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**Bioactive properties of commercialised pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) juice:
antioxidant, antiproliferative and enzyme inhibiting activities**

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19 **ABSTRACT**

20 Pomegranate juice and related products have long been used either in traditional
21 medicine or as nutritional supplements claiming beneficial effects. Although there are
22 several studies on this food plant, only few works have been performed with
23 pomegranate juice or marketed products. The aim of this work is to evaluate the
24 antioxidant effects of pomegranate juice on cellular models using hydrogen peroxide as
25 an oxidizing agent or DPPH and superoxide radicals in cell free systems. The
26 antiproliferative effects of the juice were measured on HeLa and PC-3 cells by the MTT
27 assay and pharmacologically relevant enzymes (cyclooxygenases, xanthine oxidase,
28 acetylcholinesterase and monoamine oxidase A) were selected for enzymatic inhibition
29 assays. Pomegranate juice showed significant protective effects against hydrogen
30 peroxide induced toxicity in the *Artemia salina* and HepG2 models; these effects may
31 be attributed to radical scavenging properties of pomegranate as the juice was able to
32 reduce DPPH and superoxide radicals. Moderate antiproliferative activities in HeLa and
33 PC-3 cancer cells were observed. However, pomegranate juice was also able to inhibit
34 COX-2 and MAO-A enzymes. This study reveals some mechanisms by which
35 pomegranate juice may have interesting and beneficial effects in human health.

36

37 **KEYWORDS:** pomegranate juice, *Punica granatum*, ellagic acid, antioxidant,
38 antiproliferative, COX-2, MAO-A

39

40 **1. Introduction**

41 Pomegranate, scientifically known as *Punica granatum* L. (Punicaceae), is a tree
42 originally from the Himalayas. This species has been cultivated since antiquity in the
43 Mediterranean and Southeast Asia, being also introduced in other areas such as tropical
44 Africa and California¹. It is a large-long lived tree, being able to reach three meters high
45 with numerous branches. Its bark is grayish-green, bright green leaves and red flowers.
46 The fruit is red and round, finishing in five triangular lobes, containing numerous seeds
47 separated into groups by a membranous yellowish-white pericarp^{2,3}. This fruit has been
48 appreciated by numerous civilizations such as the Greek and Egyptian⁴, and has been
49 used in traditional medicine, especially in Ayurvedic medicine, for the treatment of
50 various diseases such as diarrhea, diabetes, ulcers, parasitic infections or bleeding^{5,6}.
51 Medicinal plants and natural products have played an important role in drug discovery.
52 They are relatively cheap and available, and their use depends, many times, on the
53 ancestral experience. In developing countries, traditional medicinal plants remain very
54 important in healthcare as they are used either as medicines or nutritional supplements⁷.
55 The interest in this fruit as a nutritional or medicinal product and its therapeutic
56 applications have increased significantly in recent years due to their potential beneficial
57 effects on health, based on the presence of antioxidants, which may protect the human
58 body from free radicals, oxidative processes and progression of many chronic diseases⁸.
59 Beverages produced from fruit juices may be an interesting source of phytochemicals
60 and antioxidants, contributing to prevent oxidation of biomolecules such as DNA,
61 proteins, lipids and other cellular components^{9,10}. Pomegranate can be eaten fresh or
62 processed into wine, juice or extracts. Several studies have shown that pomegranate has
63 one of the highest antioxidant activity compared to other juices and extracts such as red
64 wine, red fruits juices, citrus and tea^{5,11,12}.
65 Studies on the composition of pomegranate show that the main components are
66 polyphenols, highlighting the presence of punicalagins, ellagic acid, flavonoids and
67 anthocyanins among others^{13,14}.
68 Most of its biological or pharmacological properties are attributed to this high levels of
69 polyphenols contained in pomegranate seeds. Polyphenols possess important biological
70 functions such as antioxidant, anti-mutagenic and anti-tumor activities^{15,16}.

Pomegranate can be considered as a functional food, and its juice may be a nutraceutical with a growing interest as an adjuvant in diseases such as atherosclerosis, whose development and progression is directly linked to oxidative processes in the cardiovascular system of the individual, being a risk factor for hypercholesterolemia, hypertension and diabetes. In addition, numerous other properties have been the focus of many studies, for instance, antimicrobial, anticancer, antiviral, antioxidant, antiproliferative, anti-parasitic or dermoprotective activities^{17,18,19,20}.

