

Chitosan-based electrospun nanofibers for encapsulating food bioactive

ingredients: A review

Roberto Castro-Muñoz^{1,2*}, Mohammad Saeed Kharazmi³, Seid Mahdi Jafari^{4,5,6*}

¹Gdansk University of Technology, Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Department of Sanitary Engineering, 11/12 Narutowicza St., 80-233, Gdansk, Poland

²Tecnologico de Monterrey, Campus Toluca. Av. Eduardo Monroy Cárdenas 2000 San Antonio Buenavista, 50110, Toluca de Lerdo, Mexico

³Faculty of Medicine, University of California, Riverside, CA 92679, USA

⁴Department of Food Materials and Process Design Engineering, Gorgan University of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, Gorgan, Iran.

⁵Universidade de Vigo, Nutrition and Bromatology Group, Department of Analytical Chemistry and Food Science, Faculty of Science, E-32004 Ourense, Spain

⁶College of Food Science and Technology, Hebei Agricultural University, Baoding, 071001, China

*Corresponding authors:

food.biotechnology88@gmail.com (R. Castro-Muñoz)

smjafari@gau.ac.ir (S. M. Jafari)

27 **Abstract**

28 Today, society has been more aware of healthy food products and related items containing bioactive
29 compounds, which potentially contribute to human health. Unfortunately, the long-term stability and
30 bioactivity of biologically active compounds against environmental factors compromise their target
31 and effective action. In this way, lab-designed vehicles, such as nanoparticles and nanofibers, provide
32 enough properties for their preservation and suitable delivery. Here, the electrospinning technique
33 acts as an effective pathway for fabricating and designing nanofibers for the entrapments of
34 biomolecules, in which several biopolymers such as proteins, polysaccharides (e.g., maltodextrin,
35 agarose, chitosan), silk, among others, can be used as a wall material. It is likely that chitosan is one
36 of the most employed biomaterials in this field. Therefore, in this review, we reveal the latest
37 advances (over the last 2-3 years) in designing chitosan-based electrospun nanofibers and
38 nanocarriers for encapsulation of bioactive compounds, along with the key applications in smart food
39 packaging as well. Key findings and relevant breakthroughs are a priority in this review to provide a
40 cutting-edge analysis of the literature. Finally, particular attention has been paid to the most promising
41 developments.

42 **Keywords:** Polysaccharides; delivery systems; nutraceuticals.

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53 **Abbreviations:**

54 AOP: antioxidant peptide

55 CGA: chlorogenic acid

56 CS: chitosan

57 DES: Deep eutectic solvent

58 EE: encapsulation efficiency

59 ENs: electrospun nanofibers

60 ES: electrospinning

61 FXM: flaxseed mucilage

62 GA: gum Arabic

63 HNTs: halloysite nanotubes

64 HP β CD: hydroxypropyl- β -cyclode

65 NFs: Nanofibers

66 PCL: poly(ϵ -caprolactone)

67 PEO: poly(ethylene oxide)

68 PLA: poly lactic acid

69 PVA: polyvinyl alcohol

70 WVP: water vapor permeability

71 XG: xanthan gum

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79 1. Introduction

80 The production of healthy products and related items enriched with bioactive compounds (bioactives)
81 is a primary concern for the food industries to meet the healthy diet of customers, who desire to
82 improve their habits and health. However, most of **the** bioactives (phenolic compounds, terpenoids,
83 phytosterols, peptides, capsaicinoids, carotenoids, alkaloids, among many others) present fast and
84 easy reactivity with external agents [1–3], such as humidity, temperature, among other environmental
85 conditions, compromising their long-term stability, bioactivity, and bioavailability; **thus**, less
86 effectiveness in the target action. **Scientists** seek for new methods and strategies to preserve such
87 compounds for a longer time and maintain their bioactivity. Today, lab-designed vehicles, such as
88 nanoparticles and nanofibers, confer a suitable environment for their preservation once such
89 molecules are encapsulated and thus providing efficient delivery as well [4].

90 Dealing with the different methods of encapsulating, electrospinning (ES), as **any** electrodynamic
91 technique, stands out as one of the most promising for protecting bioactives since does not use high
92 temperatures [5,6]. As part of its mechanism of operation, it uses a high-voltage electric field on the
93 jet of a polymer solution[7]. In this way, the resulting electrospun fibers may present either nano or
94 microstructure with high porosity, large area and interconnected pore structure, and enhanced thermal
95 stability [8,9]. Thanks to all these latter properties, electrospun nanofibers (ENs) offer high
96 encapsulation efficiency (EE) with outperforming protection for highly sensitive bioactives [8].
97 Additionally, the high surface area **favours** fluid absorption while the high porosity allows, for
98 instance, the facilitated exchange of oxygen, water, and nutrients, and minimal penetration of
99 microorganisms.

100 Proteins (zein, gelatine, whey) and polysaccharides (starch, maltodextrin, agarose, chitosan) are
1 among the main biomaterials used for the fabrication of ENs aimed at the encapsulation of bioactives
2 for food and nutraceutical interest [5,10,11]. Particularly, chitosan (CS) presents good film-forming
3 and nanostructured properties, together with biodegradability, non-toxicity, and biological properties
4 (i.e., antimicrobial, antifungal, and antiviral) [12]. Considering its plenty of functional groups (e.g.,

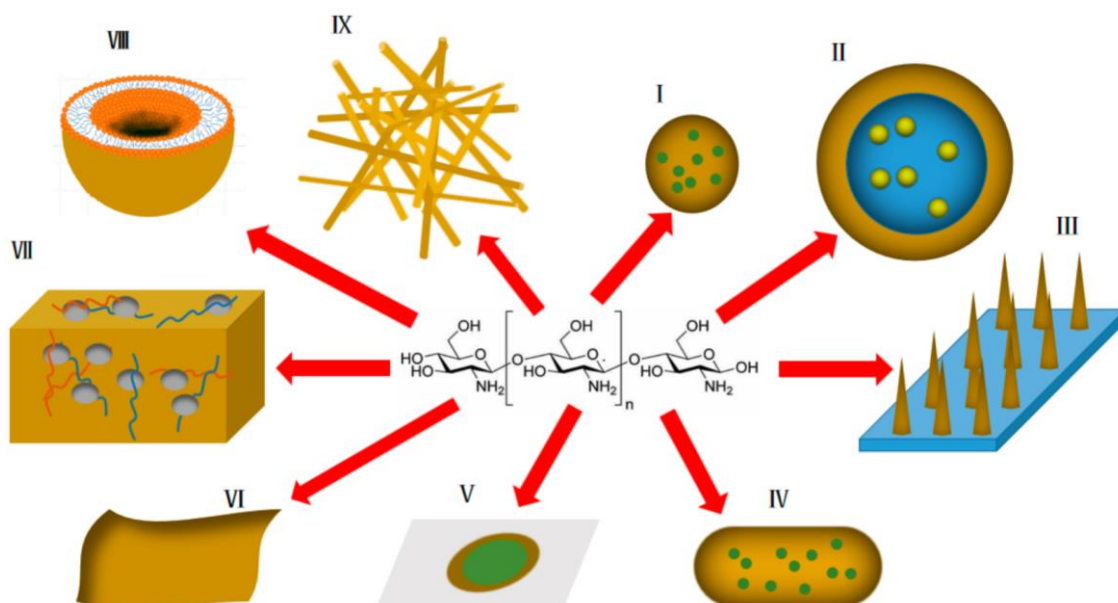
105 amino and hydroxyl), CS can be easily modified and can react with additives and species for tailoring
106 desired self-assembled structures [13], making it suitable for the fabrication of ENs as a wall material
107 for encapsulating biomolecules [14,15]. In this review, we collect the recent pieces of evidence for
108 applying CS in the fabrication of ENs; herein, we analyse the latest developments over the last 2-3
109 years. A particular emphasis has been focused on the utmost ideas in designing CS-based ENs and
110 their important findings and results.

