 e 5).
3 Caffeic Acid showed in this pH, antimicrobial effects against
4 various micro-organisms studied (*E. coli*, *Pseudomonas*
5 *aeruginosa*, *Bacillus cereus*, *Kokuria rhizophila*,
6 *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Candida*
7 *albicans*).⁷³

8 The mechanism of antimicrobial activity of substances is
9 established considering one of the following three: (1) reaction
10 with the cell membrane causing increased permeability and loss
11 of cellular constituents, (2) inactivation enzymatic systems or
12 essential enzymes, including those involved in the production
13 process energy and synthesis of structural components, or (3)
14 destruction or inactivation functional genetic material.⁷⁴⁻⁷⁵

15
16 The cytoplasm membrane of bacteria and mitochondrial
17 membrane of yeasts are a permeable barrier to passage of small
18 ions such as H⁺, K⁺, Na⁺ and Ca⁺⁺, in addition to being
19 responsible for input and output of different compounds. This
20 cell permeability is important for various cell functions such as
21 maintenance of energy in the transduction process, solute
22 transport, metabolism regulation and pressure control.⁷⁶⁻⁷⁷
23 There is a consensus that aromatic and phenolic compounds,
24 such as caffeic acid, affect the cytoplasm membrane, alter their
25 structure and function, change the active transport and
26 coagulate cell content.⁷⁸⁻⁷⁹

27 Cytotoxicity

28
29 Caffeic acid and its derivatives, such as caffeic acid phenyl
30 ester, has action against colon and oral cancer, and they are
31 inhibitors of cyclooxygenase II (COX-2).⁸⁰⁻⁸² These substances
32 are cytotoxic for tumours but not for normal cells.⁸³⁻⁸⁴

33 An analysis by flow cytometry showed that the caffeic acid
34 and its derivatives caused cellular entrapment of oral squamous
35 cell carcinoma cells, Meng-1 (OEC-M1) in G2/M phase of cell
36 division. These differential effects on cancer show that these
37 compounds may be useful in cancer chemotherapy oral.⁸⁵

38 Various natural antioxidants were tested, among them
39 caffeic acid, catechin, epicatechin and quercetin to evaluate the
40 reduction of the cytotoxicity induced by peroxynitrite in
41 chondrosarcoma cells. This observation suggests that diets rich
42 in antioxidant compounds are able to limit cell cytotoxicity.⁸⁶

43 A derivative of caffeic acid, the caffeic acid phenyl ester
44 was used and it was observed that it inhibited growth and
45 secretion of interleucin-6, and it induced apoptosis in a dose
46 and time dependent on multiple myeloma cells ARH-77.
47 Therefore, both the caffeic acid as its derivative deserves
48 further study as an effective agent against multiple myeloma.⁸⁷

49 Treatment of mice with propolis, caffeic acid phenyl ester
50 and caffeic acid itself, significantly reduced the number of
51 tumour nodules in the lungs of animals whose lung nodules
52 were generated by injection of viable tumour cells
53 intravenously. In in vitro studies, the propolis did not affect
54 tumour cell growth, while the phenyl ester of caffeic acid and
55 caffeic acid expressed a strong cytotoxicity to cells.⁸⁸

The p38, a mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK)
responds to stimuli such as heat, shock, cytokines, UV and is
directly involved in cell proliferation and production of NO.⁸⁹
Caffeic acid significantly reduces mRNA expression of
Interleucin-10 UVB-induced in murine and also inhibits the
activation of p38-MAPK.⁹⁰ The caffeic acid also reduces the
migratory capacity of malignant keratinocytes.⁹¹

Although many studies demonstrate the antitumoral activity
of caffeic acid, others show opposite effects. The
carcinogenicity of low dietary levels of the antioxidants caffeic
acid, butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA), sesamol, 4-
methoxyphenol (4-MP) and catechol, were examined alone or
in combination in a 2-year long-term experiment. The results
indicate that even at low dose levels phenolic compounds can
exert additive/synergistic effect on carcinogenesis.⁹²
Furthermore, caffeic acid is also listed under some Hazard Data
and in the International Agency for Research on Cancer in the
Group 2B, as a substance "possibly carcinogenic to humans".

As there are many controversial results about the protective
or carcinogenic potential of caffeic acid, more studies should be
conducted to elucidate its therapeutic use.

92 Analytical Methods

93 There is no method for determination and quantification of
94 caffeic acid in official compendia, such as pharmacopoeias,
95 however most current articles recommends quantification of the
96 substance by High Performance Liquid Chromatography
(HPLC).

