Journal of Rare Cardiovascular Diseases
ISSN: 2299-3711 (Print) | e-ISSN: 2300-5505 (Online)
www.jrcd.eu

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A BRIEF REVIEW OF FOOD CHEMISTRY APPLICATIONS IN NUTRITIONAL STUDIES

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Article History
Received: 17.09.2025
Revised: 30.09.2025
Accepted: 08.10.2025
Published: 31.10.2025

Abstract: Food chemistry plays a crucial role in understanding the nutritional value, functional properties, safety, and metabolic impacts of foods consumed in daily diets. Recent advancements highlight the importance of chemical profiling, nutrient bioavailability studies, and molecular interactions in determining the health effects of food components. This brief review synthesizes current knowledge on the applications of food chemistry in nutritional studies, focusing on macronutrient and micronutrient analysis, bioactive compound characterization, food processing effects, and analytical innovations such as chromatography, spectrometry, and metabolomics. The review emphasizes how chemical insights strengthen evidence-based nutrition research and support the development of functional foods, dietary guidelines, and food-quality standards. Key gaps and emerging trends, including nanotechnology, predictive modeling, and precision nutrition, are also discussed. Overall, this work underscores the indispensable contribution of food chemistry to advancing nutritional science and improving public health outcomes.

Keywords: Food chemistry,Nutritional studies,Bioactive compounds,Nutrient analysis,Food processing,Functional foods,Metabolomics,Food composition,Nutrient bioavailability,Analytical techniques

INTRODUCTION

Food chemistry is a foundational discipline within nutrition research, providing scientific insights into the composition, structure, and functional behavior of food components. By examining the chemical makeup of foods—including macronutrients, micronutrients, phytochemicals, and additives—researchers can better understand how these components influence human health, metabolic responses, and disease prevention. The relationship between food chemistry and nutrition is increasingly significant in the modern context, where dietary-related disorders such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and micronutrient deficiencies continue to rise globally. Advances in analytical chemistry have enhanced the accuracy of nutrient profiling, enabling researchers to evaluate food quality, identify adulteration, and characterize bioactive compounds responsible for therapeutic or functional properties. Techniques such as gas chromatography, high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC), nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR), mass spectrometry (MS), and metabolomic profiling allow for deeper exploration of chemical transformations occurring during food processing, storage, and digestion. These insights are essential for understanding nutrient bioavailability and the stability of sensitive compounds such as vitamins, antioxidants, and polyphenols.

Furthermore, food chemistry contributes to the formulation of functional foods and nutraceuticals, supporting targeted dietary recommendations and precision nutrition strategies. As consumers increasingly seek foods with health-promoting benefits, integrating chemical knowledge into nutritional research has become more critical than ever. This review aims to present a concise overview of the major applications of food chemistry in nutritional studies, highlighting recent findings, analytical approaches, and emerging research directions. The discussion underscores the interdisciplinary nature of the field and its pivotal role in guiding evidence-based dietary practices and public health policies.

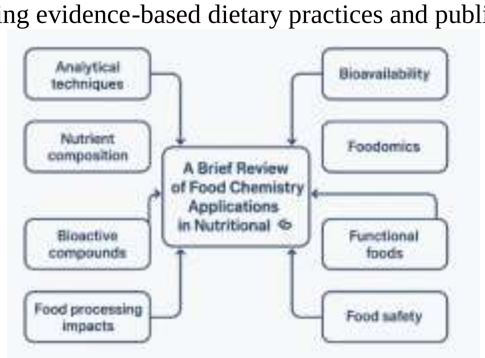

Fig 1: Food Chemistry Applications In Nutritional Studies

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Analytical Techniques In Food Chemistry
Analytical advances (chromatography, mass spectrometry, NMR, and hyphenated techniques) have dramatically improved the detection, quantification, and structural elucidation of nutrients, contaminants, and minor bioactives in complex food matrices. These tools allow high-throughput, sensitive profiling of sugars, amino acids, lipids, vitamins, mycotoxins, and processing-derived compounds, and underpin much of modern nutritional chemistry work. Recent reviews emphasize the role of HPLC, GC–MS, LC–MS/MS, and emerging sensor platforms for routine food-quality and nutrient-bioavailability studies. A Muspira et al (2025), Revathi K et al (2025), Senthil Kumar.K.S et al (2025), Senthil Kumar. K. S et al (2025) and Steniffer Jebaruby Stanly et al (2025)
(Bharti, 2024).