111 **2. Electrospinning and chitosan: an overview of factors affecting electrospun fabrication**

112 CS is an animal-origin biopolymer, produced from the deacetylation reaction of chitin (poly(β -(1-4)-
113 N-acetyl-D-glucosamine). This latter biomaterial is extracted from the outer part of crustaceans'
114 shells. Regarding its availability, CS is reported to be produced around 1011 tons yearly, in which
115 the global market has grown from USD 553 million in 2017 to 1,088 by 2022 [16]. This opens a
116 window on its availability and further applications in several sectors such as flocculants, ion
117 exchangers, chelating agents, coating and film-forming materials, drug carriers, membranes, and
118 scaffolds for tissue engineering, to mention just a few [16–19]. CS is a water-soluble material in an
119 acidic environment (at $\text{pH} < 6$) because of the strong hydrogen bonding between its acetamide and
120 hydroxy groups. It also presents exceptional biodegradability and null toxicity. According to its
121 chemical functionalities in structure (e.g., hydroxyl groups), CS displays hydrophilic properties with
122 facilitated transport of polar substances thanks to hydrogen bonding interactions. **The polar** groups (-
123 OH) are available for chemical modifications, including sulfonation, carboxymethylation,
124 phosphorylation, or hydroxymethylation [15,20].

125 CS **can form** hydrogels thanks to its **all-chemical** functional groups, which could also interact with
126 each other by distinct pathways, **e.g.**, ionic and hydrophobic interactions, molecular entanglements,
7 or hydrogel bonds, resulting in the production of physical hydrogels [21]. Additionally, high-
8 molecular-weight molecules of CS **can** generate self-assembled micro and nanostructures based on
9 hydrogen-bond networks. Certainly, the conformational types of these CS structures depend on
0 several factors, such as pH, temperature, and types of additives (salt, acids, cross-linking agents),

131 while their properties depend on their molecular weight and nanostructures. CS can form 3D
132 polymeric networks or complexes designed by non-covalent strategies based on electrostatic,
133 hydrophobic and/or hydrogen bonding forces between the polymeric chains rather than chemical
134 bonds. **Figure 1** illustrates the different ways of using structures based on CS for food and drug
135 delivery systems.



136 **Figure 1.** Distinct structures based on chitosan for food and drug delivery systems (yellow colour represents chitosan,
137 including nanoparticles (I); emulsions (II); transdermal microneedles (III); nanocapsules (IV); transdermal patches (V);
138 transdermal membranes (VI); hydrogels (VII); liposomes (VIII); nano-scaffolds (IX).
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141 Importantly, even if CS presents great potential as carrier material in bioactive delivery systems [22],
142 it still displays a capacity limitation for modulating/controlling the release of bioactives due to its fast
143 dissolution in systems with high water content, e.g., in the stomach [23]. To face this drawback,
144 typical chemical modifications, such as co-polymerization or derivatization, have been proposed.
145 While specific chemical modifications are applied to improve other CS properties, including
146 solubility, biodegradability, good biocompatibility, drug-carrying capacity, as follows:

- 147 • Carboxylation modification: It involves the introduction of carboxyl groups into the molecule
8 using mainly glyoxylic acid and chloroacetic acid. Nevertheless, when using chloroacetic
9 acid, chloroacetic acid, they can react with C₂-NH₂ and C₆-NH₂ on CS producing N,O-
0 carboxymethyl CS. This latter CS derivative molecule presents substantially improved water
1 solubility, biocompatibility, and antibacterial properties [24].



