

11-2017

Mycotoxins

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Abstract

Mycotoxins, toxins produced by fungi that commonly contaminate food crops, remain an important global food safety concern. Aflatoxins and fumonisins mainly pose a cancer risk, whereas deoxynivalenol poses a risk to gastrointestinal and immune function. Ochratoxin A poses a risk for kidney disease. Grains and some legumes are the predominant sources of these toxins, but they vary in the range of foods that they contaminate. For example, fumonisins occur mainly in corn, whereas deoxynivalenol is mainly found in wheat, barley and corn. Aflatoxins are mainly found in peanuts and corn. The nature of the fungi that produce each toxin seems to be the main determinant of which crop species will be the main sources of the mycotoxins.

Disciplines

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Comments

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11 18.1 INTRODUCTION

12 Mycotoxins, toxins produced by fungi that commonly contaminate food crops, remain an
13 important global food safety concern. Aflatoxins and fumonisins mainly pose a cancer risk,
14 whereas deoxynivalenol poses a risk to gastrointestinal and immune function. Ochratoxin A poses
15 a risk for kidney disease. Grains and some legumes are the predominant sources of these toxins,
16 but they vary in the range of foods that they contaminate. For example, fumonisins occur mainly
17 in corn, whereas deoxynivalenol is mainly found in wheat, barley and corn. Aflatoxins are mainly
18 found in peanuts and corn. The nature of the fungi that produce each toxin seems to be the main
19 determinant of which crop species will be the main sources of the mycotoxins.

20 Aflatoxins, most importantly aflatoxin B1 (AFB1), are produced, and named for *Aspergillus*
21 *flavus*, but other *Aspergillus* species also produce aflatoxins, especially *A. parasiticus*. Crosses of
22 these two fungi produce greater amounts of aflatoxins than do either parent species, but the two
23 species are typically isolated from each other, with *A. flavus* infecting peanuts, corn, cottonseed
24 and tree nuts and *A. parasiticus* infecting mainly peanuts ¹. Aflatoxin B1 is a human liver
25 carcinogen, and is also involved in impairing growth, development and immune function of
26 children in regions with significant aflatoxin contamination of staple foods ².

27 Fumonisin are produced by at least 15 *Fusarium* species, especially *F. verticillioides*, *F.*
28 *proliferatum* and *F. subglutinans*. These fungi are corn pathogens, causing stalk rot as well as
29 potentially harmful levels of the predominant fumonisin, B1 in corn kernels ³. Fumonisin B1 has
30 been associated with human esophageal cancer and neural tube defects ³, especially in regions
31 where corn is a staple food and where contamination of corn by this toxin is not well-recognized
32 and managed. *In vivo* studies of *Fusarium* mycotoxins have been reviewed recently, showing a
33 broad array of effects across many species⁴.

34 Deoxynivalenol (DON) is mainly produced by *Fusarium graminearum*, and also by *F. culmorum*
35 ⁵. These fungi cause *Fusarium* head blight in wheat, a main source of this toxin. Other cereals
36 such as barley and corn, can also be significant DON sources. DON is linked with immune
37 dysfunction and gastroenteritis, hence its prior common name, vomitoxin⁶.

38 Ochratoxins are produced by *Aspergillus ochraceus*, *A. carbonarius* and *Penicillium verrucosum*.
39 *A. ochraceus* grows and produces ochratoxin mainly in stored grains under dry conditions and in
40 moderate temperatures. *A. carbonarius* grows in grapes, so ochratoxins may be found in wines
41 and other grape-derived foods. *P. verrucosum* grows well in cooler climates, so Northern
42 European and North American grains, especially wheat, experience ochratoxin contamination
43 mainly from this source ⁷. Ochratoxin A (OTA) is the main ochratoxin important to human
44 health, and is associated with nephritic syndrome, but only in regions with very high exposure to
45 OTA, such as in parts of Egypt and Sierra Leone ⁶.

46 A recent casual survey of scientific literature through Pubmed indicates significant research
47 activity, especially focused on mechanisms and mitigation of toxicity of aflatoxins and
48 deoxynivalenol, fungal biology associated with fumonisin production, and novel detection
49 methods for ochratoxins (Table 1). How this pattern of research activity aligns with public health
50 needs associated with these toxins will be discussed in summarizing key recent studies related to
51 mycotoxin risk assessment, metabolism and mitigation. Mycotoxigenic fungi will continue to
52 evolve, so continual improvement of techniques to identify and assess health risks of emerging
53 mycotoxins is needed, but is seemingly not being addressed systematically at this time.