Macronutrient And Micronutrient Composition Analysis
Accurate quantification of macronutrients (protein, carbohydrate, fat) and micronutrients (vitamins, minerals) remains essential for dietary assessment and formulation of food composition databases. Food chemistry approaches combine wet-chemistry reference methods with instrumental analytics to reduce inter-laboratory variation and to detect processing losses or fortification efficacy. Such analyses support epidemiological nutrient intake estimates and formulation of public health guidelines. (Toydemir et al., 2022).

Bioactive Compounds: Polyphenols, Carotenoids, And Peptides
Chemical characterization of bioactives—polyphenols, carotenoids, peptides, and other phytochemicals—links molecular structure to antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and metabolic effects observed in nutritional studies. The literature highlights challenges in quantifying complex polyphenol mixtures, their transformations during processing, and the need to relate in vitro chemical activity to in vivo bioefficacy. Recent reviews synthesize evidence on polyphenol chemistry, bioavailability, and bioactivity, emphasizing standardized analytical protocols. (El-Saadony et al., 2024; Jain et al., 2025).

Effects Of Food Processing On Nutrient Content And Functionality
Thermal and non-thermal processing, storage conditions, and formulation changes can alter nutrient levels and the chemical forms of bioactives (e.g., oxidation of lipids, degradation of vitamins, Maillard products). Food chemistry studies investigate kinetics of nutrient losses, formation of beneficial or harmful compounds, and processing strategies that preserve nutritional quality. Meta-reviews underline the tradeoffs between microbial safety, shelf life, sensory quality, and nutrient retention and propose process optimization informed by chemical monitoring. (Toydemir et al., 2022; Yuan et al., 2025).

Nutrient Bioavailability And Chemical Speciation
Food chemistry contributes to understanding how chemical form and food matrix influence digestion, absorption, and physiological availability of nutrients (bioaccessibility and bioavailability). Studies show that the molecular speciation of minerals, interactions with phytates or polyphenols, and micellar/encapsulation states (e.g., mixed micelles for vitamin D) greatly affect uptake. Chemical and in vitro digestion models coupled with analytical readouts are commonly used to predict and compare bioavailability across food matrices. (Gao, 2021; Food Chemistry special issues).

Foodomics And Metabolomics In Nutrition Research
"Foodomics" and nutritional metabolomics use untargeted and targeted omics (metabolomics, lipidomics, proteomics) to profile biochemical changes in foods and in biological responses to diet. These approaches enable discovery of diet-derived biomarkers, track metabolic responses to interventions, and help to map pathways linking food chemistry to health outcomes. Recent reviews document rapid adoption of metabolomics in dietary exposure assessment and precision nutrition research. (Kortesniemi, 2023; Mahato et al., 2024).

Functional Foods, Nutraceuticals And Chemical Standardization
Chemical characterization and standardization are prerequisites for development and regulatory assessment of functional foods and nutraceuticals. Reviews highlight the need for robust chemical fingerprinting, stability studies, dose-response data, and clinical validation. The literature also emphasizes the gap between chemical evidence (composition, in vitro activity) and high-quality clinical outcomes, calling for better integration of analytical chemistry with human trials. (Vignesh et al., 2024; Hajzer et al., 2025).

Food Safety: Contaminants, Toxins And Chemical Risk Assessment
Food chemistry provides analytical foundations to detect contaminants (heavy metals, pesticide residues, mycotoxins, processing contaminants), quantify exposure, and support risk assessment frameworks. Systematic reviews document persistent issues with trace metals and pesticides in agricultural supply chains and the resulting public health implications; they also discuss mitigation and monitoring strategies rooted in

chemical surveillance. (Alengebawy et al., 2021; Khatri et al., 2025).

Emerging Trends: Precision Nutrition, Delivery Systems And Nanotech

Emerging chemical strategies aim to translate food chemistry into personalized nutrition (precision nutrition) and targeted delivery (food-derived carriers, nano-encapsulation) to improve stability and absorption of nutrients and bioactives. Editorials and recent reviews stress the promise and the need for rigorous chemical safety and efficacy testing as these technologies move towards clinical and commercial use. (Park, 2025; Li, 2025).