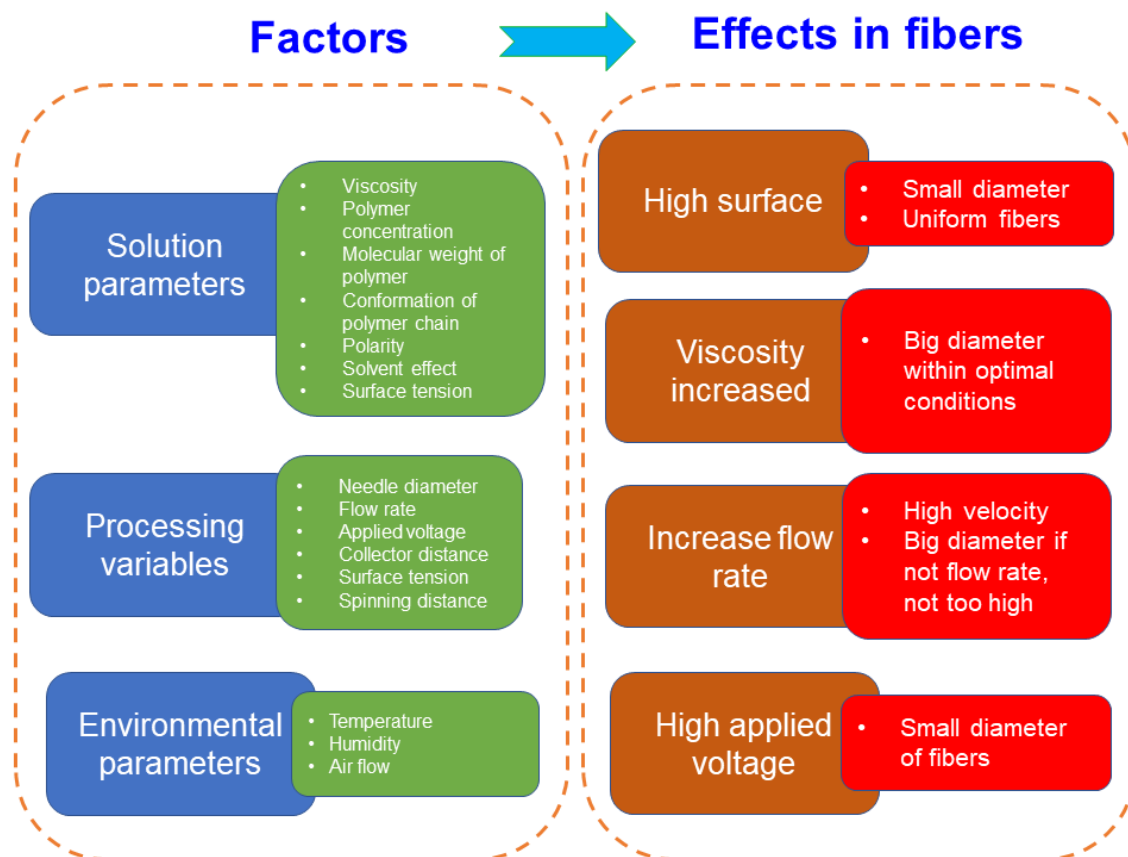
- 152 • Alkylation Modification: In general, hydroxyl or amino groups of CS are subjected to
153 alkylation reaction with halogenated hydrocarbons or sulfates, resulting in alkylated
154 derivatives under alkaline conditions. As C₂-NH₂ on the sugar molecule chain exhibits strong
155 nucleophilic lone pair of electrons, the alkylation of CS takes place preferentially on C₂-NH₂.
156 Apart from the improvement of CS solubility, alkylated derivatives of CS also show
157 exceptional biocompatibility, coagulability, and antibacterial and hemostatic properties [25].
158 For instance, N-alkylated CS derivative can be synthesized via halogenated alkanes. Here, the
159 introduction of an alkyl group with suitable molecular weight to the CS molecular chain will
160 also boost CS solubility, while the introduction of a large molecular weight alkyl group will
161 result in worsened solubility[26].
- 162 • Acylation modification: This a quite complicated pathway of chemical modification of CS.
163 Generally, organic acid derivatives (including acid anhydrides, or acid halides) are employed
164 as acylating agents in a certain reaction medium, and subsequently aliphatic or aromatic acyl
165 groups are introduced into the molecular chain of CS, resulting in acylated CS. Commonly,
166 such CS derivatives present good biocompatibility, drug-carrying capacity, and drug release
167 control capability, which are related to improved solubility [25].
- 168 • Esterification modification: In this chemical modification, hydroxyl or amino groups on CS
169 are subjected to esterification reactions (such as sulfation and phosphorylation) with oxygen-
170 containing mineral acids or acid derivatives, resulting in esterified CS. These CS derivatives
171 exhibit improvements in terms of adsorption and antibacterial properties. Looking for
172 improved CS solubility, phosphorylation via methanesulfonic acid stands out as the main
173 esterification reaction for obtaining a CS derivative with good water solubility [27].
- 4 • Sulfonation modification: This involves the introduction of sulfonate groups into CS by
5 reacting its hydroxyl or amino groups with concentrated sulfuric acid or sulphate, this reaction
6 takes place at the C₂-NH₂ of CS [25].
- 7 • Quaternary Ammonium salt modification: This chemical modification involves the

178 introduction of quaternary ammonium groups into the amino groups (or even hydroxyl ones)
179 of CS. According to the high activity of the amino functionalities, quaternary ammonium salt
180 modification mostly takes place on the amino groups. Interestingly, quaternary ammonium
181 salt groups feature large steric hindrances (such as strong hydrate-ability) greatly weakens the
182 hydrogen bond between CS added to the quaternary ammonium salt group, and consequently
183 improves its water solubility. In addition to this, N-quaternary ammonium CS derivatives also
184 exhibit better biocompatibility, biodegradability, and good mucosal adhesion [28].

- 185 • Graft copolymerization modification: This modification technique is the most attractive
186 pathway for improving both physicochemical and biological properties via physical and
187 chemical modifications of CS. Oxidative coupling copolymerization, free radical graft
188 copolymerization, and condensation copolymerization are among the most typical methods in
189 this method. They comprise the introduction of chemical functionalities (such as hydroxyl,
190 carboxyl, ester, and amide) into CS. The resultant properties of the CS after this chemical
191 modification are mainly controlled by the molecular structure, length, and number of side
192 chains. In general, this method mainly involves the graft copolymerization with alcohols,
193 esters, acids, and amides into CS, which results in improving the antibacterial, antitumor,
194 antioxidant, and anticoagulant properties of resultant CS derivatives [25].
- 195 • Schiff base reaction: It involves the condensation reaction of the amino groups of CS with
196 carbonyl compounds, such as fatty aldehydes, aromatic aldehydes, and ketones, in a neutral
197 medium in order to eliminate water molecules and thus synthesize the Schiff base with imine
198 group. Acetic acid, ethanol, and methanol, or their mixtures are among the main solvent media
199 for the Schiff base reaction. After this reaction, there is a change on the molecular structure
0 of the CS molecular chain while increasing the number of positively charged ions, allowing
1 to greatly strengthens the water solubility and antibacterial activity of the resultant CS
2 derivative [25,29].

3 According to these previous modifications, the resulting CS structure may display different

204 properties in terms of solubility, water retention and emulsification capacity, and digestibility, along
 205 with structural and chemical compatibility with other molecules [30]. In this latter point, the carrier
 206 morphology, e.g., in ENs, can be potentially designed during the ES process and spinning dope [5].
 207 **Figure 2** summarizes the main operating parameters and factors of ES influencing directly the ENs.
 208 To some extent, the fabrication of ENs greatly depends on the solution (polymer) viscosity and the
 209 chain entanglement degree of the wall material which belong to the solution parameters; however,
 210 some other factors, such as process variables and environmental parameters, may also play an
 211 important role. The right optimization of the aforementioned factors leads to the designing and
 212 fabrication of ENs with desired geometry, structure and architecture.



213 **Figure 2.** Operational factors in electrospinning and their influence on the resultant electrospun fibers. Adapted with
 214 permission from Coelho et al. [31].
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7 **As for the** encapsulation of bioactives and their post-delivery, ENs offer structural advantages, such
 8 as a high surface area to volume ratio, tailored morphology and porosity. Furthermore, these ENs also
 9 confer functional advantages including improved stability and bioavailability, high EE, and
 0 controlled release. Even if the properties of the final fibers are a result of the ES process, wall



221 materials are also determinants in the final features of ENs. Here, distinct materials have been used
 222 as wall material, such as polylactic acid (PLA) [32], polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) [33], and
 223 polycaprolactone (PCL) [34], which are all categorized as biocompatible polymers. While hyaluronic
 224 acid [35,36], sodium alginate [37], silk [38], zein [10,39], xylan and guar gum [40,41], and CS, among
 225 many others are some examples of biopolymers. **Table 1** gives, for instance, some examples of using
 226 such materials for the encapsulation of bioactives for different purposes. These latter biopolymers,
 227 like CS, have somehow contributed to overcoming the challenges of ENs in terms of biodegradability
 228 and biocompatibility for the fabrication of innovative and safe products within the food and
 229 pharmaceutical field. In the following section, our attention has been emphasized to analyze and
 230 discuss only the most recent advances in designing and optimizing CS-based ENs for bioactives
 231 encapsulation.