The aim of this study was to evaluate biological properties of a commercially available pure (100%, without additives) pomegranate organic juice, as many studies are performed with extracts made in the laboratory instead of registered and marketed beverages. The authors studied the antioxidant and protective effects of the juice in cellular and cell free systems, the antiproliferative effects in cancer cells (HeLa and PC-3) as well as its effects on enzymes with relevant pharmacological properties such as cyclooxygenases, xanthine oxidase, acetylcholinesterase and monoamine oxidase-A. These enzymes were selected because they are involved in inflammation, uric acid formation, dementia and depression respectively.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Reagents and chemicals

All chemical reagents were acquired through Sigma-Aldrich (Spain). Pomegranate juice (Rabenhorst®) was acquired in a specialized shop. Authors selected this product because it was organic pomegranate juice, 100% pomegranate without additives. According to the manufacturer, the juice is obtained by expression, pasteurisation and bottled into glass bottles (batch and best before 04.03.2016; 11:57).

2.2. Pomegranate juice lyophilization

750 ml of Rabenhorst® pomegranate juice (PJ) were lyophilized using the VIRTIS Genesis 25EL lyophilizer at -40°C (condenser at -80°C) for 288h, with previous vacuum stage of 4 minutes until 113mTorr, and a posterior secondary drying phase of 36h with a

smooth transition of -40 to +40°C. A dried red powder was obtained and kept at -20 °C before performing experiments.

102

2.3. *Phytochemical analyses of lyophilized pomegranate juice*

2.3.1. *Polyphenol content*

Folin-Ciocalteu Assay was carried out with some modifications in order to adapt the method to 96-well plates²¹. 9 µl of sample was mixed with 201.5 µl of Folin-Ciocalteu reagent. After 5 min incubation at room temperature, 89.5 µl of 15% sodium carbonate was added to the mixture and this was incubated again at room temperature in the dark for 45 min. The blank wells were made with distilled water instead of Folin-Ciocalteu reagent. Absorbance was measured at 752 nm in a microplate reader. The standard curve was measured with different concentrations of gallic acid standard water solution: 1, 0.5, 0.25, 0.125, 0.0625, 0.03125, 0.015625 and 0.0078125 mg/ml. The PJ water solutions were 10, 5 and 2.5 mg/ml. The result was expressed µg of gallic acid per mg of sample ± SD.

2.3.2. *HPLC-DAD analysis*

The phytochemical analysis of the lyophilized juice and the detection of the main compounds were done by HPLC using an Agilent 1260 Infinity LC (column Eclipse Plus C18 4.6 x 100 mm, 5 µm) coupled with a photodiode array detector, following a described procedure with some modifications²². Elution was carried out at a flow rate of 1 ml/min using H₂O (solvent A) and acetonitrile (solvent B) from 0% to 100% of solvent B in 50 min. Both solvents contained 0.5 % acetic acid. Detection was performed at 254 nm. The injection volume was 10 µl and the concentration of injected sample was 10 mg/ml. The presence of ellagic acid and punicalagins was confirmed by the same retention times of standard acquired in Sigma.

125

2.4. *Protective effects of pomegranate juice in living organisms and cellular models*

127

128

129 *2.4.1. Protective effects of pomegranate juice against hydrogen peroxide induced*
130 *toxicity in Artemia salina*

131 First of all, the toxicity of the juice was tested by the brine shrimp (*Artemia salina*)
132 lethality assay^{23,24}. Commercial dried cysts of brine shrimp were hatched in seawater
133 with aeration for 72 hours. The lyophilized juice was dissolved in seawater and
134 transferred to 6-well plates to obtain concentrations of 1, 10, 100, 1000 µg/ml in 5 ml
135 sea water with 10 nauplii in each well. Control test wells were filled with 5 ml of
136 seawater and 10 nauplii. After 24 h incubation at room temperature, the number of
137 viable nauplii was counted. The percentage of mortality was calculated.

