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Sarika Joga
Assistant Professor, Department of
Pharmacology, Sarojini Naidu Vanita
Pharmacy Maha Vidyalaya,
Secunderabad, Telangana, India

Vasanthi AV
Student, Department of Pharmacology,
Sarojini Naidu Vanita Pharmacy Maha
Vidyalaya, Secunderabad, Telangana,
India

Nitiashwarya G
Student, Department of Pharmacology,
Sarojini Naidu Vanita Pharmacy Maha
Vidyalaya, Secunderabad, Telangana,
India

Medha Gayatri B
Student, Department of Pharmacology,
Sarojini Naidu Vanita Pharmacy Maha
Vidyalaya, Secunderabad, Telangana,
India

Thanmai A
Student, Department of Pharmacology,
Sarojini Naidu Vanita Pharmacy Maha
Vidyalaya, Secunderabad, Telangana,
India

Sreeja Ch
Student, Department of Pharmacology,
Sarojini Naidu Vanita Pharmacy Maha
Vidyalaya, Secunderabad, Telangana,
India

Sruthi Ch
Student, Department of Pharmacology,
Sarojini Naidu Vanita Pharmacy Maha
Vidyalaya, Secunderabad, Telangana,
India

Rushitha G
Student, Department of Pharmacology,
Sarojini Naidu Vanita Pharmacy Maha
Vidyalaya, Secunderabad, Telangana,
India

Rakshitha J
Student, Department of Pharmacology,
Sarojini Naidu Vanita Pharmacy Maha
Vidyalaya, Secunderabad, Telangana,
India

Nandini C
Student, Department of Pharmacology,
Sarojini Naidu Vanita Pharmacy Maha
Vidyalaya, Secunderabad, Telangana,
India

Sreekanth M
Associate Professor, Department of
Pharmacology, Sarojini Naidu Vanita
Pharmacy Maha Vidyalaya,
Secunderabad, Telangana, India

Corresponding Author:
Sarika Joga
Assistant Professor, Department of
Pharmacology, Sarojini Naidu Vanita
Pharmacy Maha Vidyalaya,
Secunderabad, Telangana, India

Emblica officinalis (Amla): An Ayurvedic Legacy with Modern Therapeutic Promise

Sarika Joga, Vasanthi AV, Nitiashwarya G, Medha Gayatri B, Thanmai A, Sreeja Ch, Sruthi Ch, Rushitha G, Rakshitha J, Nandini C and Sreekanth M

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Abstract

Emblica officinalis, commonly known as Indian gooseberry or amla, holds a distinguished place in traditional healing systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani. Celebrated as a rejuvenating “Rasayana” in Ayurvedic medicine, amla is revered for its remarkable nutritional and therapeutic attributes. The fruit is especially rich in vitamin C and a diverse array of bioactive compounds, including flavonoids, tannins, alkaloids, and phenolic substances, which contribute to its extensive pharmacological profile. Modern scientific investigations have validated many of its traditional uses, highlighting its potent antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antidiabetic, cardioprotective, hepatoprotective, and neuroprotective activities. These properties position *E. officinalis* as a promising natural agent for the prevention and management of chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, neurodegenerative disorders, and cancer. Traditionally, amla has been employed to enhance digestion, respiratory health, immunity, and overall vitality. Its adaptogenic and immunomodulatory effects are particularly noteworthy in the context of holistic health management. With a strong safety profile and centuries of documented use, amla continues to attract global interest as a valuable component of functional foods, dietary supplements, and novel therapeutic formulations. This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of *Emblica officinalis* with emphasis on its Ayurvedic heritage, phytochemical richness, and pharmacological relevance, thereby bridging traditional knowledge with contemporary biomedical research.