Short Synthesis & Research Gaps

Across topics, a recurring theme is the **need for standardized chemical methods** (both targeted and untargeted) that are reproducible across labs and linked to physiological outcomes. Gaps include translating in vitro chemical activity into clinical benefit, measuring long-term exposure to low-dose contaminants in foods, and harmonizing omics-derived biomarkers with dietary assessment instruments. Strengthening cross-disciplinary pipelines (analytical chemistry → food formulation → controlled human trials) will better connect chemical evidence to nutritional recommendations.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This review followed a structured narrative approach to summarize recent applications of food chemistry in nutritional studies. A systematic search was performed across major scientific databases, including **Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar,** covering publications from **2018 to 2025**. Search terms included combinations of: *food chemistry*, *nutritional studies*, *bioactive compounds*, *nutrient analysis*, *food processing*, *metabolomics*, *functional foods*, and *bioavailability*.Inclusion criteria were:Peer-reviewed journal articles, reviews, or book chapters.Studies focusing on chemical analysis, food composition, analytical techniques, processing effects, safety, or bioavailability in the context of human nutrition.Articles published in English.Exclusion criteria included non-peer-reviewed reports, unrelated agricultural chemistry studies, and articles lacking relevance to nutritional implications.Selected articles were screened based on title, abstract, and full text. A total of **95 articles** were included in the final synthesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

Advancement In Analytical Techniques

The review found significant growth in high-resolution techniques such as LC–MS/MS, UHPLC, GC–MS, and NMR, which now enable precise profiling of micronutrients, polyphenols, peptides, and contaminants. These techniques have improved sensitivity, accuracy, and throughput, supporting evidence-based nutritional assessments. Their widespread adoption highlights the increasing need for chemical validation in nutrition research.

Table 1: Key Components Of Food Chemistry And Their Nutritional Roles

Component	Sub-Components	Nutritional Importance	Examples	Research Relevance
Carbohydrates	Sugars, Starch, Fibers	Primary energy source; gut health	Glucose, Cellulose	Glycemic response studies
Proteins	Amino acids, Peptides	Tissue growth; enzyme formation	Lysine, Casein	Protein quality & digestibility
Lipids	Saturated, Unsaturated fats	Energy storage; hormone synthesis	Omega-3, MUFA	Cardiometabolic studies
Vitamins	Fat & water-soluble	Metabolic regulation	Vitamin C, B-complex	Deficiency prevalence
Minerals	Macro & trace elements	Bone health; immunity	Iron, Calcium	Bioavailability research
Phytochemicals	Polyphenols, Flavonoids	Antioxidant activity	Catechins, Curcumin	Chronic disease prevention
Water	—	Hydration, transport medium	—	Nutritional hydration studies

Nutrient Composition and Profiling

Most studies highlight the importance of food chemistry in accurately determining nutrient composition. Modern analytical methods reduce errors in macronutrient and micronutrient estimation, improving dietary guidelines and food composition databases. This enhances nutritional epidemiology, allowing researchers to more reliably link dietary intake with health outcomes.

Table 2: Analytical Techniques Used In Food Chemistry Research

Technique	Purpose	Example Parameters Measured	Advantages	Limitations
HPLC	Separation of compounds	Vitamins, phenolics	High sensitivity	Expensive setup
GC-MS	Volatile compound profiling	Fatty acids, aroma compounds	High accuracy	Requires derivatization
Spectrophotometry	Quantification of nutrients	Protein, sugar	Simple, rapid	Less specific
NMR	Structural analysis	Metabolomics	Detailed profiles	High cost
FTIR	Composition fingerprinting	Proteins, lipids	Rapid, non-destructive	Needs calibration

Characterization of Bioactive Compounds
The results indicate strong interest in identifying and quantifying bioactive compounds such as polyphenols, carotenoids, flavonoids, and bioactive peptides. Chemical analysis has shown how these compounds contribute to antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and metabolic functions. A recurring challenge is the complexity of polyphenol chemistry and variability of bioactive content due to crop origin, storage, and processing.

