Grenze International Journal of Engineering and Technology, June Issue

An Effective Assessment of Oat based Cereal Bars as Functional Foods for Glycaemic Management

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***Abstract*—The increasing rate of diabetes mellitus in the world especially Type 2 diabetes, has heightened the need to turn to functional foods that help in maintaining glycaemic control and at the same time match current dieting trends. Cereal oat bars have emerged as one of such options whereby they have taken advantage of their convenient size with promising health benefits. This review is a critical analysis of the nutritional make up, physiological impact and appropriateness of cereal oat bars as a dietary intervention to people who have diabetes. The role of β-glucan as a soluble fiber that oats contain that leads to better insulin sensitivity and lower postprandial glycaemic levels is emphasized. The paper also examines how the parameters of formulation including sugar content, other grains, source of fats and other functional additives like nuts and seeds affect the overall glycaemic index of the product. In addition, recent clinical discoveries and dietary recommendations will be discussed to assess the applicability of oat- based snacks in a diabetic meal program. This paper has made use of a synthesis of research on nutritional science, food technology, and diabetic care to highlight the possibility of oat bars cereals as a convenient and health-supportive snack among diabetic groups.**

***Keywords*— Cereal oats, diabetes mellitus, glycaemic index, functional foods, post prandial glucose, dietary fiber.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The chronic metabolic condition that is defined by constant hyper glycaemia is diabetes mellitus and has become one of the biggest societal health issues of the 21st century. The recent reports on the world indicate that the number of adults who are deemed to be living with diabetes is over 537 million and that it would rise to 643 million and 783 million in the year 2030 and 2045 respectively unless some preventive measures are prioritized [1]. The advantages of foods with low-glycaemic index (GI) levels in curbing the blood glucose spikes and improvements in insulin sensation have been documented [2]. Among them, cereals of the whole grain (especially, oats) are becoming increasingly popular thanks to their high percentage of nutritional value and their potential medicinal properties [3].

Oats (Avenasativa) are a Near East/European cereal grain which is rich in 8-glucan soluble fibre that has cholesterol- lowering and glycaemic-modulating effects. The functional potential of 2-glucan is that it could develop viscous gels within the gut and delay the rate of gastric emptying and slower glucose move in the intestines [4][5].

Grenze ID: 01.GIJET.12.2.328_24

Different clinical accounts have determined that the postprandial glucose levels might be enhanced substantially when frequent consumption of oats normalize after intake hence might be a suitable dietary element of diabetic patients [6].

The practicality of the inclusion of oats, however, in the modern food tendency in traditional patterns like porridge or the cooked meals could be restricted by the time and the shift of the lifestyle. These bars may be erected as wise eating habits towards glycaemic control particularly in the populations where diabetes prevails provided, they are designed in the proper way [7].

The food industry has responded to this by creating more and more oat-based cereal varieties, on the claims that they are diabetes-friendly, low-GI or sugar-free. Despite the fact that this market is growing, there are very few integrated sources of literature on the scientific legitimacy of these claims and the effectiveness of cereal oat bars as a dietary food in diabetes. The composition, labelling of nutritional content as well as glycaemic effects of these products to both the consumers and the healthcare providers should be known [8].

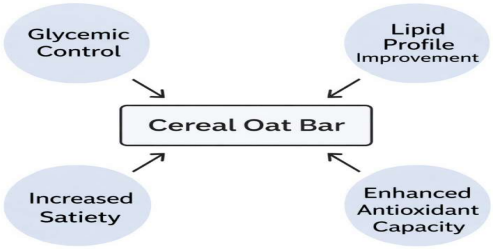

Figure 1: Potential Benefits of Cereal Oats Bars for Diabetes [9].