Keywords: *Emblica officinalis*, Phytochemicals, Neuroprotective, Ayurveda, Traditional Medicine, Ethnopharmacology

Introduction

Emblica officinalis (EO), commonly known as Indian gooseberry, Amla, or *Phyllanthus emblica*, holds a revered position in Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine. As per Indian mythology, it is considered the first tree created in the universe, symbolizing its sacred status. Belonging to the family Euphorbiaceae, *E. officinalis* is a medium-sized deciduous tree native to tropical Southeast Asia. It typically reaches a height of 8 to 18 meters and is predominantly found in central and southern India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, southern China, Malaysia, and the Mascarene Islands [1].

Traditionally, Amla has been used to treat a wide spectrum of health conditions including cancer, diabetes, liver disorders, cardiovascular diseases, ulcers, and anemia. Pharmacologically, it exhibits gastroprotective, cytoprotective, immunomodulatory, analgesic, antipyretic, antioxidant, antitussive, and antimicrobial properties. It also supports cholesterol reduction, vision enhancement, cognitive function, and even neutralization of snake venom. One of its most popular formulations is Triphala, a classical Ayurvedic combination of equal parts *E. officinalis*, *Terminalia chebula*, and *Terminalia bellirica* fruits [2].

Phytochemistry of *Emblica officinalis*

Emblica officinalis is rich in a wide array of bioactive phytochemicals that contribute to its extensive pharmacological profile. Notable compounds include luteolin, methyl gallate, apigenin, gallic acid, ellagic acid, quercetin, chebulinic acid, corilagin, isostrictinin, and

several tannins such as pedunculagin, punigluconin, phyllaemblicin B, emblicanin A, and emblicanin B [3]. Its amino acid composition is significant, with glutamic acid (29.6%), proline (14.6%), aspartic acid (8.1%), lysine (5.4%), and alanine (5.3%) being predominant. Dried fruit pulp (after nut removal) comprises albumin (13.08%), crude cellulose (17.08%), gallic acid (1.32%), tannins and gums (13.75%), mineral content (4.12%), and moisture (3.83%). Trace metal analysis of fruit ash reveals the presence of chromium (2.5 ppm), zinc (4 ppm), and copper (3 ppm). Importantly, the leaves were found to be free of toxic metals like lead and nickel, while exhibiting relatively high copper levels compared to chromium, manganese, and zinc [4].

- Leaves: Contain gallic acid, chebulic acid, ellagic acid, chebulinic acid, chebulagic acid, amlic acid, and alkaloids such as phyllantine and phyllantidine [5].
- Seeds: Yield fixed oil, phosphatides, and essential oils. The fixed oil contains linolenic acid (8.78%), linoleic acid (44%), oleic acid (28.40%), stearic acid (2.15%), palmitic acid (2.99%), and myristic acid (0.95%), along with sterols and unsaponifiable matter.
- Bark: Contains leukodelphinidin, tannins, and proanthocyanidins.
- Roots: Found to contain ellagic acid and lupeol [5]

Table 1: Bioactive Compounds of *Emblica officinalis*: Therapeutic Properties, Mechanisms, and Natural Source [6, 7]