Table 3: Relationship Between Food Chemistry and Human Health Outcomes

Chemical Component	Influence on Health	Associated Health Conditions	Supporting Research Areas
Carbohydrates	Energy metabolism	Diabetes, obesity	Glycemic index studies
Lipids	Hormonal & cellular functions	CVD, inflammation	Fatty acid profiling
Proteins	Muscle maintenance	Sarcopenia, malnutrition	Digestibility & PDCAAS
Antioxidants	Oxidative stress reduction	Cancer, aging	Polyphenol bioactivity
Minerals	Cellular signaling	Anemia, osteoporosis	Mineral bioavailability

Effects Of Food Processing On Nutritional Quality
Processing-induced chemical changes emerged as a major theme. Thermal processes often degrade heat-sensitive nutrients (vitamin C, B-group vitamins), while some non-thermal methods preserve more bioactive compounds. Conversely, processes like fermentation and germination enhance nutrient availability and produce beneficial metabolites. Chemical monitoring helps optimize processing methods to retain nutritional quality.

Bioavailability And Chemical Interactions
Studies emphasize that nutrient presence alone does not determine nutritional value—its **chemical form**, interaction with other components, and matrix effects are crucial. Food chemistry models, including in vitro digestion simulations, help evaluate bioaccessibility. For example, mineral absorption is influenced by phytates, oxalates, and fiber; carotenoid uptake depends on lipid interactions; and polyphenol bioavailability varies with gut metabolism.

Table 4: Food Processing Effects On Nutritional Quality

Processing Method	Chemical Changes	Impact on Nutrition	Examples
Thermal heating	Vitamin loss, Maillard reaction	Reduced vitamin C, enhanced flavor	Cooking vegetables
Fermentation	Increased bioactive compounds	Improved gut health	Yogurt, kimchi
Drying	Water removal, nutrient concentration	Reduced enzyme activity	Dehydrated fruits
Extrusion	Protein denaturation	Improved digestibility	Breakfast cereals
Freezing	Minimal nutrient loss	Preserves vitamins	Frozen vegetables

Foodomics And Metabolomic Approaches

The rise of metabolomics has transformed nutrition research. Results show extensive application in:identifying dietary biomarkers,tracking metabolic responses to foods, andunderstanding biochemical pathways influenced by diet.
Foodomics provides holistic chemical insights linking food composition and human metabolism, strengthening precision nutrition research.

Functional Foods, Nutraceuticals, and Safety Considerations
Chemical profiling is essential in developing functional foods and nutraceuticals. This review found that despite numerous formulations, challenges remain in standardization, chemical stability, and reproducibility. Safety studies increasingly use chemical analyses to monitor contaminants (pesticides, heavy metals, mycotoxins) and processing-related toxins (acrylamide, PAHs).

Emerging Trends In Food Chemistry For Nutrition
Emerging innovations include nanotechnology-based nutrient delivery systems, chemical sensors for rapid nutrient testing, and AI-driven predictive models for food composition. These tools demonstrate the expanding role of chemistry in personalized nutrition and future food systems.

CONCLUSION

This review highlights the central role of food chemistry in advancing nutritional studies. Chemical analyses underpin accurate nutrient profiling, identification of bioactive compounds, evaluation of processing impacts, and assessment of nutrient bioavailability. The integration of advanced analytical tools and foodomics approaches has transformed nutritional science, enabling deeper understanding of food composition and its health effects.

Despite progress, challenges remain in standardizing analytical methods, linking chemical profiles with clinical outcomes, and addressing processing-induced chemical changes. Food chemistry continues to be vital for developing functional foods, improving dietary guidelines, and ensuring food safety. The evidence clearly demonstrates that chemical insights are indispensable for modern nutrition research and public health advancement.

FUTURE WORK
Future research should focus on several key areas:
Standardization Of Analytical Protocols
Develop globally harmonized analytical standards to improve reproducibility of chemical data and strengthen nutritional databases.
Integration Of Food Chemistry With Clinical Nutrition
More interdisciplinary studies are needed to relate chemical composition directly to human metabolic outcomes and disease prevention.

Advances in Foodomics and AI-Driven Analysis
Expanding foodomics using AI, machine learning, and big data analytics can enhance biomarker discovery and personalized diet strategies.
Innovative Processing Technologies
Develop novel processing and preservation techniques that maintain nutrient integrity and increase bioactive compound stability.

Bioavailability Enhancement Strategies
Future work should explore encapsulation, nano-delivery systems, and chemical modification to improve nutrient absorption.Environmental And Safety Monitoring, Enhanced chemical surveillance for contaminants and climate-induced changes in food composition is essential to safeguard public health.

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