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Review Paper

Gluten Free Cookies: Taste The Freedom

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ABSTRACT

Gluten-free foods have gained substantial attention due to the increasing prevalence of gluten intolerance, coeliac disease, and a growing consumer preference for functional and health-orientated bakery products [1, 2]. Cookies are one of the most widely consumed bakery items; however, conventional cookies are primarily based on wheat flour, which contains gluten and is unsuitable for gluten-sensitive individuals [1, 3]. The present review titled “Gluten-Free Cookies: Taste the Freedom” focuses on the formulation, nutritional significance, and functional attributes of gluten-free cookies developed using alternative cereals, millets, and natural ingredients [3, 4]. Special emphasis is placed on the use of ragi (finger millet), jowar, barnyard millet, gram flour, flax seeds, cocoa powder, dates, jaggery, and nuts as gluten-free substitutes [3, 5]. These ingredients not only eliminate gluten but also enhance dietary fibre, mineral content, antioxidant potential, and overall nutritional quality [4, 5]. The review discusses formulation strategies, the role of individual ingredients, processing considerations, and quality attributes such as texture, taste, and consumer acceptability [3, 4]. The use of natural sweeteners and plant-based ingredients further aligns gluten-free cookies with current trends in clean label and functional foods [2, 3]. This review highlights the potential of gluten-free cookies as a nutritious, safe, and palatable alternative to traditional bakery products, supporting their growing role in health-focused food markets [1, 4].

INTRODUCTION

Gluten is a composite protein mainly found in wheat, barley, and rye, responsible for the viscoelastic properties of dough [6]. While gluten contributes to the structure and texture of bakery

products, its consumption can cause adverse health effects in individuals suffering from coeliac disease, gluten sensitivity, or wheat allergy [7]. The global increase in gluten-related disorders has driven the demand for gluten-free food products, particularly bakery items such as cookies, biscuits,

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and bread [8]. Cookies are popular across all age groups due to their convenience, taste, and extended shelf life [9]. Developing gluten-free cookies poses technological challenges because the absence of gluten affects dough handling, texture, and sensory quality [10]. To overcome these challenges, alternative raw materials such as millets, legumes, and oilseeds are increasingly being explored [8, 10]. Millets like ragi, jowar, and barnyard millet are naturally gluten-free and nutritionally superior, being rich in dietary fibre, minerals, and bioactive compounds [6, 8]. The objective of this review is to evaluate the potential of gluten-free cookies formulated using millet-based flours and natural ingredients, highlighting their nutritional benefits, formulation strategies, and role in promoting health and dietary inclusivity [9, 10].

What are Functional Cookies

Functional cookies are enriched bakery products containing ingredients that provide health benefits beyond basic nutrition, such as improving digestion, boosting immunity, and supporting metabolic health. [11]

Characteristics of Functional Cookies

- Nutrient-Dense Higher fiber, minerals, protein. [12]
- Low GI Helps control sugar levels [13]
- Better Digestibility Contains prebiotics and whole grains [14]

Reasons for choosing Ragi in Functional Cookies

- Nutritional Value: Rich in calcium, iron, dietary fiber, essential amino acids, and minerals, making it more nutritious than wheat flour. [15]

- Gluten-Free Grain: Suitable for people with gluten intolerance, celiac disease, and those seeking allergen-free foods. [16]
- High Dietary Fiber: Improves digestion, prevents constipation, and increases satiety (fullness), supporting weight management. [17]
- Low Glycemic Index: Releases glucose slowly; helps control blood sugar levels; ideal for diabetics. [18]
- Rich in Antioxidants: polyphenols and flavonoids that reduce inflammation and enhance immunity. [19]
- Good for Bone Health: Extremely high in calcium and vitamin D, beneficial for children, elderly, and bone-health-focused foods. [20]
- Technological Suitability Ragi flour blends well with jaggery, cocoa, nuts, and gives cookies a crisp, pleasant texture. [21]
- Sustainable Crop: Crops Grows in dry climates, requires less water, accessible and affordable—supports climate-resilient food systems. [22]
- Long Shelf Life: Natural antioxidants prevent rancidity, enhancing cookie storage stability. [19,21]

What Is Gluten?