232 **Table 1.** Examples of biopolymers for encapsulating food ingredients and biomolecules via electrospinning.

| Biopolymer | Bioactive compound | Purpose of electrospinning | Ref. |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---|------|
| Amaranth protein isolate | Folic acid | Enhanced preservation of the antioxidants from UV light exposure | [42] |
| Gelatin/zein | Curcumin | Enhanced preservation and release in food packaging | [43] |
| Poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid) | Curcumin | Enhanced release rate for delivery systems | [44] |
| Zein | Curcumin | Boosting storage and stability for coloring food systems | [45] |
| High-amylose starch | - | Studying the rheological properties for potential food and pharmaceutical application | [46] |
| Gliadin | Ferulic acid | Enhanced long-term stability and solubility for food packaging | [47] |
| Zein | Omega-3-rich fish oil | Evaluating <i>in vitro</i> gastrointestinal activity for nutraceutical applications | [48] |
| Poly(ethylene oxide) | <i>Spirulina</i> microalga | Improving thermal properties and release rate for food packaging applications | [49] |

233
 234 It is important to point out that CS has been intensively explored for nanofiber fabrication due to its
 235 ability in releasing satisfactorily the encapsulated food bioactives. For instance, in an acidic medium
 236 (with pH=1.2), bioactives release from the CS hydrogel is increased thanks to the higher swelling
 7 ratio of the hydrogel whose amine groups in CS chains become protonated, resulting in enhanced
 8 electrostatic repulsion between them and thus weakening the bonding interaction of the CS molecules.
 9 Hence, the CS hydrogel network is relaxed allowing the diffusion of the bioactives [50,51].

3. Recent breakthroughs in CS-based electrospun nanofiber design for food ingredients

3.1. Pristine CS-based electrospun nanofibers

Over the last two years, great effort has been done on manufacturing ENs utilizing CS as a primary material. **Table 2** reports the recent state of the art of CS ENs and the main findings reported by the researchers in the field. According to its chemical structure and multiple chemical functionalities, CS presents suitable film-forming properties itself. For instance, in a series of studies aiming the protection of perishable foods, Ceylan and co-workers investigated the microbiological stability of sea bass fillets protected with smoke-doped CS NFs [52] and ENs containing a liquid smoke/thymol mixture as well [53]. Both electrospun mats presented a smooth, and ultrafine biopolymeric structure with a fiber diameter ranging from 72 to 132 nm. Regarding their applications in food packaging, the ENs presenting the mixture of smoke/thymol exhibited around 60% limitation of growth in terms of total mesophilic bacteria, while the fiber-containing smoke only showed a limitation between 40-50%. In both cases, the antimicrobial effects observed in fish fillets, opening a new window for extending the shelf-life of perishable foods. To date, CS has been used as a primary phase in fabrication of ENs; however, in a recent development, Zahiri and co-workers [54] utilized CS as a nanocarrier of curcumin within PCL and gelatin fibers. This concept and utilization of CS nanostructures in ENs fabrication allow extending the application of such materials, e.g., for wound healing and dermal reconstruction. The versatility of CS nanoparticles is widely open for a polymer blending with other polysaccharides, like sulfobutyl- β -cyclodextrin, in which the potential nanoparticles present the ability to protect phenolic compounds (eugenol) [55].

As for electrospinning process, it is important to mention that the different parameters, including voltage, flow rate, distance between electrodes, temperature and related humidity, along with electrospinning solution properties (e.g., pH, viscosity, molecular weight, and mixing ratios of polymers and solvents) are fundamental in the resultant properties of the nanofibers [56–58].

Considering the excellent antibacterial properties of CS-based ENs, the resultant nanofibers have been mainly investigated in packaging applications of several food products to extend the self-life of

267 fruits and vegetables, meat shelf-life prolongation [59]. To some extent, the main parameters
268 influencing the antibacterial properties of CS are:

- 269 • pH: CS exhibits low solubility above pH 6.5, and thus meaning the antibacterial effect is
270 only observable at an acidic pH, which is ascribed to the protonation of NH₂ groups.
271 Herein, where CS becomes polycationic and interacts with negatively charged microbial
272 cell membrane compounds, such as phospholipids, proteins, anionic polysaccharides, fatty
273 acids, and bile acids [60].
- 274 • Concentration: It has been investigated that the antibacterial activity of CS increases with
275 increasing concentration [75–78]. On the contrary, it has been also discovered that at low
276 concentrations, CS is able to bind to the negatively charged cell surface, destroying the
277 cell membrane and finally kill the cell [61].
- 278 • Molecular weight: As it is well known there are three distinguished types of CS, such as
279 high-molecular-weight, low-molecular-weight, and oligochitosan (short-chain) [62].
280 Experimentally, it was reported that lowering molecular weight increases the antibacterial
281 efficacy for Gram-negative bacteria, while a reverse impact has been noted for Gram-
282 positive bacteria [63].
- 283 • Degree of deacetylation: the deacetylation degree (as the number of amino groups) of CS
284 influences the solubility and charge formation of the chemical functionalities, as well as
285 is dependent on the positive charge density. To some extent, the antibacterial effect of CS
286 is more effective with a higher positive charge density [64].

287 Therefore, several parameters should be considered when fabricating ENs based on CS for targeted
288 application. However, there are still some properties to be improved for food packaging (e.g., higher
9 solubility, chemical, thermal and mechanical stability), and in some cases, higher capacities when
0 encapsulating food ingredients; therefore, CS usage in nanofiber fabrication has been extended by
1 combining this material with other biopolymers, proteins and some other compatible matrices as
2 addressed in following section.

293

294 3.2. CS-based blend electrospun nanofibers with other polymer materials

295 CS also presents the ability to be blended with other biocompatible wall materials resulting in
296 exceptional polymer blends. To some extent, it is likely that CS has been mostly investigated in
297 combination with other film materials proposing new materials for food packaging, Ardekani-Zadeh
298 et al. [65], for instance, fabricated mat blends based on CS and PCL doped with oregano essential oils
299 (EOs) via ES. This has been proposed according to the main hypotheses of the authors, i) two of the
300 essential oil-doped CS/PCL fiber mats can offer similar mechanical and barrier properties to cast film
301 counterparts that can be fabricated via ES method, ii) the new composite mat can effectively reduce
302 the growth of model foodborne bacterial pathogenic. After characterization, the resultant ENs
303 exhibited a dense structure, a diameter between 206-332 nm and a roughness between 62.9–84.6 nm;
304 such dense morphology was a sign of exceptional blending thanks to hydrogen bonding between
305 CS/PCL. Regarding the EE, it remained between 56.4 and 81.7% over 96 h. Interestingly, the fiber
306 blend containing 5% EOs showed antibacterial activity against Gram-positive, such as
307 *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and Gram-negative bacteria, such as *Salmonella*
308 *enteritidis*, *Escherichia coli*. According to the results, the nanofibers (NFs) displayed high
309 hydrophobicity in terms of water contact angle measurements, which is suitable in food packaging
310 applications since it prevents the wettability of the structure and thus long-term integrity.