138 As pomegranate juice did not affect the viability of *Artemia salina* nauplii within the
139 range 1-1000 µg/ml, the same experiment was performed but hydrogen peroxide was
140 added at a concentration of 0.4 g/L in the wells containing pomegranate juice. Control
141 wells without treatments and shrimps exposed hydrogen peroxide were also prepared.
142 The viability of *Artemia salina* nauplii was studied every 24 hour for 3 consecutive
143 days.

144 *2.4.2. Protective effects of pomegranate juice against hydrogen peroxide induced*
145 *toxicity in HepG2 cells*

146 Cultures were grown in Minimum Essential Medium (MEM) supplemented with 10%
147 fetal bovine serum and 1% penicillin-streptomycin. Cultures were incubated in the
148 presence of 5% CO₂ at 37 °C and 100% relative humidified atmosphere. First of all, a
149 general cytotoxicity MTT assay was performed in order to detect non-cytotoxic doses of
150 pomegranate juice²⁵. Cells were seeded in 96-well microplates at a density of 7 x 10³
151 cells/ well and grown for 48 h at 37 °C. Cells were treated with different concentrations
152 of PJ (1-1000 µg/ml) and incubated for 24 hours. Cells were then treated with an MTT
153 solution and incubated for 3 hours. The MTT solution was removed, formazan crystals
154 were dissolved in DMSO and absorbance was read at 550 nm in a microplate reader.

155 The protective effect of PJ against toxicity induced by H₂O₂ in HepG2 cells was carried
156 out using the MTT assay. Cells were seeded as described above and treated with non-
157 cytotoxic concentrations of PJ (31.25, 15.62 and 3.90 µg/ml) for 24 h. HepG2 cells were
158 then exposed to DPBS containing 500 µM H₂O₂ for 1 hour and new medium was added

159 to the cells. The MTT assay was performed 24 h after hydrogen peroxide exposure and
160 cell survival was measured as described above.

161

162 *2.5. Antioxidant activity in cell free systems*

163 *2.5.1. 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) radical scavenging capacity*

164 The capacity of the juice to scavenge DPPH free radicals was measured by a
165 colorimetric method²⁶. 150 µl of a DPPH methanolic solution (0.04 mg/ml) were added
166 to 150 µl of different concentrations of PJ dissolved in water at different concentrations.
167 Absorbance was measured at 517 nm after 30 min of reaction at room temperature in a
168 microplate reader. Controls contained all the reaction reagents except the samples.
169 Background interferences from solvents were deducted from the activities prior to
170 calculating radical scavenging capacity as follows: $RSC(\%) = [(Abs_{control} -$
171 $Abs_{sample}) / Abs_{control}] \times 100$

172 The DPPH radical scavenging capacity of ellagic acid was also measured in order to
173 compare the activity of the juice with other compounds. Ellagic acid was dissolved in
174 ethanol.

175 *2.5.2. Superoxide radical scavenging activity*

176 Superoxide radicals were generated by the xanthine/ xanthine oxidase (X/XO) system
177 following a described procedure²⁷. The reaction mixture in the wells contained: 240 µl
178 of the following mixture (90 µM xanthine, 16 mM Na₂CO₃, 22.8 µM NBT in phosphate
179 buffer pH 7.0) was mixed with 30 µl sample. The reaction was initiated by the addition
180 of the enzyme (30 µl of xanthine oxidase 168 U/L) and the mixture was incubated for 2
181 min at 37 °C. Antioxidant activity was determined by monitoring the effect of the juice
182 on the reduction of NBT to the blue chromogen formazan by the superoxide radical
183 ($O_2^{\cdot -}$) at 560 nm: $RSC(\%) = [(Abs_{control} - Abs_{sample}) / Abs_{control}] \times 100$

184

185 *2.6. Antiproliferative activity in cancer cells*

186 The antiproliferative effects of PJ were screened through the MTT assay using HeLa
187 and PC-3 cells which are common models in screening techniques²⁵. HeLa cells were
188 grown in DMEM supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum and 1% penicillin-

streptomycin-glutamine. PC-3 cells were grown in F-12K medium with 10% fetal bovine serum and 1% penicillin-streptomycin. Cultures were incubated in the presence of 5% CO₂ at 37 °C and 100% relative humidified atmosphere. Cells were seeded in 96-well microplates at a density of 7 x 10³ cells/well and grown for 24 h at 37 °C. Cells were then treated with various concentrations of extract (0.001-1 mg/ml) for 72 h and a MTT solution was added and incubated for 3 h at 37 °C. Cell survival was measured as reduction of MTT into formazan at 550 nm in a microplate reader. Three experiments were performed.

