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Opinion Article

Exploring Enzymatic Hydrolysis: A Solution to Food Allergen Sensitivity

Riordan Sahu*

Department of Food Allergens, University College Dublin, Ireland

DESCRIPTION

Food allergies have become a growing concern worldwide, affecting millions of individuals and prompting extensive research to moderate their impact. Among the various strategies explored to reduce the allergenicity of food proteins, enzymatic hydrolysis combined with processing has gained attention. This approach purposes to break down allergenic proteins into smaller peptides, potentially reducing their ability to elicit an allergic response while maintaining the nutritional quality and sensory properties of the food. This article delves into the impact of enzymatic hydrolysis combined with processing on the food.

Understanding food allergens

Food allergens are proteins present in certain foods that can trigger an abnormal immune response in susceptible individuals. Common food allergens include proteins from peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, wheat, soy, fish, and shellfish. The allergic reaction can range from mild symptoms such as hives and itching to severe, life-threatening reactions like anaphylaxis. The allergenicity of a protein is influenced by various factors, including its structure, stability, and digestibility. Allergenic proteins typically possess specific structural features that facilitate their recognition by the immune system, leading to an allergic response. These proteins can resist degradation by digestive enzymes in the gastrointestinal tract, allowing them to reach the immune cells and trigger an allergic reaction.

Enzymatic hydrolysis and allergenicity reduction

Enzymatic hydrolysis involves the use of proteolytic enzymes to break down proteins into smaller peptides. This process can disrupt the structural integrity of allergenic proteins, potentially reducing their allergenicity. By cleaving peptide bonds, enzymes such as proteases can generate peptide fragments with altered immunoreactivity, thereby mitigating their ability to provoke an allergic response. Several studies have investigated the effectiveness of enzymatic hydrolysis in reducing the allergenicity of various food allergens. For example, researchers have examined the hydrolysis of proteins from peanuts, which are tarnished for causing severe allergic reactions. By subjecting peanut proteins to enzymatic treatment, researchers observed a decrease in allergenicity as measured by allergen-specific Immunoglobulin E (IgE) binding assays and skin prick tests.

Processing techniques for allergen reduction

In addition to enzymatic hydrolysis, various processing techniques can further enhance the reduction of allergenicity in food allergens. These techniques include heat treatment, pressure processing, and fermentation, each of which can modify protein structures and potentially decrease their allergenic properties. Heat treatment, such as cooking or pasteurization, can denature proteins and disrupt their allergenic epitopes, rendering them less recognizable to the immune system. Similarly, pressure processing techniques like High-Pressure Processing (HPP) can induce changes in protein conformation, leading to reduced allergenicity. Fermentation involves the action of microorganisms on food substrates, leading to biochemical changes that can affect the allergenicity of proteins. During fermentation, proteolytic enzymes produced by microorganisms can degrade allergenic proteins, thereby reducing their allergenic potential.

Combined approaches for allergen reduction

While enzymatic hydrolysis and processing techniques can individually contribute to allergen reduction, combining these approaches may yield synergistic effects. By applying enzymatic hydrolysis followed by processing steps, researchers aim to maximize the reduction of allergenic proteins while preserving the nutritional quality and sensory attributes of the food product. For example, researchers have explored the combination of enzymatic hydrolysis with heat treatment to produce hypoallergenic food ingredients. By subjecting allergenic proteins to enzymatic hydrolysis followed by heat treatment, researchers observed a significant decrease in allergenicity compared to untreated proteins.

Correspondence to: Riordan Sahu, Department of Food Allergens, University College Dublin, Ireland, E-mail: sahu56@gmail.com

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Challenges and considerations

Despite the potential benefits of enzymatic hydrolysis combined with processing in reducing allergen city, several challenges need to be addressed. One concern is the risk of generating new allergenic epitopes or aeroallergens during enzymatic hydrolysis, which could potentially increase the allergen city of the product. Furthermore, the selection of appropriate enzymes and processing conditions is critical to ensure effective allergen reduction without compromising the nutritional integrity of the food. Researchers must also consider factors such as enzyme specificity, reaction kinetics, and the potential impact of processing on food texture and flavour.

Enzymatic hydrolysis combined with processing offers a promising approach to reduce the allergenicity of food allergens. By breaking down allergenic proteins into smaller peptides and applying processing techniques to further modify their structure, researchers aim to develop hypoallergenic food ingredients that are safe for individuals with food allergies. While challenges remain in optimizing enzymatic hydrolysis and processing conditions, ongoing research efforts continue to explore innovative strategies for allergen reduction. By advancing our understanding of the interaction between enzymatic hydrolysis, processing techniques, and allergen city, we can develop safer and more inclusive food products for consumers with food allergies.