Compound names	Molecular formula	Molecular weight	BP/ MP	Biological activity	Common sources	References
Chebulinic acid	C ₄₁ H ₃₂ O ₂₇	956.67 gm/mol	1460°C at 760 mmHg (BP)	Antioxidant activity, Antisecretory and cryo-protective activity	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> , <i>Terminalia arborea</i> , and <i>T. chebula</i>	E.
Chebularic acid	C ₄₁ H ₃₀ O ₂₇	954.66 gm/mol	1610.6°C at 760mmHg (BP)	Antispasmodic action	<i>E. officinalis</i> , <i>Terminalia Chebula</i> , <i>T. citrine</i> , <i>T. catappa</i>	Re
Emblicanin-A	C ₃₄ H ₂₂ O ₂₂	<1000 gm/mol	Not confirmed	Antioxidant activity	<i>E. officinalis</i>	
Emblicanin-B	C ₃₄ H ₂₂ O ₂₂	<1000 gm/mol	Not confirmed	Antioxidant activity	<i>E. officinalis</i>	
Gallic acid	C ₇ H ₆ O ₅	170.12 gm/mol	252° C (MP)	Radioprotective effect, chemopreventive effect, anti-carcinogenic, antioxidative, antimutagenic, antiallergic and anti-inflammatory activities	<i>E. officinalis</i> ; <i>T. chebula</i> ; <i>T. bellerica</i> , <i>C. sinensis</i> L., <i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i> L., <i>C. avellana</i> , <i>O. biennis</i> , <i>V. vinifera</i> L.	
Ellagic acid	C ₁₄ H ₆ O ₈	302 gm/mol	≥350 °C (MP)	Radioprotective and chemopreventive effect, antityrosinase Activity, antioxidant, antiproliferative, and antiatherogenic Properties, estrogenic/antiestrogenic Activity	<i>E. officinalis</i> , <i>Castanea sativa</i> , <i>Euca-lyptus camaldulensis</i> , <i>Juglans regia</i>	
Quercetin	C ₁₅ H ₁₀ O ₇	302.24 gm/mol	316.5 °C (MP)	Radioprotective, chemopreventive, hepato protective effect	<i>E. officinalis</i>	
Phyllantine	C ₁₄ H ₁₇ NO ₃	247.29 gm/mol	Not confirmed	Not confirmed	<i>E. officinalis</i>	
Phyllantidine	C ₁₃ H ₁₅ NO ₃	233.2631 gm/mol	Not confirmed	Neuropharmacological activity (CNS activity)	<i>E. officinalis</i> , <i>P. discoides</i> ; <i>Seurinega suffruticosa</i>	
Punigluconin	C ₃₄ H ₂₆ O ₂₃	802.556 gm/mol	1448.6°C at 760 mmHg (BP)	Antioxidant activity	<i>E. officinalis</i>	
Pedunculagin	C ₃₄ H ₂₄ O ₂₂	784.54 gm/mol	1578.039 °C at 760 mmHg (BP)	Antitumor activity, Antioxidant activity	<i>E. officinalis</i>	

Pharmacological Activities & Mechanisms of Action of Major Phytoconstituents of *Emblica officinalis*

Table 2: Receptor Interactions and Pharmacological Effects of Active Constituents in *Emblica officinalis* [8, 9]

S. No	Receptor / Target	Type	Pathway	Ligand / Target Molecule	Pharmacological Actions	Active Constituent(s) of Amla	Uses / Applications
1	Nrf2	Nuclear transcription	Nrf2/ARE signaling	ROS / Antioxidants	Antioxidant, cytoprotective	Emblicanin A & B, Gallic acid, Vitamin C	Anti-aging products, oxidative stress disorders, supplements
2	COX-2, TNF- α , IL-6	Enzymes / Cytokines	NF- κ B inhibition	Inflammatory mediators	Anti-inflammatory	Quercetin, Gallic acid, Ellagic acid	Arthritis, inflammation-related conditions
3	Bacterial cell wall & DNA	Microbial structure	Disruption of cell integrity	DNA gyrase, membrane proteins	Antibacterial, Antiviral	Tannins, Methyl gallate, Corilagin	Skin infections, sore throat, natural preservatives
4	GLUT-4, PPAR- γ	Receptor & Nuclear	PI3K/Akt, AMPK	Insulin signaling components	Antidiabetic, insulin sensitizer	Gallic acid, Quercetin, Emblicanin A	Diabetes management, metabolic syndrome
5	LDL receptors, HMG-CoA	Membrane enzyme	Lipid metabolism	Cholesterol, LDL	Cardioprotective, hypolipidemic	Flavonoids, Tannins, Polyphenols	Hyperlipidemia, cardiovascular health
6	Acetylcholinesterase	Enzyme	Cholinergic signaling	Acetylcholine	Neuroprotective, cognitive enhancer	Quercetin, Vitamin C, Gallic acid	Alzheimer's, memory booster, brain tonic
7	CYP450, oxidative enzymes	Enzyme	Liver detoxification	Xenobiotics	Hepatoprotective	Ellagic acid, Tannins, Emblicanin B	Fatty liver, drug-induced liver damage
8	p53, Bcl-2, Caspase-3	Tumor suppressor	Apoptosis, cell cycle arrest	DNA damage response	Anticancer, pro-apoptotic	Gallic acid, Luteolin, Methyl gallate	Cancer prevention, adjunct to chemotherapy
9	TLR-4, NF- κ B, MAPK	Pattern recognition	Immune modulation	PAMPs, cytokines	Immunomodulatory	Polyphenols, Vitamin C, Flavonoids	Immunity boosters, adaptogenic supplements
10	HPA Axis (Cortisol receptors)	Hormonal receptor	Stress response	Cortisol, ACTH	Adaptogenic, anti-stress	Emblicanin A & B, Flavonoids	Stress relief, fatigue, Ayurvedic Rasayana therapy