2.7. Inhibition of enzymes with relevant pharmacological properties

The following enzymes were selected because they are pharmacological targets for anti-inflammatory, anti-hyperuricemic, cognitive-enhancing or antidepressant drugs.

2.7.1. Inhibition of cyclooxygenases (COX-1 and COX-2) by enzyme immunoassay (EIA)

The capacity of PJ to inhibit COX-1 (ovine) and COX-2 (human recombinant) was measured in terms of prostaglandin production using a commercial kit (Cayman, item No. 560131). Authors followed kit instructions. PJ was tested at two different concentrations (0.4 and 0.2 in the reaction mixture).

2.7.2. Inhibition of xanthine oxidase (XO)

The effect of the juice on xanthine oxidase was also evaluated by measuring the formation of uric acid from xanthine at 295 nm after 2 min. The wells contained the same components as described above in the xanthine/xanthine oxidase system but the reaction mixture did not contain 22.8 µM NBT.

2.7.3. Inhibition of acetylcholinesterase (AChE)

The activity was measured using a 96-microplate reader based on Ellman's method.²⁸ Each well contained 25 µl of 15 mM ATCI in Millipore water, 125 µl of 3mM DTNB in buffer C (50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8, 0.1 M NaCl, 0.02 M MgCl₂ 6 H₂O), 50 µl buffer B (50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8, 0.1% Bovine Serum), 25 µl juice in buffer A (50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8). The absorbance was read five times every 13 s for five times at 405 nm. Then, 25 µl 0.22 U/ml AChE were added and the absorbance was measured again eight times every 13 s at 405 nm.

219 2.7.4. *Inhibition of monoamine oxidase A (MAO-A)*

220 The bioassay was performed in a 96-well microplate (Olsen et al., 2008)²⁹. Each well
221 contained 50 µl juice (or appropriate solvent as control), 50 µl chromogenic solution
222 (0.8 mM vanillic acid, 417 mM 4-aminoantipyrine and 4 U/ml horseradish peroxidase
223 in potassium phosphate buffer pH 7.6), 100 µl 3 mM tyramine and 50 µl 8 U/ml MAO-
224 A. Absorbance was read at 490 nm every 5 min for 30 min. Background interferences
225 were deducted as the same way described above but without MAO enzyme. Data were
226 analyzed using GraphPad to obtain IC₅₀ values.

227

228 2.8. *Statistical analysis*

229 Results are expressed as mean ± standard error of experiments performed in triplicates.
230 Data analysis was performed using GraphPad Prism version 5. ANOVA and appropriate
231 post hoc tests were run with data depending on the type of experiments.

232

233 **3. Results**

234

235 3.1. *Phytochemical analysis of the extract by HPLC and polyphenol content*

236 Polyphenol content was measured by Folin-Ciocalteu method expressed as gallic acid
237 equivalents (GAE). Our PJ contained 25.6 ± 0.9 µg GAE / mg of lyophilized
238 pomegranate juice. *Punica granatum* juice was also analyzed by HPLC-DAD and two
239 main peaks were detected at 254 nm. The main peaks at 1.1 min and 11.8 min were
240 respectively identified as punicalagins and ellagic acid comparing retention times and
241 UV-visible spectra with standards acquired in Sigma (Figure 1).

242

243 3.2. *Protective effects of pomegranate juice against hydrogen peroxide induced toxicity*
244 *in Artemia salina*

245 As shown in Figure 2, PJ increased survival of *Artemia salina* nauplii compared to 0.4
246 g/L hydrogen peroxide at 24, 48 and 72 hours. Hydrogen peroxide at 0.4 g/l induced
247 significant toxicity at different times of the study; however, co-treatment of nauplii with

doses of 1 to 0.25 mg/ml enhances survival up to 80 - 100 % in the first 48h. At 72 h the percentage of *Artemia salina* survival decreases being significant only the doses of 1 mg/ml. PJ was not toxic in the range 0.001-1mg/ml (data not shown).