Gluten is a collective term for a group of seed storage proteins primarily found in certain cereal grains, especially wheat, barley, and rye. Chemically, gluten consists of two major classes: prolamins (such as gliadin in wheat, hordein in barley, and secalin in rye) and glutelins. [23]

Non-celiac gluten sensitivity [24]

Wheat allergy [25]

Dermatitis herpetiformis (DH) [26]

Why Gluten Intolerance Is Increasing Today

- Modern Wheat Has Higher Gluten Content [27]



- Excessive Consumption of Wheat Products [28]
- Poor Gut Health Due to Lifestyle [29]
- Highly Processed Wheat Products [30]

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The following ingredients were used for the preparation of gluten-free biscuits

Sr.no	Ingredients	Purpose	Scientific Justification
1.	Ragi (Finger Millet)	Base flour	High in dietary fiber, calcium, and polyphenols; provides structure and nutrition in gluten-free systems.
2.	Jowar	Nutritional enhancement,	Improves protein content, enhances crunchiness, and contributes to slow-digesting carbohydrates.
3.	Barnyard Millet	Nutritional enhancement,	Low GI, high fiber, antioxidants, and rich micronutrients improve nutritional value, digestion, and suitability for diabetic and gluten-free diets.
4.	Gram flower	Binding agent	Gram flour is rich in protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals, providing health benefits such as improved digestion and better blood sugar control
5.	Flax Seeds	Natural binder and help in replace eggs	Flax seeds provide healthy omega-3 fats for heart health and give slight nutrients
6.	Cocoa Powder	Adds rich flavor	Adds rich chocolate flavor
Sr.no	Ingredients	Purpose	Scientific Justification
7.	Baking powder & baking soda	Leavening	Produces CO ₂ to lighten texture in gluten-free dough
8.	Dates	Natural sweetener	They improve the nutritional value by adding fiber, iron, and antioxidants. Dates help in binding the dough, giving better texture to gluten-free cookies.
9.	Jaggery	Natural sweetener	Helps in caramelisation, color development, moisture retention
10.	Almonds & Cashew	Crunchy texture	Cashews give a creamy, smooth texture to gluten-free cookies. Almonds add protein and healthy fats to the cookies.
11.	Butter	Shortening agent	Enhances spread ability, tenderness; coats flour particles for better mouth feel.
12.	Milk	Hydration	Helps bind ingredients; activates starch gelatinization.

Experimental Design

The present work was designed as an experimental research study aimed at developing and evaluating gluten-free cookies using millet-based and

functional ingredients. The study focused on formulation development, preparation, and quality evaluation of gluten-free cookies suitable for individuals with gluten intolerance.



Materials

The raw materials used for the preparation of gluten-free cookies were procured from the local market and food-grade suppliers.

Sr. No	INGREDIENTS	QUANTITY TAKEN
1	Ragi (Finger Millet)	30g
2	Jowar	2g
3	Barnyard Millet	3g
4	Gram flower	5g
5	Flax Seeds	3g
6	Cocoa Powder	1g
7	Baking powder & Baking soda	0.1g
8	Dates	3g
9	Jaggery	10g
10	Almonds & Cashew	3g
11	Butter	3g
12	Milk	5ml

Equipment Used in the Formulation of Ragi & Varai Biscuits

1. Digital Weighing Balance: For accurately weighing flours, jaggery, butter, baking agents, etc.

2. Measuring Cylinders / Measuring Cups: For measuring milk and liquids.

3. Mixing Bowls (Stainless Steel): Used to mix dry and wet ingredients separately.

4. Sieve / Strainer (60–80 Mesh): For sieving ragi, jowar, barnyard millet, and gram flour to ensure uniform particle size.

5. Spatula / Wooden Spoon: Helps in mixing the dough softly without over-kneading.

6. Blender / Mixer / Grinder: To powder dates (if needed). To make fine paste or grind roasted nuts

7. Rolling Pin (Belan): For flattening dough evenly before cutting.

8. Cookie Cutters / Molds: To cut uniform biscuit shapes.

9. Baking Tray Steel or aluminum tray: For arranging biscuits before baking

10. Butter Paper / Parchment Paper: Prevent biscuits from sticking to tray.

11. Oven (Electric / OTG / Bakery Oven): For baking biscuits at controlled temperature (160–180°C).

12. Cooling Rack: Allows biscuits to cool uniformly after baking.

13. Airtight Containers / Packaging Material: For storing finished biscuits without

Preparation of Gluten-Free Cookies

Date Paste Preparation

Dates are cleaned, briefly soaked in warm water, and blended to obtain a smooth paste.