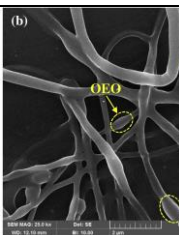
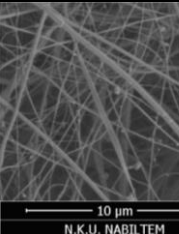
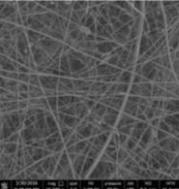
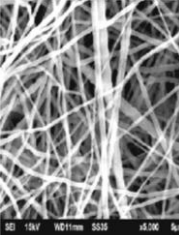
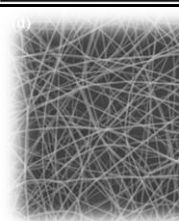
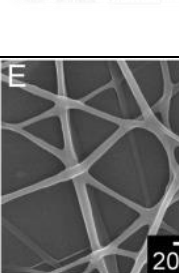
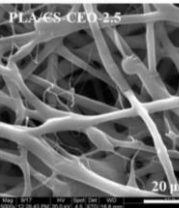
311 Pursuing hydrophobic surfaces, hordein, which presents several nonpolar and hydrophobic residues
312 and low contents of charged amino acids, has been timely combined with CS to improve the
313 hydrophobicity and its water resistance [66]. While hordein can form ultrathin fibers, it presents weak
314 mechanical strength and low stability in aqueous environments. Therefore, both materials were
5 intentionally merged to offset their drawbacks. Compared with Ardekani-Zadeh's study [65], Rostami
6 et al. [67] reported higher EE ca. 86% when loading resveratrol in CS-gellan ENs, which achieved to
7 deliver in the intestinal region approximately 43–51% of the amount presented in the initial fibers. It
8 is important to mention that the hydrophobicity of hordein/CS NFs has been also improved by heat

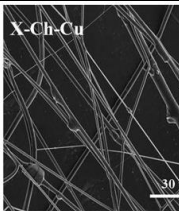
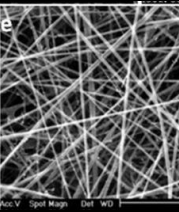
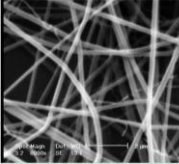
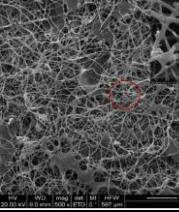
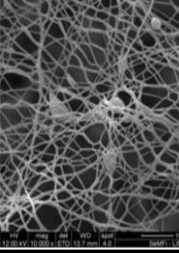
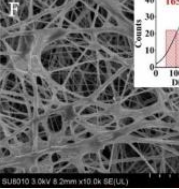
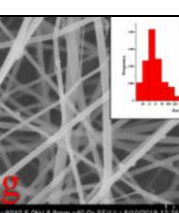
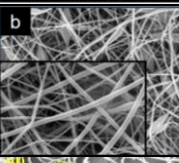
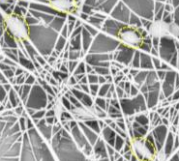
319 treatment. Another insight due to thermal treatment, the fiber diameter was slightly reduced from 393
320 to 379 nm. In a real application, the ENs were applied to apples with an incision, retaining the fresh
321 color and inhibiting the enzymatic browning for 6 h. Similar effects were observed in potatoes with
322 incisions in which their properties were maintained over 12 h [68].

323 Polullan, which is produced from starch by the fungus *Aureobasidium pullulans*, is another
324 polysaccharide blended with CS to tailor ENs [69]. **The main justification of the authors for blending
325 polullan with CS deals with common issue of fabricating pure CS, since this latter biopolymer
326 displays a polycationic nature in solution, stiff structure and intra-molecular interactions making
327 challenging the manufacture of nanofibers. In general, the electrospinning processing can be
328 facilitated by using direct or indirect solvents, but they are undesirable in edible systems. Considering
329 this, it has been reported that pullulan has been used to improve the electrospinnability of
330 electrospinning solutions by raising viscosity and lowering conductivity and surface tension.
331 Therefore, the purpose of the authors was to improve the limitations of CS in this process and
332 concurrently develop fast-dissolving oral films keeping in mind that both polymers present edible
333 properties.** In this regard, polullan meets such criteria since several properties have been widely
334 studied, including non-toxic, non-mutagenic, odorless, tasteless and low-caloric [70]. Apart from the
335 good interaction translated to biocompatibility among the biopolymers, CS improved the thermal
336 stability of pullulan. **Interestingly, the authors concluded that the CS/pullulan ratio had an influence
337 on solution property and nanofiber morphology, e.g., with the increase of CS, viscosity and
338 conductivity of solutions increased, while diameter of nanofibers decreased initially and then
339 increased.** Finally, in such natural composite fibers, aspirin was selected as an active compound,
340 demonstrating fast-dissolving properties which make it promising for oral mucosal release [69].

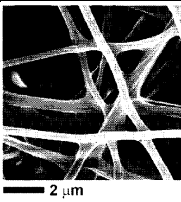
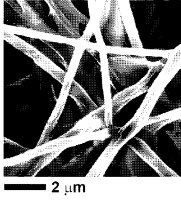
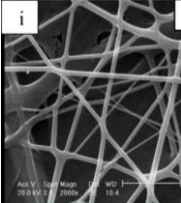
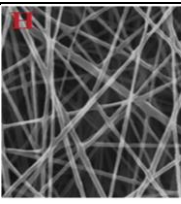
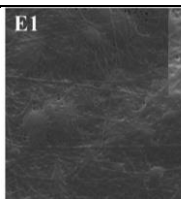
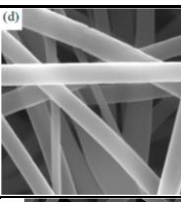
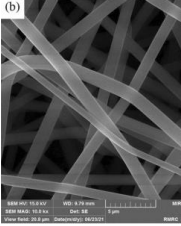


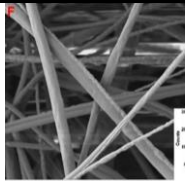
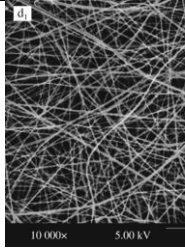
Table 2. Advances in chitosan-based nanofibers for embedding different food bioactives and their main findings.