251

3.3. Protective effects of pomegranate juice against hydrogen peroxide induced toxicity in HepG2 cells

Figure 3 shows that treating HepG2 cells with 500 μ M of hydrogen peroxide for 1 hour reduced cell survival to 57.7 % compared to control. However, pre-incubation of cells with pomegranate juice at a dose of 31.25 μ g/ml for 24 hours significantly increased cell viability by almost 20 % (percentage of cell survival was 78%). PJ was not toxic in the range 0.001-0.031 mg/ml in HepG2 cells. Cell viability of HepG2 was slightly reduced at higher doses (data not shown); for this reason hepatoprotective activity in HepG2 was screened at low non cytotoxic doses.

261

3.4. Antioxidant activity in cell free systems

The DPPH radicals scavenging effects of PJ and ellagic acid are shown in Figure 4. The antioxidant activity of PJ and ellagic acid is concentration dependent. IC₅₀ values were also calculated using a nonlinear regression (one phase association) with GraphPad Prism. IC₅₀ values were 23 μ g/ml for PJ and 13 μ g/mg for ellagic acid, which indicates that PJ antioxidant activity is at least in part due to the presence of this polyphenol in the juice.

Figure 5 shows the antioxidant effect of PJ and ellagic acid on superoxide radical, being concentration dependent. The procedure to calculate IC₅₀ values was the same as DPPH method. IC₅₀ values in this case were 8 μ g/ml for PJ and 12 μ g/mg for ellagic acid but significant differences between the juice and ellagic acid were not detected.

273

3.5. Antiproliferative activity in cancer cells

Pomegranate juice showed dose dependent antiproliferative effects in both HeLa (cervical cancer) and PC3 (prostate cancer) cells (Figure 6). Significant differences were detected at doses over 0.125 mg/ml in HeLa whereas statistically significant differences

in PC-3 cells were detected at lower doses (0.031 mg/ml), which indicate that this cell line seems to be more sensitive to pomegranate constituents. Cell viability was similar (close to 40 %) at the highest tested dose in both cell types.

3.6. Inhibition of enzymes with relevant pharmacological properties

3.6.1. Inhibition of COX-1 and COX-2

As shown in Figure 7, concentrations of 0.4 and 0.2 mg/ml of PJ induced COX-2 inhibition of about 60% and 25% respectively. According to our data a dose-dependent effect is observed; However, PJ did not show activity on the COX-1 isoform (data not shown).

3.6.2. Inhibition of XO and AChE

The extract did not exert activity against these enzymes (data not shown).

3.6.3 Inhibition of MAO-A

Due to the fact that PJ showed a clear dose dependent MAO-A inhibition compared to other enzymes, the effects of ellagic acid and the selective MAO-A inhibitor clorgyline were studied. PJ, ellagic acid and clorgyline inhibition of MAO-A is shown in Figure 8. IC₅₀ values were also calculated using a nonlinear regression with GraphPad Prism. IC₅₀ were 69.5 µg/ml for PJ, 0.705 µg/ml for ellagic acid and 0.024 µg/ml for clorgyline.

4. Discussion

Pomegranate juices and products are widely considered as a natural source of different antioxidant compounds and some studies support these claims. The antioxidant activity of this fruit is generally attributed to phytochemicals of the polyphenol type³⁰.

In our phytochemical study, total polyphenols were 25.6 ± 0.9 µg GAE / mg of lyophilized pomegranate juice (approximately 3000 mg/L), highlighting the presence of ellagic acid and punicalagins. According to the HPLC-DAD analysis, the main

polyphenolic compound was ellagic acid, followed by punicalagins. This result demonstrates that the PJ used in this study may be a good source of phenolic compounds; however, other research works show different levels of polyphenols (from 144 to 10,086 mg GAE/ L)^{31,32}. These differences may be due to the origin of the fruit, the juice manufacturing method or how polyphenols were quantified.