54

55

56

57 Table 1. Survey of recent scientific papers published in English on mycotoxins catalogued by
 58 PubMed from Jan-May 2016

Mycotoxin	Total papers	Quantitation in foods	Novel detection methods	Exposure and risk assessment	Mechanisms of action and mitigation of toxicity	Detoxification in foods	Fungal biology
Aflatoxins	161	26 (15%)	35 (20%)	15 (9%)	49 (28%)	17 (10%)	19 (11%)
Deoxynivalenol	91	11 (12%)	10 (11%)	4 (4%)	35 (37%)	5 (5%)	28 (30%)
Fumonisin	64	7 (11%)	13 (20%)	4 (6%)	16 (25%)	4 (6%)	20 (31%)
Ochratoxin	110	12 (11%)	40 (36%)	7 (6%)	26 (24%)	9 (8%)	16 (15%)

59

60 18.2 MYCOTOXIN RISK ASSESSMENT

61 Connecting human health risks with dietary exposure to mycotoxins poses severe challenges.
 62 Outbreaks of acute illness are associated with aflatoxin B1 (aflatoxicosis causing hepatic
 63 toxicity), DON (gastroenteritis) and OTA (nephritic syndrome). Verification of mycotoxin
 64 outbreaks requires mycotoxin analysis of grain samples verified to be of the same lot or source as
 65 ingested immediately prior to the onset of illness. Blood or urinary mycotoxin analysis and
 66 assessment of disease symptoms is also required, concomitantly. Although numerous methods
 67 are available for mycotoxin analysis, most such methods require expensive instrumentation such
 68 as LC/MS. Medical personnel with appropriate diagnostic expertise are also required. Public
 69 health systems coordinating such efforts are largely lacking worldwide. To assess cancer risk
 70 from aflatoxins and fumonisins, much longer term exposure surveillance is required. For a
 71 genotoxic agent such as aflatoxin, exposure in early life causing genetic damage may result in
 72 much later development of cancer. For fumonisins, chronic exposure seems to be required for its
 73 carcinogenic effects. There is yet an incomplete understanding of human dietary exposure
 74 patterns for mycotoxins in regions where mycotoxin-related health concerns exist. It may be that
 75 OTA causes kidney impairment at lower doses than seen in nephritic syndrome, but establishing

76 this as a solid connection requires multivariate analysis coordinated across human populations.
77 Likewise, DON may impair immune and intestinal function in important but relatively subtle
78 ways that are difficult to discern. Increased global scientific cooperation and coordination are
79 crucial to address these needs. It is unfortunate that disease presence rather than disease
80 prevention seems to drive investment in such endeavors. Mycotoxin prevention systems that are
81 sustainable will need to include permanent investment in agricultural practices, health
82 surveillance, and basic and translational research. Mitigation of human health risks from
83 mycotoxins is ethically and practically important. Global burden from mycotoxin-associated
84 diseases was estimated recently at ~200,000 excess liver cancer cases per year attributable to
85 aflatoxin. Disease burdens from fumonisin, DON and OTA remain uncertain, however likely,
86 especially for fumonisins ⁶. Effects of ingestion of combinations of mycotoxins also needs
87 greater attention.

88 Recent studies of dietary exposure to aflatoxin modeling intake of 3 maize foods based on
89 aflatoxin analysis of these foods in regions of Kenya. Eating whole kernel maize would result in
90 a 5- to 10-fold greater exposure to aflatoxin than eating maize meal or muthokoi (dehulled and
91 processed maize), about 300 ng aflatoxin/kg body weight. This exposure is 1000-fold greater
92 than noted in the US ⁸.