97 For determination of rosmarinic and caffeic acids in various
98 herbs such as rosemary, sage, thyme, mint, lemon balm and
99 lavender, a HPLC method was developed and validated. The
100 separation system consisted of a reversed phase C18 column, a
101 gradient elution system of methanol/water containing
102 phosphoric acid and a photodiode array detector. The method
103 proved to be simple, sensitive, reproducible and fast ideal for
104 routine analysis.⁹³

105 For quantitation of receptor solution in a permeation study,
106 the chromatography was performed on a Hypersil ODS column
(particle size: 5 µm x 25 cm x 4.0 mm). The mobile phase was
107 acetonitrile-water (18:82) containing 2% acetic acid. The flow
108 rate was set at 1.0 mL/min. Each sample was filtered before
109 injection using a Millex filter and an aliquot (20 mL) was
110 injected into HPLC. Detection was performed at 302 nm.⁶³

111 Marti-Mestres and coworkers (2007) conducted a
112 permeation study by applying 50 µL of test formulation 2%
113 caffeic acid in propyleneglycol-transcutol (1:1) on the skin of
114 the pig's ear and used isotonic saline (NaCl 0.9%) with 1%
115 gentamycin pH 7.0 as the receiver solution. This solution was
116 maintained at 37°C and under these conditions the skin
117 temperature is 32°C, which corresponds to the temperature of
118 the body surface *in vivo*. The quantification of the receptor
119 solution was also carried out by HPLC with UV detection,
120 column C-8 reverse phase (5 µm, 250 mm x 3 mm) at 40°C.
121 The mobile phase was acetonitrile-water (18:80) with 2% acetic

acid and flow rate of 0.5 mL/min. Detection was at 330 nm and the retention time was approximately 6.0 min.⁶²

Chromatographic techniques are widely used in the separation, purification, identification and quantification of substances. Although HPLC is a robust method, it is more suitable for mixtures with known compositions. For identification of unknown substances in complex samples the most suitable method is MS or LC-MS/MS. Many papers have been published in recent years on the examination of caffeic acid by LC-MS/MS approaches.

An example of identification of caffeic acid in a complex matrix was done for simultaneous analysis of alkaloids and caffeic acid derivatives from *Echinacea purpurea* extracts. The analysis was carried out with reversed phase HPLC coupled to electrospray ionization mass spectrometry (ESI-MS). The flow rate was set to 0.2 mL/min and the eluents were A = water + 1% acetic acid and B = acetonitrile. The gradient condition was: 90% of A in B for 4 min; 90–60% of A in B from 4 to 15 min; 60–40% of A in B from 15 to 30 min; 100% B from 30 to 35 min; 90% of A in B from 35 to 43 min. The outlet of the HPLC column was directly connected to the electrospray ionization source of an ion trap mass spectrometer. The mass spectrometer was operated in the negative ion mode the first 15 min of the analysis, then switched to the positive ion mode for the remainder. The total analysis time was 43 min. This new method was considered effective for the quality control of these extracts that requires rapid methods to determine their chemical composition.⁹⁴

Another method was developed and validated to assess the qualitative and quantitative profiles of *Myrcia bella* hydroalcoholic extract. In total, 24 constituents were characterized, including phenolic acids such as caffeic acid, by means of extensive preparative chromatographic analyses, along with mass spectroscopy and Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) techniques. And it shows that the mass spectroscopy technique is a powerful tool for direct and rapid identification of the constituents after isolation and NMR characterization.⁹⁵

Plasma is another type of complex matrix in which caffeic acid may be found. A validated method was developed for the simultaneous determination of the hydroxycinnamates caffeic acid, dihydrocaffeic acid, ferulic acid, dihydroferulic acid, and isoferulic acid in human plasma as metabolites derived from coffee consumption. It was possible using high-performance liquid chromatography coupled to negative electrospray ionization tandem mass spectrometry.⁹⁶ These same techniques were used in conjunction to develop a simple, rapid and sensitive method for the simultaneous quantification of chlorogenic acid and caffeic acid in rat plasma.⁹⁷

Conclusions

This review was carefully prepared to prove the potential of caffeic acid use in cosmetics and pharmaceutical preparations and to encourage more studies to elucidate the activity of this substance on the human body.

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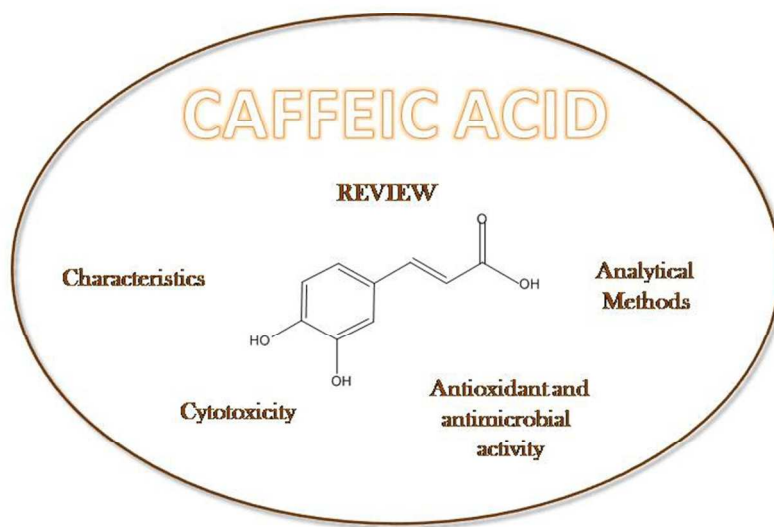
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