| Bioactives | Biopolymers | CS properties | SEM image | Application | Encapsulation efficiency | Highlights of the study | Ref. |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---|---|---|--------------------------|--|------|
| Oregano essential oil (OEO) | CS/PCL | Medium molecular weight, DD: 75–85% |  | Food packaging | 56.4–81.7% | Excellent antibacterial properties with outstanding EE. Excellent hydrophobicity | [65] |
| Smoke | CS | Low molecular weight: 70 kDa DD:75-85 % |  | Food packaging | - | Promising antibacterial properties (40-50% growth limitation) | [52] |
| Smoke/thy mol mixture | CS | Low molecular weight: 70 kDa DD:75-85 % |  | Food packaging | - | Promising antibacterial properties (60% growth limitation) | [53] |
| α -tocopherol | Zein/CS | Medium molecular weight: 900 kDa DD: 90% |  | Delivery systems | - | Tocopherol did not affect ENs morphology The bioactive compound enhanced mucoadhesivity | [71] |
| Fish peptide | CS/PVA | Medium molecular weight: 300 kDa DD: 75-85% |  | Food packaging | 94% | High hydrophobicity of ENs; Enhanced mechanical and thermal properties. High EE independent from the peptide level. | [72] |
| Cinnamaldehyde | CS/PEO | Molecular weight: 460 kDa |  | Delivery systems | - | Fast release of cinnamaldehyde, High inactivation efficiency toward <i>Escherichia coli</i> and <i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i> . | [73] |
| Cinnamon essential oil | PLA/CS | Molecular weight: 80,000 DD: 85% |  | Delivery systems and anti-microbial application | 47-55% | Improved antimicrobial Activity, High long-term inactivation rates toward <i>Escherichia coli</i> and <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i> | [74] |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|---|---|-------------------------------|-----|--|------|
| Curcumin | XG/CS | Molecular weight: 28 kDa DD: 89% DP: 175 |  | Delivery systems | 69% | Excellent carriers for hydrophobic bioactives, ENs displayed long-term pH-stimulated release properties. | [75] |
| Resveratrol | Gellan/CS | Molecular weight: 50-190 kDa DD: 75% |  | Delivery systems | 86% | Resveratrol released in intestine was between 43-51%. | [67] |
| - | CS/Gelatin | Molecular weight: 60-120 kDa |  | Food packaging (edible films) | - | Resultant ENs displayed exceptional mechanical strength. | [76] |
| - | Hordein/CS | DD: 90-98% |  | Food packaging (edible films) | - | Excellent hydrophobicity allowed ENs to display water resistance. | [66] |
| Cabreva essential oil | CS/PVA | Medium molecular weight: 300 kDa DD: 85% |  | Delivery systems | - | ENs showed ability to modulate oil release. | [77] |
| Chlorogenic acid | CS/PCL | Medium molecular weight: 150-300 kDa DD: 95% |  | Active food packaging | 70% | Long-term release of phenolic compounds. Enhanced antioxidant and antimicrobial activities. | [78] |
| Aspirin | Pollulan/CS | Molecular weight: 400,000 |  | Fast dissolving oral films | - | Improved thermal properties, Fast dissolving oral properties | [69] |
| Quercetine | Hordein/CS | Molecular weight: 152,143 DD: 95% |  | Food packaging | - | Improved hydrophobicity of films using heat treatment. | [68] |
| <i>Bifidobacterium animalis</i> | CS/PVA | Medium molecular weight DD: 75-85% |  | Functional food applications | - | Survivability of probiotic in fiber mat was substantially enhanced. | [79] |



| | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|--|---|--|------|--|------|
| Black pepper essential oil | CS-coated PLA | Medium molecular weight |  | Biomedical applications | 65% | Enhanced hydrophilicity, Acceptable antimicrobial properties, Improved cell adhesion compared with pristine fibers | [80] |
| Limonene | CS-coated PLA | Medium molecular weight |  | Biomedical applications | 43% | Enhanced hydrophilicity, Acceptable antimicrobial properties, Improved cell adhesion compared with pristine fibers | [80] |
| Thyme essential oil | CS/Gelatin | Molecular mass: 60000–120000 |  | Functional food applications for meat products | 40% | Thyme essences exhibited antimicrobial activity against <i>Clostridium perfringens</i> ENs represented an alternative for nitrate substitute in sausages | [81] |
| Pomegranate peel extract | CS/PEO | Medium molecular weight: 100–300 kDa |  | Active food packaging for meat products | - | The ENs displayed acceptable properties in terms of thermal and mechanical tests. The composite ENs preserved and enhanced the shelf life of beef. | [82] |
| 3-Phenylacetic acid | CS/Gelatin | DD: 95% |  | Active food packaging | - | At optimized acid level, ENs displayed enhanced thermal and water stability, and water vapor permeability. | [83] |
| <i>Ziziphora clinopodioides</i> essential oil, Sesame oil | CS/FXM | Medium molecular weight: 190–310 kDa DD: 75–85% |  | Active food packaging | >93% | Active CS/FXM ENs displayed acceptable antioxidant and antimicrobial activity. | [84] |
| Anthocyanins | CS/GA | Medium molecular weight: 250 kDa DD: 75–85% |  | Active food packaging for chicken products | 97% | The extract reduced the tensile strength and increased elongation at break. The extract improved the water barrier and thermal stability | [85] |

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------|--|---|---|---|--|------|
| | | | | | | of the resultant ENs. | |
| Thymol/ HP β CD | CS/PCL | Medium molecular weight:100- 200 kDa DD: 95% |  | Active food packaging for fruit products | - | Improved thermal stability of the resultant ENs. Long-term release of the thymol over 240 h Good antifungal activity in tomato samples. | [86] |
| Curcumin | CS/Gelatin | Medium molecular weight DD: 75–85% |  | Active food packaging | - | ENs displayed high sensitivity of colorimetric changes due to ammonia presence. Both mechanical and thermal properties in the ENs were improved by embedding curcumin. | [87] |

342 *PEO: poly(ethylene oxide); PLA: Poly lactic acid; XG: xanthan gum; PCL: polycaprolactone; FXM: flaxseed
343 mucilage; GA: gum Arabic; HP β CD: hydroxypropyl- β -cyclodextrin; DA: Degree of deacetylation, DP: Degree of
344 polymerization.

345 Zou et al. [78] also reported the manufacture of ENs based on CS and PCL, in which this latter
346 polymer has been intentionally blended to improve the spinnability limitations of CS, while halloysite
347 nanotubes (HNTs), doped with chlorogenic acid (CGA), were incorporated in the polymer blend to
348 improve the encapsulation efficiency of the composite ENs due to the hollow tubular structure of the
349 aluminosilicate nanomaterial. **Figure 3a** illustrates the physical embedding of such bioactives in the
350 composite fiber. To some extent, the usage of HNTs contributed to higher EE, which was noted to
351 increase at higher ratio of such nanomaterials (**Figure 3b**). The maximum EE was found to be ca.
352 70%. Regarding the surface nature of the fiber, they resulted to be highly hydrophilic with a contact
353 angle of approximately 30-50° (see **Figure 3c**) adding between 2-6% CGA@HNTs. While the water
354 vapor permeability decreased significantly with the incorporation of CGA@HNTs, as illustrated in
355 **Figure 3d**. This latter property was improved by adding such a complex biomolecule composite; in
356 theory, the water vapor permeability is a relevant parameter for packaging materials since it correlates
357 with the moisture transfer between the environment and food item. Additionally, these ENs displayed
358 excellent antioxidant and antimicrobial properties, in which the resultant mats offered a long-term
359 release of CGA governed by Fickian diffusion. After the complete study, the authors stipulated that
360 such CGA@HNT/PCL/CS ENs could be used as an inner layer added to the packaging substrates and
361 thus extend the self-life of perishable food products [78].