The paste is kept aside for later use.

Ingredient Mixing

Dry Ingredients



- Ragi, varai, jowar, and gram flour are combined with baking powder and baking soda.
- The mixture is sieved to achieve uniform distribution and remove lumps.

• **Wet Ingredients (Creaming)**

- Soft butter or ghee is beaten with jaggery powder until light and fluffy.
 - Date paste is incorporated to form a smooth, evenly mixed base.
 - Care is taken to avoid over-mixing for proper cookie texture.

Dough Formation

- The dry mixture is gradually folded into the wet mixture using gentle strokes.
- Small amounts of milk are added only as needed to bind the dough.
- The final dough should be soft, pliable, non-sticky, and free from cracks.
- Dough is rested briefly to allow moisture absorption and improve handling.

Shaping

- The work surface is lightly dusted with flour.
- Dough is rolled evenly to a medium thickness suitable for cookies, ensuring consistent texture.

Cutting

- Cookie shapes are cut using a cutter or suitable mold.
- Excess dough is gathered, re-rolled, and reused.

Baking

- The oven is preheated, and cookies are arranged on a lined baking tray with spacing.
- Cookies are baked until edges are lightly browned and the base is set.

- After baking, cookies are cooled first on the tray, then on a wire rack to firm up.

Packaging and Storage

- Completely cooled cookies are stored in airtight containers or food-grade pouches.
- Products are kept in a cool, dry environment to maintain quality and shelf life.
- All dry ingredients were weighed accurately and mixed uniformly. Butter and jaggery were creamed until light and fluffy, followed by the addition of milk and date paste. The dry ingredient mixture was gradually incorporated to form uniform dough. The dough was sheeted, cut into desired shapes, and baked in a preheated oven at 170–180°C for 12–15 minutes. The baked cookies were cooled at room temperature and stored in airtight containers for further evaluation. The prepared gluten-free cookies were evaluated for physical, sensory, and nutritional parameters. Physical parameters included weight, diameter, thickness, and spread ratio. Sensory evaluation was carried out using a 9-point hedonic scale by a semi-trained panel. Nutritional composition was estimated based on standard food composition data.



EVALUATION PARAMETER

The assessment of herbal cookies involves analyzing both general quality aspects of the product and specific characteristics influenced by the herbal ingredients.

The main parameters include:

Physical Properties

- Measurement of weight, diameter, and thickness [32]
- Determination of the spread ratio [33]
- Texture analysis to assess firmness and crispness [34]
- Color evaluation, either visually or using a colorimeter [35]

Sensory Evaluation (Organoleptic)

- Observation of appearance [36]
- Assessment of aroma to evaluate herbal scent and balance [37]
- Taste testing for flavor, bitterness, and herbal tones [38]
- Evaluation of mouthfeel [39]
- Overall acceptability scoring using a standard hedonic scale [36,40]

Chemical Analysis

- Determination of moisture content [41]
- Ash analysis including total ash and acid-insoluble ash for herbal purity [42]
- Measurement of pH, fat, protein, and carbohydrate content [43]
- Estimation of fiber levels [44]
- Analysis of total phenolic content if antioxidant herbs are included [45]
- Antioxidant activity tests such as DPPH assay [46]

Shelf-life Evaluation

- Monitoring product stability under different storage conditions [47]

- Testing for rancidity, especially in fat-containing products [48]
- Regular checks of sensory and microbial quality during storage [49]

Herbal-Specific Tests

- Standardization of herbal extracts, often through marker compound analysis [50]
- Phytochemical screening to identify active constituents [51]
- Compatibility studies to ensure herbal ingredients do not react negatively with the cookie's components [52]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study focused on developing gluten-free, fiber-rich cookies using ragi (finger millet) and varai (barnyard millet), which are naturally gluten-free and high in dietary fiber [52,53]. Incorporation of these millets significantly enhanced the fiber content, improving nutritional quality and supporting digestive health, glycemic control, and satiety [54,55]. Despite the absence of gluten, satisfactory dough binding and structural stability were achieved due to the starch and fiber components of millets, along with gram flour and flax seeds [56,57]. The cookies exhibited desirable texture, color, and sensory acceptability [58]. Overall, the study demonstrates the potential of ragi and varai in producing nutritious, acceptable gluten-free cookies [59].