93 In a study in Lebanon, mean aflatoxin B1 exposure was 0.63 ng/kg/d, extrapolating to an
94 increased risk of cancer of ~ 0.05 cases/100,000 individuals⁹, a relatively low additional risk. In a
95 survey of aflatoxin intake from foods in Malaysia, mean aflatoxin intake was much greater, about
96 30 ng/kg/d, contributing ~0.7 liver cancer cases/100,000 individuals. With the current maximum
97 limit for aflatoxin of 15 ppb in Malaysia, this finding indicates some need for continued vigilance
98 in limiting intake of foods contaminated with aflatoxin above that maximum¹⁰.

99 From the most recent French Total Diet Study, only DON exposure and not exposure to aflatoxin,
100 fumonisin or OTA exceeded the health-based guidance value (HBGV) of estimated intake of
101 1000 ng DON/kg/d. Only 0.5% of adults and 5% of children exceeded this estimated DON intake.
102 Mean DON exposures were estimated at ~400 ng/kg/d for adults and ~550 ng/kg/d for children
103 from this study ¹¹. This study should be seen as a model for other countries to better assess health
104 risks from mycotoxins.

105 A total diet study of urban Lebanese showed that mean DON intake exceeded the European Food
106 Safety Authority's (EFSA) HBGV (1000 ng/kg/d), at 1560 ng/kg/d, whereas mean OTA intake of
107 4.3 ng/kg/d was 80% of EFSA's HBGV⁹. When exposure to DON was combined with exposures

108 to 3- and 15-Acetyl DON in a case study of 1269 individuals in Shanghai, China, mean DON
109 exposure from these 3 forms slightly exceeded the HBGV at 1085 ng/kg/d ¹². More work on
110 public health effects of such findings related to DON are needed.

111 A Tunisian case control study of 69 women with breast cancer and 41 controls showed
112 significantly greater urinary α -zearalenol in women with breast cancer, with mean concentration
113 of 4.6 ng/mL, 3-fold greater than in controls ¹³. This estrogenic metabolite of zearalenone might
114 enhance growth of estrogen-responsive breast cancer cells. This study suggests that it would be
115 worth studying the extent to which urinary α -zearalenol might predict breast cancer risk.

116 However, a recent study biomonitoring mycotoxins in Belgium showed that only one adult out of
117 239 studied had any urinary content of α -zearalenol, and this metabolite was not detected in
118 children (n = 155)¹⁴. The study in Belgium implies that in countries with more highly developed
119 food safety systems, zearalenone would not pose a human breast cancer risk. A study associating
120 zearalenone exposure with reproductive development in 163 9-10 year old girls in New Jersey
121 showed mean urinary α -zearalenol ten-fold less than seen in Tunisian women, and lesser breast
122 development in girls with greater zearalenone exposure ¹⁵, suggesting an anti-estrogenic effect of
123 the mycotoxin at these exposure levels. It is intriguing to consider further work to investigate
124 possible breast cancer protective effects of zearalenone at exposures similar to those noted above
125 in Belgium or the US.

126 **18.3 MYCOTOXIN METABOLISM**

127 The metabolism of mycotoxins, by animals, bacteria associated with the gut, and by plants, may
128 be a significant factor in mitigating health risks of these compounds, but this aspect of
129 mycotoxins has not been incorporated directly into risk assessment or mitigation strategies. It
130 may be that dietary and other health habits of populations either enhance or inhibit mycotoxin
131 detoxification. Such possibilities will be explored in this chapter section.

132 Among the 4 major mycotoxins, aflatoxin is known to undergo significant mammalian
133 metabolism, both in activation to its proximate carcinogenic (mutagenic) form, aflatoxin 8,9-
134 epoxide, by cytochromes P-450 (P450) ¹⁶, and its detoxification, especially by glutathione S-
135 transferases (GSTs) to transform the epoxide site's to a hydroxyl and a glutathione adduct ¹⁷.
136 P450s are inducible by dietary components including flavonoids ¹⁸ and cruciferous vegetables
137 such as broccoli and cabbage ¹⁹. Chronic food restriction also may induce P450s ²⁰, suggesting
138 enhanced susceptibility to AFB1 toxicity in regions where food shortages and undernutrition are
139 more common. Paradoxically, P450s may also be inhibited by flavonoids ²¹. Some flavonoids