The protective effects of pomegranate juice (PJ) against toxicity induced by hydrogen peroxide were measured using living organisms such as *Artemia salina* and a cellular model based on HepG2 cells. In both cases, the juice showed significant differences versus cells or living organisms exposed to the oxidant agent. The authors performed experiments with the juice as a co-treatment with hydrogen peroxide in the case of *Artemia* and as a pretreatment in HepG2 cells with the aim of studying the protective effects against a common oxidant in this both situations. The highest protective effect was in the *Artemia salina* model of co-treatment, reaching an almost 100% survival of nauplii within 48 h. However, in HepG2 cells, the protective effect against hydrogen peroxide is 20% compared to control. This effect is consistent with other studies where oxidative stress was induced by tert-butyl hydroperoxide (t-BOOH) and treated with aqueous pomegranate seed extract³³. In this case, the reduction of toxicity enhances 21 % when cells were pretreated with 100 µg/mg of the extract.

In the cell free systems procedures, PJ has shown great ability to reduce free radicals. The antioxidant activity of ellagic acid in cell free systems was also measured because this compound is considered to be bioavailable after oral ingestion of pomegranate juice and first pass metabolism³⁴. The DPPH radical is widely used as a model to evaluate the antioxidant activity of compounds and extracts³⁵. PJ has shown an ability to reduce DPPH radicals in a clear dose dependent mode of action, with an IC₅₀ of 23 µg/ml. A recent study with pomegranate whole seed ethanolic extract (PSEE) showed antioxidant activity in the same range with an IC₅₀ of 95.6 µg/ml³⁶. In the DPPH method, IC₅₀ of ellagic acid was lower than PJ, and therefore it may be considered that part of PJ activity was due to ellagic acid. However, in the xanthine oxidase system, IC₅₀ values for ellagic acid and pomegranate were similar. These differences may be also due to the presence of other polyphenols, and also for the synergy of actions of these components. The xanthine oxidase system is a more relevant method of generating free radicals in biology as DPPH are artificial radicals that do not exist in physiological systems. As PJ

339 did not inhibit XO enzyme, we can conclude that the juice acts in this method only by
340 capturing the superoxide radical generated by the reaction of this enzyme. This
341 antioxidant activity is in accordance to other studies of XO and pomegranate juice³⁷.

342 In addition to the antioxidant activity, PJ has shown antiproliferative activity in cancer
343 cells, referenced in several studies. In this study, authors evaluated the antiproliferative
344 activity using the MTT assay in HeLa and PC-3 cells, which are common models in
345 screening techniques. PJ showed dose dependent antiproliferative effects in both cell
346 cultures. Cell viability was close to 40 % at the highest tested dose in both cell types.
347 Other studies have reported better results in terms of antiproliferative or cytotoxic
348 effects in cancer cell lines, where cell survival drops to 20% for both cells types too,
349 with a treatment of pomegranate extract^{36,38}. These differences may be explained due to
350 the fact that many studies are performed with concentrated and purified extracts, where
351 as our study was done with a commercially available pomegranate juice. In this sense,
352 in a recent study, other authors obtained significant differences in proliferation of PC-3
353 cells between pomegranates peel extracts and seeds extracts, being almost four times
354 higher the activity of the first extract³⁹. These antiproliferative effects on tumor cells
355 could be explained by the inhibition of protein kinase A, which is altered in some kind
356 of cancers and dietary polyphenols may act as protein kinase A inhibitors⁴⁰.

357 Furthermore, our study reveals that PJ may also inhibits other enzymes with relevant
358 pharmacological properties. The inhibition of cyclooxygenases was performed by an
359 EIA procedure, having only significant differences on the inhibition of COX-2, which is
360 a key enzyme for the conversion of arachidonic into prostaglandins, important
361 inflammatory mediators. Among both isoenzymes, COX-2 is relevant in inflammatory
362 processes, whereas COX-1 is believed to have more physiological effects. This is
363 correlated with the studies where the extract of pomegranate fruit indicated a selective
364 inhibition of COX-2^{41,42}.

365 Finally, PJ also showed inhibitory effects on MAO-A, which is a key enzyme in
366 neurotransmitters metabolism, involved in deamination of catecholamines and
367 serotonin; inhibition of MAO-A may lead to antidepressant and anxiolytic effects and
368 pomegranate juice caused MAO-A inhibition in a dose dependent manner, which could
369 be a mechanism involved in the antidepressant activity of pomegranate reported in mice
370 in previous works^{43,44,45}.