In addition to that, individual variations in glycaemic reactivity, differences in the composition of the products, and the introduction of some products containing some added sugars or high-GI molecules such as glucose syrups or refined flours to some bars make it difficult to consider that all oat bars are healthy to diabetics. Hence, contents of the products, fibre content of the products and the way the products are processed should be examined to confirm the suitability of the products [10][11]. The gap in the current review is aimed at filling this gap by exploring the biochemical, clinical and nutritional implication of cereal oat bar intake as much as disease of diabetes is concerned. The paper is also interested in the recent studies on the topic, consumer impression, and regulatory issues relating to the creation and marking of such items [12]. This review will seek to provide a comprehensive answer towards the research question by combining fragments of evidence on nutritional science, food technology, and the management of diabetes in explaining why the cereal oat bars may be an appropriate and effective dietary supplement in the management of diabetes. Lastly it also suggests application of evidence-based formulation, consumer awareness and further research that ought to maximize the use of such functional food in the daily diabetic diet [13][14]. Oat cereal bars are typically formulated using rolled oats, oat flour or oat bran as their primary ingredient and they may be enriched with other functional ingredients, including dried fruits, seeds, nuts, and sweetening agents. The basic nutritional value of these bars is the large amount of dietary fibre, in particular, of 1, 5-glucan which plays the central role in the control of glycaemic response by increasing gastrointestinal viscosity, and, additionally, slowing the process of carbohydrate breakdown [38]. In addition, oats are also rich in polyphenols, avenanthramides, and proteins, and some of the essential micronutrients like magnesium and zinc which stimulate the metabolism [22][41].

TABLE I: NUTRITIONAL COMPONENTS OF OAT-BASED BARS AND THEIR ROLE IN DIABETES MANAGEMENT

Component	Nutritional Role	Function in Diabetes Management	References
β-glucan (soluble fibre)	Forms viscous gel, reduces digestion speed	Lowers postprandial blood glucose and cholesterol levels	[21], [47]
Whole grain oats	Complex carbohydrate, rich in fibre	Slow glucose release, improves insulin sensitivity	[14], [35]
Dried fruits	Natural sugars, antioxidants, vitamins	Can aid in antioxidant balance, but may increase GI if Overused	[16], [43]
Nuts& seeds	Healthy fats, fibre, protein	Promote satiety, improve lipid profile, help regulate blood sugar	[28], [39]
Sugar substitutes	Low/zero- calorie sweeteners (e.g., stevia, erythritol)	Reduce glycaemic load compared to refined sugars	[11], [46]
Refined flours	or glucose syrups (in some bars)	Rapidly digestible carbs May spike blood sugar; negatively impact glycaemic index	[24], [50]

The existing tendencies in product formulations are to reduce the overall GI of the cereal bars, avoiding the high-GI binders (e.g. glucose syrups or refined flours) and using the natural binders (e.g. dates, honey or chicory root fiber) [18][45].

It has been demonstrated that protein fortification, in most instances achieved through addition of whey or plant-based proteins, has positive impact in decreasing glycaemic responses through the enhancing satiety and decreasing the overall rate at which carbohydrates are digested [26]. Besides this, Nuts and seeds will ensure a stabilizing effect of glucose release. [30].

The size and labelling of such bars and its portion control are also as relevant to the health of the diabetic consumer as the fact that the serving size, amount of added sugar or total carbohydrates discrepancy can misguide the diabetic consumer and pose a risk to the glycaemic control [33]. Functional cereal bar labelling practice has not been fully reconciled by the regulatory frameworks, as these offered by EFSA and FDA, this is why there is an acute need of transparency and revolution in packaging and marketing [15][44].