140 such as apigenin, a flavonoid in parsley, inhibited AFB1 mutagenicity *in vitro* mediated by the
141 human P450 enzyme thought to be important for AFB1 activation, hCYP1A2²². The significance
142 of this finding for prevention of AFB1-associated human cancers remains to be determined.
143 Several studies have shown in animal models the possible mitigation of aflatoxin toxicity and
144 carcinogenesis by dietary alterations of its metabolism. Marked inhibition of AFB1
145 carcinogenesis in rainbow trout, the most sensitive species to AFB1, was shown for beta-
146 naphthoflavone (BNF) and indole-3-carbinole (a component of cruciferous vegetables) but only
147 BNF induced P450 in this model²³. This early study illustrated the complexity of attempting to
148 prevent AFB1 carcinogenicity by dietary components, as mediated by modulation of P450.
149 Chickens fed 100 ppb AFB1 showed induction of P450, which was prevented by supplementation
150 with 0.5 mg selenium (Se)/kg diet compared with 0.2 mg Se/kg, suggesting that diets containing
151 this moderately greater amount of Se might mitigate the activation of AFB1. This approach may
152 be feasible to investigate as a human intervention in regions where AFB1 contamination is
153 common. Dietary induction of GSTs as a strategy to mitigate AFB1 carcinogenicity has been
154 shown using a model antioxidant, oltipraz, in rats²⁴. Oltipraz increased production of AFB-
155 glutathione metabolites in a human clinical trial, demonstrating the feasibility of this approach²⁵.
156 The identification of effective dietary inducers of GSTs that can mitigate AFB1 toxicity in
157 humans remains to be accomplished. It has been recently proposed that strategies not involving
158 AFB1 metabolism, such as increasing dietary chlorophyllin content, which binds to and inhibits
159 absorption of AFB1, may be more useful to consider because altering P450s and GSTs is likely to
160 alter metabolism of many drugs, thus making public policy recommendations about such dietary
161 constituents highly problematic²⁶.

162 DON is also metabolized by inducible biotransformation in animals. In particular, the hydroxyls
163 of DON are sites for addition of sulfate (by sulfotransferases, STs) or glucuronide.
164 Glucuronidation by UDP-glucuronosyltransferases (UGTs) is favored in species possessing both
165 types of biotransformation enzymes, based on limited data²⁷. Human UGTs have less capability
166 to form DON glucuronides than do rat UGTs *in vitro*, but such metabolites are the predominant
167 urinary excretion products across species²⁸. DON-3-glucuronide was shown to have negligible
168 toxicity compared with DON in human K562 cells, consistent with the general idea in toxicology
169 that such metabolites are detoxification products²⁹. Because UGTs are highly inducible by some
170 dietary constituents, such induction may mitigate DON toxicity in humans. Neither the extent of
171 UGT induction nor the effect of this phenomenon on DON toxicity has been established yet in
172 humans.

173

174 The biotransformation of DON in plants to DON glucosides, especially DON-3-glucoside (D3G)
175 has been observed³⁰. Many hydroxylated secondary plant metabolites are also stored in plants in
176 glucoside form. This conversion of DON initially was shown to “mask” DON to its detection.
177 Since then, D3G has been recognized as a minor but not insignificant form of DON in DON-
178 contaminated grains, constituting as much as 25% of total DON in wheat and maize³¹. D3G can
179 be readily converted back to DON by bacterial β -glucosidases in the mammalian gut. D3G per se
180 is practically unabsorbed, so the absorption of DON from dietary D3G would occur mainly in the
181 ileum and colon which contain most of the bacteria in the intestine. Enhanced presence of D3G
182 in the diet could alter the site of intestinal toxicity. The development of grains that have
183 increased ability to convert DON to D3G would not be advisable unless DON de-epoxidation
184 capacity, and hence DON detoxification were also commonly occurring. This has been
185 demonstrated in rats, in which the urinary excretion of D3G was 5-fold less than that seen for
186 DON; most D3G was excreted as DON or de-epoxy DON (DOM-1) in rat feces³². When DON
187 was fed to pigs as D3G, its apparent bioavailability was about two-fold less³³. DON de-
188 epoxidation in the rumen is the main fate of DON in cattle³⁴, which seems to be why ruminants
189 are relatively protected from DON toxicity. De-epoxidation in the lower intestine of pigs is also
190 common, but this has no protective benefit from DON toxicity because DON seems to be
191 absorbed in the small intestine before the DON de-epoxidating bacteria can be effective³⁵.
192 Likewise, in one study of French farmers, about 30% of the humans tested had DON de-
193 epoxidating activity in fecal bacteria³⁶. A lesser extent of this metabolism was observed in
194 individuals from the UK³⁷. De-epoxidation of DON in humans would not be expected to
195 mitigate DON toxicity appreciably unless DON were present mainly as D3G which is not
196 currently the case. If we presume that DON can be rapidly and extensively converted to DON
197 glucuronides, the DON glucuronides would be expected to be eliminated mainly in bile. These
198 metabolites would not be reabsorbed until they were converted back to DON by bacterial
199 glucuronidases in the lower intestines. At that point in DON metabolism DON might be
200 detoxified by gut bacterial DON de-epoxidases. It may be worth exploring the feasibility of
201 modifying the human gut microbiome to include DON de-epoxidating bacteria in individuals who
202 do not naturally carry such bacterial species. Some such species have been identified and might
203 be seen as a new class of probiotics, potentially beneficial bacteria that might be introduced into
204 the food supply. The need for such alteration of human gut bacteria remains to be established,
205 and would not be a trivial process. But if such a need were confirmed (in humans who do not