Therapeutic Applications and Modern Research Chronic Disease Management

Amla (*Phyllanthus emblica*) or Indian gooseberry is an important part of traditional and contemporary medicine for the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases. Packed with vitamin C, polyphenols, tannins, and flavonoids, Amla is rich in antioxidant activity that counteracts oxidative stress—a key contributor to chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.

Current research has shown that Amla extract is able to reduce blood sugar levels through the promotion of insulin secretion and boosting of pancreatic beta-cell function. Experimental and clinical studies point towards its efficacy in lowering fasting and postprandial blood sugar levels, thus having the potential to be used as a complementary approach to type 2 diabetes mellitus. Amla's hypolipidemic action also helps to promote cardiovascular well-being by reducing total cholesterol, LDL, and triglycerides and raising the HDL level. Its free radical scavenging and anti-inflammatory activities shield tissues from chronic inflammation and cellular damage. Current research is investigating Amla bioactives derived from its fruits for their chemopreventive potential, with encouraging evidence that they can inhibit carcinogenesis through modulating the detoxification enzymes and inhibiting mutagenic pathways [10].

Digestive and Respiratory Health

Traditionally in Ayurveda, Amla is regarded as a great digestive tonic. Modern research studies have established its gastro-protective action with regard to hyperacidity, gastritis, and peptic ulcer. High tannin concentration in it may impart resistance to ulceration in gastric mucosa and promote mucosal healing. Other research suggest Amla extracts as a stimulant for digestive secretion; good for appetite and nutrient absorption.

For respiratory ailments, Amla stands as an expectorant along with antimicrobial properties. Traditionally, in Ayurvedic preparations, it has been used under conditions of coughs, sore throats, and bronchitis. Vitamin C in Amla increases resistance of the body to infections and can promote mucociliary clearance to clear excess mucus from the respiratory tract. In harmony with this, another research direction in modern medicine is working on Amla in treating asthma symptoms through the attenuation of inflammation and oxidative damages occurring in the airways [11].

Cognitive and Immune Health

Since neuroprotective effects of Amla are explored in research, they are believed to support cognitive health along with the prevention of neurodegenerative diseases. Its antioxidants, such as emblicanin A and B, quercetin, or gallic acid, are mighty agents in counterbalance to oxidative stress ordained in the brain-one of the major steps toward the decline of cognition with aging and of diseases such as Alzheimer. Animal studies suggested that Amla extracts could enhance retention of memories while helping with learning; these extracts also worked to protect the neurons from degeneration.

Amla also takes up a key role as an immunomodulatory agent. Being rich in vitamin C, it fosters the generation and activities of immune cell types, such as macrophages, lymphocytes, and natural killer cells. It is confirmed through

modern research that it actually increases resistance against bacterial and viral infections, making this herbal medicine on a higher rank in immune strength. Its ability to reduce inflammation helps in alleviating the severity of auto-immune responses, and allergic states [12].

Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals

Amla is increasingly being added to functional foods and nutraceuticals owing to its superior nutritional and therapeutic value. It is applied in juices, candies, dried powders, capsules, and herbal supplements sold for their antioxidant, anti-aging, and detoxifying properties. Functional drinks and health tonics with Amla are favored for increasing energy, promoting digestion, and increasing general health.