TABLE II: SUMMARY OF CLINICAL AND OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES ON OAT CONSUMPTION AND GLUCOSE CONTROL

Study/Source	Sample Size	Intervention	Result
[35] Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)	60 T2DM patients	6 - week intake of oat bars with 4g β-glucan	18% Reduction in postprandial glucose levels
[43] Cross-sectional Study	150 adults	Dietary recall including oat products	Inverse association between oat consumption and fasting blood sugar levels
[48] Clinical Trial	40 participants	Oat vs wheat- based snack bars	Oat bars showed 22% lower glycaemic index values
[31] Meta- analysis	9RCTs	Soluble fibre intake in diabetes	β-glucan from oats most consistently linked with improved insulin response

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of cereal oat bars as dietary intervention in diabetes mellitus in the last few years has gained momentum especially with the growing availability of functional foods in glycaemic control. A number of clinical and nutritional research have indicated that oats is a major grain with potential health results in case they are incorporated in diabetic diets [33][46][21]. The macronutrient composition of Oats is distinctive, as soluble fibre content, most of which is 80 percent of percentage This fibre has been linked with a retarded absorption of carbohydrates thus lowering the postprandial glycaemic spikes [47][36]. A research study published in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition revealed that regular consumption of oat-based products led to enhanced insulin sensitivity and an increase in the management of glycaemic control among patients with Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (T2DM) [39]. Nuts, seeds, and natural sweeteners, as well as dried fruits, are often used to develop cereal oat bars. All these ingredients have their own physiological actions, including supply of unsaturated fats, protein, antioxidants and other fibre, which can have synergistic activity that can be enhanced by the presence of oats to further enhance glycaemic responses [40] [44]. Other commercially available oat bars, however, contain refined starches or glucose syrup that inhibits the desired effects by being high in glycaemic index. Such differences underscore the importance of conducting stringent product appraisal prior to recommending the products to the diabetic patients [26].

In a comparative study of traditional granola bars and oat based bars enriched with B glucan, the subjects who took the latter had a much less reaching blood glucose excursions 2 hours after the intake [45]. Furthermore, research indicates that bars containing 3 grams of 8 gms of 2 - glucan per portion have the strongest effects on glycaemic moderation.

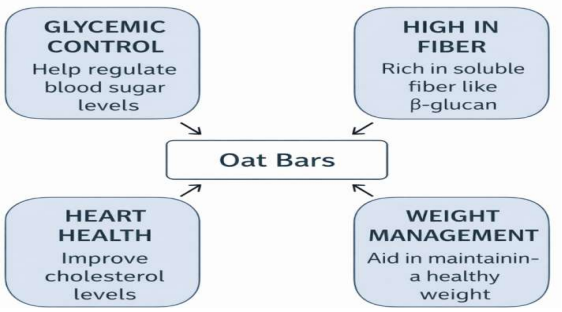

Figure 2: Health Benefits of Oat Bars for Diabetes [49].

A. Oat Bars Nutritional Composition

Cereal oat bars are considered as a low but efficient source of energy and healthy foods that can be tailored to ensure that the target population gets an equal amount of the macronutrients and healthy exposures to healthy foods that is likely forced to grapple with chronic diseases like diabetes. The nutritional basic information about oat bars is that oat bars are whole oats as their primary food thus, oats are inherently a source of complex carbohydrates, dietary fiber and vegetarian protein [41][50][29]. The process is also accompanied by a slowing of the rate of nutrient absorption that ultimately leads to slow release of glucose to blood that is needed in glycemic control among patients with diabetes [44][38].

Also, oat bars have a high probability of including nuts, seeds, and other natural sweeteners like stevia or honey which will benefit from additional other micronutrients, healthy fats, and antioxidants. The additions not only acknowledge the health portrait of the bars but, they also include satiety and palatability [32][27].

However, the quality of the bars commercially sold should also be doubted since some of them do not do without refined sugars, additionally, they include hydrogenated oils or even additives, which may increase the glycemic index (GI) because of which the beneficial effects of the products are canceled [36]. The diabetic friendly oat bars should be comprised of low calorie artificial sweeteners (e.g., erythritol, xylitol), No added refined sugars, sufficient soluble fiber with 3g per serving, less fat that is saturated.