206 already have this metabolic capability in their gut microbiomes), standards exist for assuring the
207 efficacy and safety of probiotic bacteria ³⁸.

208 Ochratoxin A (OTA) is the main ochratoxin of concern to human health. It can be hydrolyzed by
209 proteases to form an apparently non-toxic form, ochratoxin-alpha, and phenylalanine. The lack of
210 toxicity of OTA-alpha has been demonstrated in zebrafish recently ³⁹. The percentage of
211 ochratoxin absorbed in humans has not been directly determined, presumably due to ethical
212 concerns about deliberately exposing humans to this presumed carcinogen, but across several
213 species, uptake has been estimated at ~50% of ingested dose ⁴⁰. In limited human studies, OTA-
214 alpha seemed to be the predominant urinary form of OTA. In one study, human urinary contents
215 of OTA and OTA-alpha were about equal ⁴¹. Pregnant women showed about 10-fold greater
216 urinary OTA-alpha than OTA ⁴², indicating seemingly greater OTA detoxification ability of
217 pregnant women than of non-pregnant women. Hydrolysis of OTA by microbial enzymes may
218 be a strategy for mitigation of the mycotoxin ⁴³, but the capability of enhancing such hydrolysis *in*
219 *vivo* in humans remains to be determined.

220 The metabolism of fumonisins has been shown to be virtually nil *in vivo*, as might be expected for
221 these highly water-soluble, relatively large and therefore, poorly absorbable toxins. Seemingly
222 their water-solubility facilitates their rapid excretion and poor retention in body tissues, as has
223 been demonstrated by studies of the fate of radio-labeled FB1 in a rodent model ⁴⁴. These
224 compounds may be altered during some food processing reactions (e.g., addition of reducing
225 sugars to the primary amine of FB1) and by microbial enzymes (e.g., carboxylesterase FumD)
226 that are potentially useful in mitigating the toxins ⁴⁵.

227 In summary, it may be worth considering incorporating alteration of human/gut microbial
228 metabolism of some mycotoxins in future mitigation strategies. Insofar as the future may hold
229 the ability for genetic characterization of individual biotransformation enzyme genetics and
230 polymorphisms, and thus the prospect of tailoring diet to contain the right mix of
231 biotransformation enzyme inducers or inhibitors depending on dietary circumstances, metabolism
232 modification may need to be part of the defense arsenal against these toxins.

233 **18.4 MYCOTOXIN MITIGATION**

234 Mitigating the presence of mycotoxins in the human food supply is mostly about reducing
235 mycotoxin burden in grain crops used for human food. Significant attention is also directed
236 toward reducing mycotoxins in the feed of livestock, for example, in the case of aflatoxin, due to

237 carry over of the aflatoxin metabolite AFM1 into dairy milk. Mitigation strategies involve
238 improving mycotoxin detection and regulation, which currently means removing from the food
239 supply foods that exceed action, advisory or guidance levels developed by the United States (US)
240 Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Analogous standards that may be somewhat more or less
241 stringent exist in many countries, including the European Union (EU). An action level is
242 mandated by FDA only for aflatoxins in the US, currently set at 20 ppb for foods for human
243 consumption. FDA advisory levels are set at 1 ppm for deoxynivalenol in foods for human
244 consumption, and FDA has also provide guidance levels for fumonisins of 2-4 ppm for foods for
245 human consumption ⁴⁶.