Current nutraceutical research emphasizes the standardization of Amla extracts to provide an optimal amount of active phytoconstituents such as ascorbic acid, polyphenols, and flavonoids. Encapsulation and nanoformulation methods are being investigated to enhance the stability and bioavailability of the bioactives of Amla and provide maximum therapeutic effects. The potential of Amla as a natural preservative based on its antimicrobial activity is also being studied, which provides opportunities for clean-label, preservative-free foods.

Regulatory authorities and scientists are collaborating to assure the efficacy, safety, and quality of Amla-based nutraceuticals. With increasing consumer awareness of natural health products, Amla continues to be among the most promising botanicals in the global functional food and dietary supplement industries [13].

Safety Profile and Toxicological Considerations

Clinical Safety and Dosage

Amla (*Phyllanthus emblica*), long cherished in Ayurvedic medicine, has built a solid safety record through both traditional use and modern research. Clinical studies in humans have shown that doses of up to 1,000 mg per day are generally well tolerated over periods of several weeks to months. People taking amla in this range usually do not experience serious side effects.

In fact, most individuals report benefits like improved digestion, enhanced immunity, and antioxidant support. Occasionally, some may notice mild gastrointestinal discomfort—like stomach cramps or loose stools—especially when amla is consumed in large quantities or on an empty stomach. These effects are typically self-limiting and resolve once the dosage is adjusted.

Animal studies further support its safety, showing no signs of organ toxicity or behavioral changes even at very high doses. This gives amla a wide therapeutic window, making it suitable for both dietary and medicinal use under professional guidance [14].

Contraindications and Drug Interactions

While amla is generally safe for most people, there are a few situations where caution is advised.

- **Blood Thinners:** Amla has mild blood-thinning properties. When taken along with anticoagulants like warfarin, aspirin, or clopidogrel, it may enhance their effects and increase the risk of bleeding. If you're on such medications, it's wise to speak to your doctor before adding amla to your routine.

- Diabetes Medications: Amla has been shown to help regulate blood sugar levels. However, if you're already on insulin or oral hypoglycemics, it could potentially lower blood sugar too much, leading to hypoglycemia. Monitoring and dosage adjustments may be necessary.
- Kidney Stone Risk: Amla naturally contains oxalates, which in susceptible individuals might contribute to the formation of kidney stones. If you have a history of calcium oxalate kidney stones, it's best to limit or avoid high intake.
- Pregnancy and Lactation: Although no harmful effects have been clearly documented, there isn't enough robust data to guarantee amla's safety during pregnancy and breastfeeding. As a precaution, it's best to consult a healthcare provider before use in these stages ^[15].

Conclusion

Amla (*Phyllanthus emblica*) has withstood the passage of time as a pillar of Ayurvedic medicine, valued for its rejuvenating and healing virtues. A large number of its traditional indications have been validated by scientific research, which has demonstrated its antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, hepatoprotective, and immunomodulatory effects. Being rich in vitamin C and polyphenols, Amla provides a natural, multi-faceted therapeutic alternative in the treatment of a vast range of health ailments.

Nonetheless, with its longstanding traditional connotation, so far the scientific world has just touched the surface of its therapeutic utility. There is an urgent need to prove age-old assertions with strong clinical and pharmacological substantiation to promote its wider recognition within conventional healthcare systems.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Authors Contribution

Concept, Design & Supervision – Sarika J, Sreekanth M; Resources, Material & Data Collection – Vasanthi A V, Thanmai A, Nitiashwarya G, Medha Gayatri B; Analysis & Interpretation – Sreeja Ch, Sruthi Ch; Literature Search & Writing - Vasanthi A V, Thanmai A, Nitiashwarya G, Medha Gayatri B; Critical Reviews – A V Vasanthi, Medha Gayatri B, Rushitha G, Rakshitha J, Nandini C, Sreeja Ch, Sruthi Ch

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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