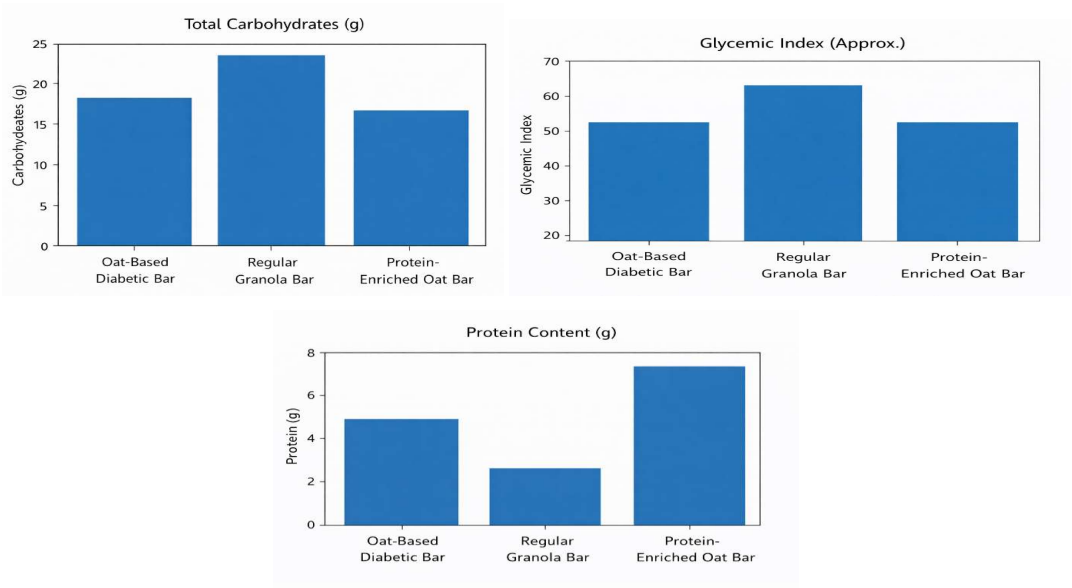

Figure 3: A graphical depiction of your nutritional comparison data (using midpoint values for ranges) [42] [31].

A more effective measure of the effect of a bar is the glycemic load (GL); it is the GI x carbohydrate content. It is, therefore, valuable that the diabetic people should choose bars that have low or moderate GI and low GL [47].

- β -Glucan in Glycemic Modulation: A non-starch polysaccharide known as 2 -glucan, which is located in the major part of the cell walls and is made of oats, is the most significant element that regulates postprandial glycemic indexes. The taking of 2 -glucan results in its formation as a gel like viscous compound in the stomach. This gel makes the contents in the intestines to be more viscous hence slows the rate of emptying the stomach and the rate at which blood glucose absorption is slowed [44][39][26]. This retardation of absorption produces the following: Attenuated post prandial glucose peaks, INR insensitivity, Decreased glycemic variation.

  The research has shown that increasing the use of at least 3 grams of oat 8 glucan per day would go a long way in correcting the glycemic response of diabetic patients with type 2 diabetes [31][48].
- Dietary fibre Gut Microbiota Regulation - Dietary fibre, such as 2-glucan, is a prebiotic with the ability to produce the growth of healthy gut microbes, such as, Bifido bacterium and Lactobacillus [35][29]. These microorganisms ferment soluble fibers to produce short chain fatty acids (SCFA) such as acetate, propionate and butyrate. SCFAs are known to: Stimulate the release of insulin through the activity of GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide-1), Enhance the intestinal barrier integrity, Suppress systemic inflammation - one of the major causes of insulin resistance [46][23].