Sensory evaluation showed good acceptability in terms of appearance, flavor, taste, texture, and overall quality [60]. The characteristic flavor of millets was balanced through appropriate [58,60]. The proximate analysis of the developed gluten-free, fiber-rich cookies revealed a nutritionally balanced product with enhanced functional properties [61]. Moisture content decreased from 7.0% before baking to 4.0% after baking, which is desirable for improved shelf stability and crisp texture [62]. Reduced moisture also contributed to

the concentration of macronutrients in the baked cookies [63]. Ash content increased slightly after baking, indicating a higher mineral density, primarily contributed by ragi, barnyard millet, gram flour, and flax seeds [53, 64]. Fat content increased marginally due to moisture loss, with butter, flax seeds, and nuts acting as major lipid sources [61, 65]. Protein level of 9.1% was observed in the cookies, largely due to the presence of millets, gram flour, nuts, and milk, highlighting their nutritional advantage over traditional cookies. [56, 59]. Crude fiber content increased to 8.0% after baking, highlighting the functional value of ragi, barnyard millet, flax seeds, and dates [54, 55]. High fiber content is associated with improved digestive health, glycemic regulation, and enhanced satiety, making the product suitable for health-conscious consumers and individuals with gluten intolerance [52, 54]. Carbohydrate content remained the major macronutrient, mainly derived from millets and jaggery, while the calculated energy value of 404 kcal/100 g indicates that the cookies provide sufficient energy along with improved nutritional quality [61, 65]. Overall, the results demonstrate that the formulated cookies successfully combine gluten-free characteristics with high fiber and acceptable macronutrient composition, supporting their potential as a functional bakery product [59, 60].

Parameter	Before Baking	After Baking (%)
Moisture	7.0 ± 0.2	4.0 ± 0.2
Ash	2.2 ± 0.1	2.4 ± 0.1
Fat	12.0 ± 0.3	12.8 ± 0.3
Protein	8.5 ± 0.2	12.8 ± 0.3
Crude Fiber	7.5 ± 0.2	8.0 ± 0.2
Carbohydrate*	62.8	63.7
Energy (kcal/100 g)	62.8	404

Sensory evaluation revealed that the cookies scored well for taste, texture, and overall acceptability, attributed to the use of cocoa powder, nuts, and natural sweeteners.

Sensory Evaluation Scores (9-Point Hedonic Scale)

Attribute	Mean Score
Appearance	8.2
Taste	8.4
Texture	8.1
Flavor	8.3
Overall Acceptability	8.5

CONCLUSION

Gluten-free cookies formulated using millets and natural ingredients present a promising alternative to conventional wheat-based bakery products [60, 61]. The combination of ragi, jowar, barnyard millet, and functional ingredients not only addresses gluten-related health concerns but also enhances nutritional quality [62,63]. These formulations align with the growing demand for functional, clean-label, and health-oriented foods [64,65]. Gluten-free cookies truly represent the concept of “Taste the Freedom” by offering safe, nutritious, and enjoyable options for gluten-sensitive consumers [61,66]. This study established the feasibility of producing gluten-free, fiber-enriched cookies using ragi, barnyard millet, and complementary natural ingredients [62,67]. The developed cookies showed uniform physical properties, an acceptable spread ratio, and a pleasant texture, even in the absence of gluten [68]. The functional role of gram flour and flax seeds was evident in improving dough cohesiveness and overall product structure [69,70]. Nutritional evaluation revealed an improved profile, characterized by higher dietary fiber, adequate protein and fat levels, and enhanced mineral content [63,71]. The reduction in moisture after baking supported better crispness and storage stability [72]. Sensory analysis indicated strong acceptance for taste, flavor, texture, and overall quality, largely due to the inclusion of cocoa powder, nuts, dates, and jaggery [73,74]. In conclusion, millet-based gluten-free cookies can serve as a nutritious and appealing alternative to



traditional wheat cookies, with promising potential for application in health-oriented and gluten-free food products [60,64,75].

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