246 A strong research publication focus has been on innovative detection methods, but this research
247 does not seem to be well-aligned with the needs, especially in low income countries, for rapid,
248 accurate and inexpensive mycotoxin detection. Mycotoxin analytical methods have been recently
249 reviewed ⁴⁷ and major constraints in this field were noted, including the varied chemistries of the
250 mycotoxins, the need to assess multiple mycotoxins in food samples and to assure that samples
251 are appropriately representative of the scope of possible contamination, and the need for speed
252 and economy. QuEChERS (quick, easy, cheap, effective, rugged and safe) technologies were also
253 noted to be especially important in the realm of mycotoxin analysis. Portability of analytical
254 methods is improving, with a number of promising advances coming from the realm of
255 nanotechnology coupled with alternatives to antibody-based mycotoxin detection. Such
256 alternatives include aptamers (RNA-binding) and molecular imprint polymers (MIPs).
257 Nanomaterial sensors for mycotoxins including AFB1, DON, FB1 and OTA have been developed
258 ⁴⁸. Because many nanomaterials do not occur in nature, particular caution in assessing safety
259 related to disposal, environmental persistence, and potential health effects on humans and
260 ecosystems is warranted. Spectroscopic detection coupled with chromatographic separation
261 methods of varying types and expense remain the state-of-the-art in terms of reliability, but
262 portability of spectroscopy is also improving ⁴⁷. A few recent studies on mycotoxin detection
263 show promise. An aptamer-based dipstick for AFB1 was shown to have comparable detectability
264 compared with a standard ELISA method in the ppb range, as needed for food samples. The
265 method took 30 min to complete, with simple solvent extraction (20% methanol) of grain samples
266 including maize ⁴⁹. An antibody-based microarray system for simultaneous detection of AFB1
267 and FB1 was shown to be feasible and comparable to standard ELISAs in detection levels. This
268 method will require further validation for food samples ⁵⁰. A portable evanescent wave optical
269 aptasensor with a reversible ligand-grafted biosensing surface was demonstrated for OTA, with

270 detection limit of 0.4 ppb, and OTA recoveries from powdered wheat of 89—106%, with ~15%
271 CV. This detection limit is sufficient to meet current regulatory policies ⁵¹, but this seemingly
272 relatively cost-effective and reusable method will need further validation across food sources of
273 OTA. DON-specific nanobodies (single domain antibodies) that can mimic DON have been
274 recently discovered and might be useful in further optimizing DON detection ⁵². The adoption of
275 the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) in the US in 2011 emphasizes prevention of food
276 contamination. It remains to be seen how FSMA will affect mycotoxin detection, but rapid,
277 reliable and inexpensive methods available to farmers are likely to be needed, thus promising
278 emerging technologies such as these will be crucial.

279 Preventing mycotoxins in the field is a burden for grain producers that currently relies on their
280 ability to identify fungal contamination and insofar as feasible and permissible to apply
281 appropriate fungicides. Fungicide resistance is an ongoing concern, as well as general
282 environmental and human health concern about use of synthetic chemical fungicides, so
283 potentially toxigenic fungi-inhibiting plants and their extracts are under investigation as
284 alternatives ⁵³. Commercialization remains to be achieved; significant technical and economic
285 barriers exist in this field of “green chemicals”.