- Effects on Glycemic Index (GI) and Glycemic Load (GL): Oats have low-GI (usually, 50-55) and therefore, it is an ideal option of carbohydrates among patients with blood sugar issues. GI of oat bar is also reduced in the instance of combination with: Healthy fats (e.g., nuts, seeds), Proteins (e.g., whey, soy), Low GI, general glycemic load (e.g., stevia, monk fruit) and white (e.g., cyclamate, glycerol) natural sweeteners [33][45].
- Satiety and Control of Appetites: Oat bars contain soluble fiber that helps to create satiety because: Dilating the stomach wall, which causes the feeling of fullness, Delaying gastric emptying.
  This process plays an indirect role in contributing to glycemic regulation through the decreasing of caloric intake and the avoidance of glucose spikes due to snacking [37][43].

B. Market Availability and Trends on Oat Based Bars.

In the last 10- years, there has been a considerable shift in consumer preference in the global market towards functional and health-oriented food. Of them, cereal oat bars have become one of the most popular options thanks to the combination of nutritional and convenient features and the need to stay in control of chronic diseases like diabetes (Carter, 2014).

- Increase in Consumer Health Behaviour: Increased awareness regarding the correlation between diet and health outcome has made consumers demand products with preventive properties. A survey conducted by Global Health and Wellness Survey [47] revealed that more than 65 percent of consumers around the world post-love food products that offer certain health benefits, especially blood sugar control and weight control.
  This demand can be addressed by using oat-based bars due to: Their low glycemic index (GI), High levels of soluble fiber (particularly 2 - glucan), Clean label ingredients with little processing.
- Ingredient Combinations and Product Innovations: Producers have come up with new formulations which entail incorporation of oats in other functional ingredients like: digestive support [30][41][49].
- The Marketing Cereal oat bars to diabetic consumers are often labeled and Claimed with the following on the packaging: Low GI, Helps to manage blood sugar, High in β-glucan fiber, No added sugar / Diabetic-friendly.

This designation is frequently regulated by these health agencies: the FDA in the US and the FSSAI in India, with a minimum 0.75g / serving of 8- glucan required to declare a product heart- or glucose-relevant [38][50].

III. Discussion and Results

The high rates of diabetes mellitus increase in the world have forced a paradigm shift in the way nutritional interventions are applied. Star is functional foods especially those that are designed to help glycemic control. One of them, cereal oat bars, have become a viable dietary choice given the convenience and the functional characteristics of oats mainly β-glucan [12] [28]. The second most important lesson learned through literature is the proven role of 8-glucan in regulating postprandial glycemic and insulin sensitivity. Its capacity to raise intestinal viscosity procrastinates the absorption of carbohydrates [41], [18]. There is also clinical evidence, which proves that at least 3 grams of -glucan on a daily basis is effective in enhancing glucose and lipid metabolism [35], [20]. This is in the light of the fact that oat bars should have adequate amounts of whole oats or oat bran to qualify as therapeutically beneficial. Regardless of potential health benefits, most of the commercial oat bars fail to deliver on their promises because of added sugar, high-glycemic foodstuffs (like glucose syrups, refined flours) and dietary fiber content [22], [39]. These additives would offset the glycemic-reducing effects of oats, and the product would be considered a high-energy food item, rather than a diabetic-good functional food.
A critical assessment of the ingredient labels shows discrepancies in the health claims and the real nutritional content [47][30]. An example is that, some products which claim to be type friendly contain concealed sugars such as honey, fructose, or malt dextrin- ingredients with a moderate to high glycemic index [14],[46].These ingredients are healthy, dietary, and functional qualities like healthy fats, vegetarian proteins, antioxidants, and are sweet without high GI response [26], [44].
Bars that are fortified with chia, almonds or flax either not only the fiber content but also the omega-3 and polyphenols, which are useful in the management of insulin resistance and oxidative stress in diabetes [29], [40]. A baking, or extrusion processing method can affect the structural integrity of 3-glucan and other bioactivity compounds. Soluble fiber can be degraded or nutrient bioavailability decreased through over-processing [19], [33]. Thus, the manufacturers have to balance the shelf stability and product texture against nutrient retention. It has been demonstrated that minimally processed or cold-pressed bars can retain more of their functional properties than thermally processed bars [13], [36]. The perception and the behaviour of the consumers also determine the effectiveness and acceptance of oat bars as a dietary tool. Although convenience and taste are the major factors of purchase, the awareness of sugar content and ingredient transparency is increasing [15], [48].