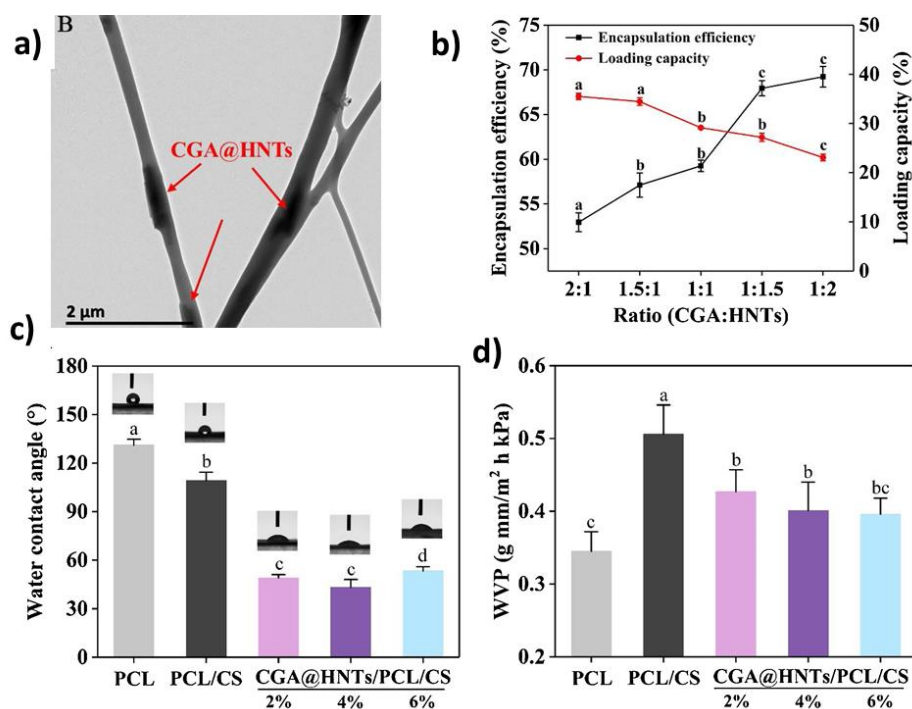
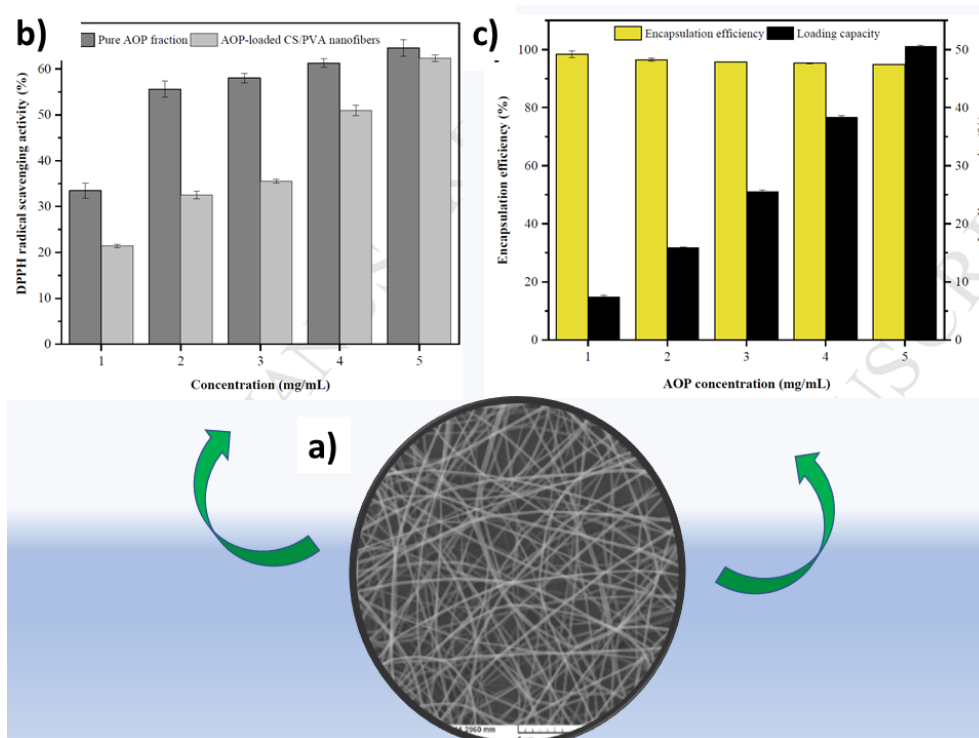


Figure 3. CS/PLA nanofibers loaded with chlorogenic acid for food packaging, a) Micrograph of the resulting ENs, b) their encapsulation efficiency and loading capacity, c) water contact angle measurements and d) water vapor permeability (WVP). Adapted with permission from Zou et al. [78].

In the same field of food packaging application, Hosseini et al. [72] blended CS with another highly polar polymer, like PVA, to further encapsulate fish-purified antioxidant peptide (AOP). In this study, PVA was introduced as a host easily electrospinnable polymer to counter the generated repulsive force between CS ionic groups. These new blend mats showed a homogenous and bead-free hydrophobic nanostructure (see **Figure 4a**) with a diameter varying from 157 to 195 nm, which supported the good miscibility among both polymer phases. This agrees with similar findings in terms of structure and fiber diameter (ca. 200 nm) reported by Lamarra et al. [77], who prepared CS/PVA ENs as well. Structurally, the blended fiber also showed improved thermal and mechanical properties due to the possible intermolecular hydrogen bonding among PVA and CS [72]. As shown in **Figure 4b**, the antioxidant activity increased as a function of AOP concentration; also, the loading capacity of ENs increased proportionally with the peptide concentration, reaching its maximum 50% at 5 mg/mL of peptide (**Figure 4c**), while the EE remained unchanged (~94%)[72]. As a perspective, these ENs still need to prove their preservation ability of any food system in real practice; or at least antimicrobial activity should be assessed, as proved by CS/PVA ENs containing Cabreuva EOs

381 against *Candida albicans*, *E. coli*, *S. aureus*, and *S. epidermidis* [77].