286 Identification and development of mycotoxin-resistant crop varieties has shown particular promise
287 in maize, a species for which at least a few naturally occurring variants are resistant to AFB1 ⁵⁴.
288 AFB1 Resistance associated proteins have been identified, and current genomic technologies may
289 permit engineering of such proteins into other crop species. But no commercially available AFB1-
290 resistant maize lines are yet available ⁵⁴. Several cross bred maize lines were recently identified as
291 resisting both AFB1 and FB1 contamination in field trials in South Africa, in which at least a few
292 crosses were developed that did not accumulate AFB1 above 5 ppb or FB1 above 4 ppm (current
293 regulatory levels) ⁵⁵. For DON in wheat, the quantitative trait locus *Fhb1* permitted conjugation of
294 DON with glucose and several glucose derivatives as well as glutathione conjugates, significantly
295 increasing D3G/DON ratio ⁵⁶. As noted in the above section on DON metabolism, this conversion
296 would not be expected to significantly detoxify DON unless DON-de-epoxidating capability was
297 also present in individuals ingesting this grain. It might be presumed that any DON conjugate,
298 whether with glucose, glutathione or other glucose derivatives would likely be deconjugated by gut
299 bacteria, but that remains to be proven. Barley is another major source of DON; it has been
300 discovered recently that black barley showed about half the DON contamination of yellow barley,
301 so switching to this barley type might be a feasible mitigation approach ⁵⁷. A yeast species,
302 *Kluyveromyces thermotolerans* was capable of decreasing OTA in grapes ⁵⁸, which may be a

303 significant source of this toxin, so some types of biocontrol may be feasible, but will certainly need
304 to be developed on a crop-specific basis. No work on OTA resistance in grain crop species was
305 uncovered for this review. But progress is being made, seemingly especially for AFB1 and FB1
306 resistance in maize.

307 A number of potential strategies to decrease mycotoxins during food processing have been
308 demonstrated in the literature. Current US regulatory policies do not permit blending of a crop
309 contaminated above key limits with non-contaminated crop; exceptions may be made when a
310 severe mycotoxin contamination epidemic occurs. Diversion of mycotoxin contaminated crops
311 into animal feeds may occur where regulatory levels permit⁴⁶. Regulators, scientists and citizens
312 should engage in effective global discourse about the problem of mycotoxin contamination of
313 crops used to feed humans. It is important to determine a rational future for feeding a world in
314 which mycotoxin contamination is likely to be a problem of increasing severity due to
315 increasingly extreme weather and climate conditions that have been occurring and are predicted.
316 More attention to development of low cost and effective means of decreasing mycotoxins in
317 human foods as a part of food processing is warranted.

318 Aflatoxin decontamination methods have been developed. Screening grain kernels under UV
319 light which can recognize grain grossly contaminated with aflatoxins and mechanical sorting to
320 cull contaminated kernels is permitted in the US to achieve grain batches compliant with the
321 action level for aflatoxin. Ammoniation of cottonseed is permitted by FDA. Although this
322 method has been established to effectively detoxify maize containing aflatoxins⁵⁹, with several
323 trials across livestock and laboratory animals showing a reduction in aflatoxin content to 1% or
324 less than in the starting contaminated grain⁵⁹, this method is not approved for grains in the US.
325 As summarized in a recent review focused on an African perspective on mycotoxin remediation
326 ⁶⁰, sorting and cleaning before storage, and keeping stored grain dry may be quite effective in
327 reducing aflatoxin contamination of grains and peanuts. In a study using visibly moldy maize in
328 Malawi, hand sorting to remove obviously damaged or shriveled seeds and seed fragments
329 removed ~95% of AFB1 or FB1. Floating the kernels in water before sorting only removed about
330 60% of either type of contamination; adding flotation to hand sorting showed no additional
331 benefit⁶¹. Thus, simple but labor intensive methods may be beneficial where farmers and
332 consumers are educated about the health benefits of removing aflatoxins from foods. A novel
333 method of treating hazelnuts with cold atmospheric plasma in a controlled pressure chamber
334 using power of 1000 W decreased AFB1 content of the nuts by two-thirds after 12 min⁶². This
335 technique should not interfere with food quality and might be useful for many other AFB-

336 containing foods. The wider feasibility, mainly cost-effectiveness, of such technologies remains
337 for future work.