371 As a conclusion, this study reveals that certain pomegranate products or beverages are
372 an interesting source of phytochemicals with antioxidant, antiproliferative,
373 antiinflammatory or mood enhancing properties and therefore may have beneficial
374 effects in human health. This work may help to elucidate mechanisms of action
375 involved in properties that have been observed in previous animal or human studies
376 performed with pomegranate products.

377

378

379 **Acknowledgements**

380 Andre Mazzari and Mukish Hanafi from University College London-School of
381 Pharmacy are thanked for technical support with HepG2 and PC-3 cells. Dr. Olga Abián
382 from Institute of Biocomputation and Physics of Complex Systems (BIFI) is thanked for
383 providing HeLa cells. Miguel Ángel Céspedes from CITA-Aragón is gratefully
384 acknowledged for lyophilization of the juice.

385

386 **Conflict of interests**

387 The authors declare no competing financial interests.

388

389 **Figures**

390
391 **Figure 1.** HPLC profile of pomegranate juice at 254 nm. Punicalagins (1.148 min) and
392 ellagic acid (11.821 min) were identified comparing retention times and UV-visible
393 spectra with standards analysed by the same method.

394

396

397 Figure 2. Protective effects of pomegranate juice (PJ) on hydrogen peroxide induced
 398 toxicity in *Artemia salina*. ### Significant differences ($P < 0.001$) were observed between
 399 control and H₂O₂ (0.4 g/l) samples at 24, 48 and 72 hours. *** Significant differences (P
 400 < 0.001) also were observed between H₂O₂ and H₂O₂+PJ samples at 24 and 48 h. At 72
 401 h only 1 mg/ml of PJ has protective effect with significant difference** ($P < 0.01$)
 402 compared to H₂O₂ samples. Significant differences were calculated through ANOVA
 403 and Dunnett's Multiple Comparison Test.

404

405

406 Figure 3. Protective effects of pomegranate juice (PJ) on hydrogen peroxide induced
407 toxicity in HepG2 cells. Results are expressed as % of cellular survival in terms of MTT
408 reduction. * $p < 0.05$ versus cells exposed to 500 mM hydrogen peroxide (ANOVA and
409 Newman Keuls Multiple comparison test). Concentration of pomegranate juice is
410 expressed in $\mu\text{g/ml}$.

411

Figure 4. Antioxidant activity of pomegranate juice (PJ) and ellagic acid against DPPH radicals. IC₅₀ values were calculated by non linear regression (23 μ g/ml for PJ and 13 μ g/mg for ellagic acid).

Figure 5. Antioxidant activity of pomegranate juice (PJ) and ellagic acid against superoxide radicals generated by the xanthine/xathine oxidase method. IC₅₀ values were calculated by non-linear regression (8 μ g/ml for PJ and 12 μ g/mg for ellagic acid). There were no significant differences between IC₅₀ values of pomegranate juice (PJ) and ellagic acid (Student t test)

424

425

426 Figure 6. Antiproliferative effects of pomegranate juice on HeLa (human cervix
427 adenocarcinoma) and PC-3 (human prostate cancer) cells expressed as % of cell
428 survival (% MTT reduction). * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ versus control (non treated cells).
429 Significant differences were calculated through ANOVA and Dunnett's Multiple
430 Comparison Test. Concentrations of pomegranate juice extract on the X axis are
431 expressed as mg/ml.

432

433 Figure 7. Inhibition of COX-2 by pomegranate juice. Significant differences compared
 434 to control exist for 0.4 mg/ml ($P < 0.01$) and 0.2 mg/ml ($P < 0.05$). Significant
 435 differences were calculated through ANOVA and Dunnett's Multiple Comparison Test.

436

437 Figure 8. MAO-A inhibition profile of pomegranate juice (PJ), ellagic acid and the
 438 selective inhibitor clorgyline. Data and IC_{50} values were calculated using non-linear
 439 regression representing log C inhibitor in X axis and percentage of enzyme inhibition on
 440 Y axis.

441

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