Increasingly, diabetic people are turning out to be more informed and demanding, demanding products that match their glycemic objectives and food demands [27][32]. Furthermore, no universal standards exist to create a regulatory label concerning the labelling of a product as to it being diabetes- less. friendly." [24][49]. Research on these aspects should be done over a longer period to understand the long-term effects of glycemic control, satiety, weight management, and cardio metabolic effects [25], [50].

Finally, cereal oat bars are a good addition to the diabetic diet that has been formulated with consideration of the glycemic index, fiber level, and the synergy of ingredients. Nevertheless, their potential is curtailed by discrepancies in commercial products, absence of regulatory clarity and inadequate clinical validation. Their potential as a functional food in diabetes management will be achieved through continued formulation, education of the consumers and policy development [38], [43].

IV. Conclusion

Oat bars also made up of cereals have turned out to be viable functional food products, particularly to people who deal with diabetes. Oats are very high in soluble fibers such as 2 - glucan, and they have numerous physiological effects such as glycemic regulation, improvement in lipid profile, and satiety [12], [27], [38]. The review shows how the ability to add oats to easily accessible, ready-made foods such as cereal bars is practical in ensuring healthy eating habits of diabetic patients especially in the busy city life [19], [31]. It is highlighted in the literature that nutritional profile of oat bars can be enriched greatly through incorporation of other functional ingredients like flax and chia, nuts, and sugar alternatives like. stevia or monk fruit [34], [45]. The additions also enhance the antioxidant properties, enhance the metabolism of lipids and promote the general metabolic well-being without increasing the blood sugar levels [23], [50]. Moreover, there is a problem of consumer acceptance with the factors including taste, texture, affordability, and cultural inclinations affecting the rate of adoption [18], [43]. Finally, oat bars can provide a useful and stable food product applicable in combating diabetes. Continuous research, product development and policies are required to maximize the therapeutic value of these bars on diabetic patients throughout the world [36][49].

Future Work

Even though there have been major steps taken towards investigating the potential benefits of the cereal oat bars to diabetic people, there are a number of research and development opportunities that are yet to be explored. The future research should aim to identify solutions to these gaps to maximize the potential of oat-based functional foods.

The optimization of bar formulation is one of these critical areas, more specifically its ability to retain 2 -glucan content and molecular weight. Research indicates that physiological action of 21-glucan is very sensitive to its molecular structure that may be damaged by too much heat or mechanical processing while making bars [21], [34]. Future research ought to involve more emerging technologies in food processing e.g. cold extrusion, or vacuum baking where food quality is preserved in terms of nutrient content and palatability and shelf-life are maintained [19], [42].

The other opportunity is to differentiate oat bars into individual nutrition. As nutrigenomics progresses, it is more possible to create oat bar formulations on the basis of genetic composition, intestinal microflora composition, or personal glycemic response. Combining wearable glucose measurements and real time dietary advice may transform what has been done with oat bars in treating type 2 diabetes [25], [48].

Although there are short term studies, there are hardly any that extend to 6 months and beyond or sub-groups like gestational diabetes or type 1 diabetics [30], [44]. This would minimize misinformation and give the consumers products that have been proven to be effective [23], [50].

Finally, the future study should be based on consumer education and behavioural adoption. The most scientifically optimized oat bar will necessarily be useless in case it is not accepted by the target audience. It will be required to implement human-centered design, behavioural-based marketing strategies, and flavor profiles that suit a particular culture to expand the use of these bars to the real world [28], [33]. Simply put, interdisciplinary cooperation with food technologists, clinical researchers, nutritionists, and policymakers is necessary to transform cereal oat bars into mainstream rather than niche health products in the prevention and management of diabetes.

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