338 For DON, as might be expected from its hydrophilicity, processing foods in water such that the
339 water is removed from the final product can remove significant amounts of DON. This is
340 pertinent but probably not practical for pasta. Boiling of 310 g pasta from 0-10 min showed
341 progressive loss of DON from 0.62 ppm to 0.16 ppm (75% loss of DON)⁶³, but as this was
342 “fresh” pasta, eating quality would not be acceptable to many consumers after the longer boiling
343 times that were more effective. Wheat flour bread making and baking did not diminish DON
344 concentrations⁶³. Treatment of DON-contaminated dried distillers grain solids for nursery swine
345 feed with 5% sodium metabisulfite,(SMB) autoclaving and drying decreased DON concentration
346 in this feed by more than 80%. Heating DON with SMB causes formation of a DON-10-
347 sulfonate, which was non-toxic to the pigs. Average daily gain was restored to control levels by
348 this treatment ⁶⁴. Practically, such treatments of grain flours for human intake might be feasible,
349 but prevention of toxic effects to workers from sulfur dioxide gas release during processing
350 would be important. Also, some individuals may have allergic-like reactions to sulfites as food
351 additives, and warning labels would be needed. Heat processing per se, such as during extrusion
352 of corn flour⁶⁵ may remove DON by as much as 98%, but results from another lab with wheat
353 flour did not show this ability of heat processing ⁶⁶. It seems prudent to conduct additional
354 studies on SMB using human foods because this may be a cost-effective approach that could be
355 necessary depending on the extent of DON contamination that may emerge in some regions.
356 Additional investigations as to the potential of SMB treatment of DON contaminated grain flours
357 to adversely affect sulfite sensitive individuals, and appropriate additional food labeling may be
358 needed as well.

359 Regulatory limits for ochratoxins in foods range from 2-10 ppb in the EU. Pre-harvest control by
360 good agricultural practices, careful use of fungicides and biocontrol agents (e.g., yeasts,
361 natamycin) are thought to be most effective against OTA ⁶⁷, as well as low-moisture storage.
362 Adsorption of OTA from beverages may be feasible but must be evaluated carefully for effects on
363 nutritional quality and taste; modified zeolites may be particularly useful⁶⁷. Quaternary
364 ammonium beta-cyclodextrin was shown *in vitro* to have 200-fold stronger affinity for OTA than
365 beta-cyclodextrin, as measured by fluorescent spectroscopic changes; this cyclodextrin derivative
366 may be a good candidate for pass-through adsorption of OTA from beverages⁶⁸. More practical
367 conditions will need to be investigated for such an adsorbent, as well as determination of any
368 significant adverse effects on beverage quality from use of the adsorbent.

369 The prospect that human metabolic capabilities may also mitigate health risks from mycotoxins
370 also deserves greater attention, based on the theoretical framework developed above (see section
371 on mycotoxin metabolism).

372 **18.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

373 Human risk assessment of mycotoxins that includes better recognition of disease and cost burdens
374 of these food borne toxins is a primary need. Such risk assessment should move toward
375 incorporating the assessment of dietary and other health habits in addition to mycotoxin exposure
376 assessment. A number of dietary constituents, as discussed previously, might mitigate adverse
377 effects of mycotoxins. Exercise is increasingly recognized as a strong factor in mitigation of
378 cancer risk⁶⁹, but taking a global perspective, does intensive physical activity in the case of
379 subsistence farmers confer benefits or add health stress?

380 Discovery and development of mycotoxin resistant crop species is progressing. This work will
381 need to continue permanently as it is reasonable to consider that mycotoxigenic species will
382 continue to evolve. Integrated pest management systems that employ “green” technologies of
383 biocontrol against mycotoxins must become feasible and affordable in the future.

384 The recognition of the potential of microbes to degrade and detoxify mycotoxins may extend
385 from the field to the fork, in that anti-mycotoxin microbes might be developed into a new
386 generation of probiotics that could be incorporated into an array of ready-to-eat food products.
387 Such a recommendation should be approached with great caution and respect for the many
388 unknowns that need careful testing as fundamental discoveries move into product development.
389 Engineering or manipulation of the human gut microbiome to contain microbes beyond what are
390 naturally present across diverse human populations seems unwise without a great deal more
391 understanding of gut microbial populations and interactions between these microbes and complex
392 food constituents.

393 A focus on extending adequate resources for mycotoxin management and mitigation to low
394 income world regions must be the greatest priority. Advances in the ability of human populations
395 to effectively govern themselves and abide by fair rules of law will be needed to accomplish the
396 needed eradication of excess liver cancer due to aflatoxin. Humanity deserves better assurance of
397 food safety; mycotoxins remain an important global consideration in that regard.

398 **Key words**

399 aflatoxin, deoxynivalenol, fumonisin, ochratoxin, remediation, risk assessment

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