382 In agreement with Hosseini et al. [72], Shen et al. [86] also confirmed **both improved** thermal and
383 mechanical properties thanks to hydrogen bond interaction among the polymer phases. In this case,
384 the authors used CS/PCL to encapsulate thymol/2-hydroxypropyl- β -cyclodextrin complexes for the
385 packaging of tomatoes. The bioactive compound was released over 240 h, exhibiting acceptable
386 antifungal activity *in vitro* and *in vivo*. **As for the incorporation of the complexes, the ENs benefited**
387 **from increased average diameters 243.84 nm to 560.55 nm, improved water vapor permeability,**
388 **crystallinity decrease and a hydrophilic surface.**



389 **Figure 4.** CS/PVA nanofibers loaded with bioactive peptide for food packaging, a) Micrograph of the resulting ENs, b)
390 their antioxidant activity and c) encapsulation efficiency and loading capacity. Adapted from Hosseini et al. [72].
391
392

393 Differently from Hosseini et al. [72] and Lamarra et al. [77] who encapsulated bioactives, **Mojaveri et**
394 **al. [79] proposed CS/PVA electrospun matrix for the protection of probiotics, such as *Bifidobacterium***
5 ***animalis* Bb12. The CS/PVA system, which was also enriched with inulin as a prebiotic, evidenced**
6 **the compelling thermal protection of the probiotic. The main target of simultaneously incorporated**
7 **the prebiotic and probiotic in the ENs was to exhibit a synergistic effect (known as symbiotic) and**
8 **thus improve probiotic proliferation in the intestine while helping the modifications of the gut**

399 community. For instance, **Figure 5a** shows clear evidence of the attached bacteria, which were also
 400 observed in fluoresce microscopy (**Figure 5b**). The authors demonstrated the survival of probiotics
 401 in ENs, compared with free cells, which was substantially improved under simulated gastric and
 402 intestinal fluids, as evidencing probiotic presence after the exposure in such conditions (see **Figure**
 403 **5c & d**). This research gives proof for symbiotic nutraceutical supplements. As a perspective, the
 404 authors highlighted the future evaluation of the cell viability at room and refrigerated conditions [79].
 405 Similar to Mojaveri et al. [79], Xu et al. [88] recently encapsulated *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* in a
 406 PVA/pectin matrix maintaining the survival of the probiotics over 90%.

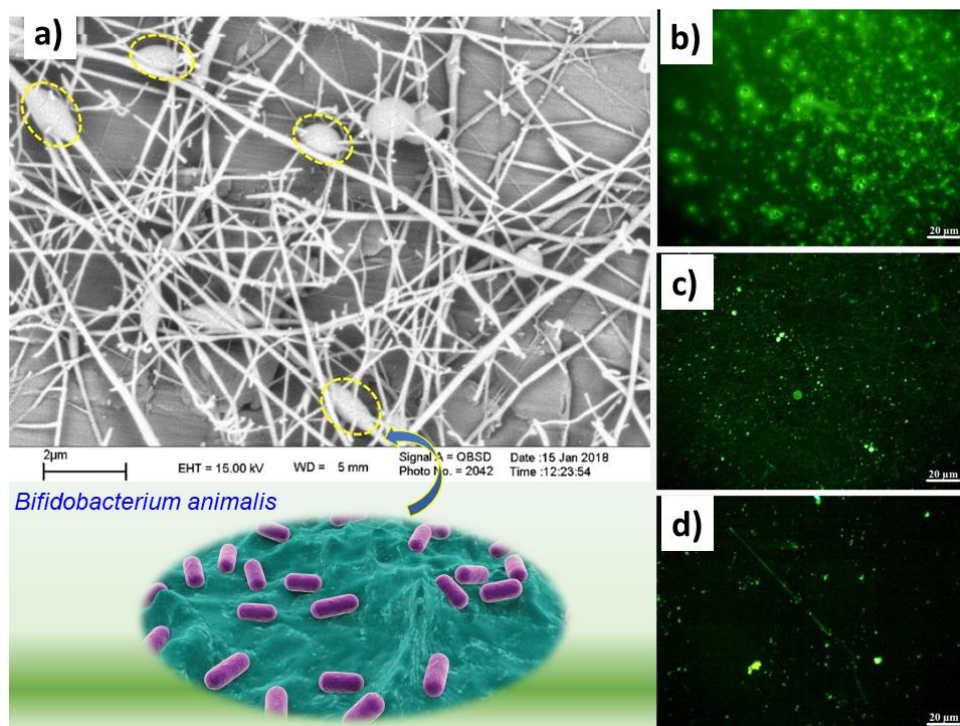


Figure 5. CS/PVA nanofibers enriched with inulin for probiotic encapsulation, a) SEM view of the resultant ENs, b) fluorescence micrograph of the probiotic embedded into the CS/PVA composite, and fluorescence micrograph of the ENs after exposure in simulated gastric (c) and intestinal fluids (d). Adapted with permission from Mojaveri et al. [79].

411 To date, several successful attempts have been achieved for the blending of CS with gelatine in
 412 electrospun mat fabrication [76,81]. Gelatine, which is well known as food grade and edible protein,
 413 composed of several amino acids, was merged into CS to prepare ENs loaded with thyme EOs [81].
 414 In Vafania's study [81], it was documented that NFs based on CS/gelatine doped with thyme EOs
 5 exhibited antimicrobial activity against *Clostridium perfringens*. Particularly, NF mats containing
 6 500 ppm thyme EOs were additionally added into sausages, showing similar organoleptic features
 7 compared with the ones containing nitrites. It is relevant to mention that nitrites are typically used in
 8

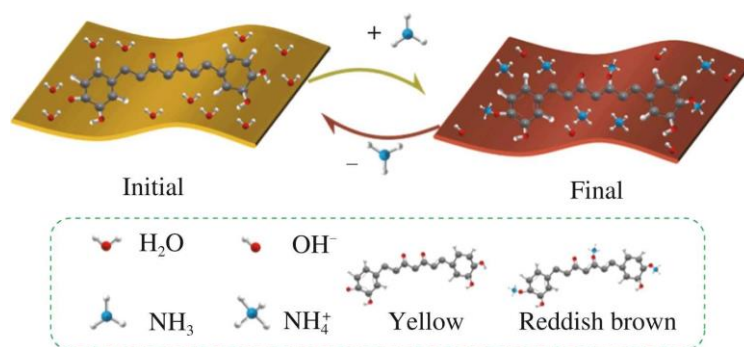


419 the meat industry as a curing agent, providing better flavor, taste, and aroma while preserving the
420 characteristic red-pinkish color of the meat; and prevent the risk of bacterial contamination;
421 unfortunately, nitrites are considered harmful for consumers' health [89]. Therefore, the addition of
422 thyme EOs-enriched CS/gelatin fibers into sausage formulation represents an alternative for healthier
423 meat products. An important aspect in Varania's study [81] relies on the non-interaction of any of the
424 wall materials (gelatin or CS) with the ingredient, but it is likely that both materials may interact since
425 it is reported that the incorporation of proteins-based compounds into chitosan is able to weaken the
426 interactions between chitosan molecules and may lead to a possible disruption of the three-
427 dimensional structure of the mats. This latter interaction may also result in improved solubility water
428 solubility of the resultant composite and this easy release of the ingredient [90].

429 Within the field of meat product preservation, Surendhiran et al. [82] designed CS/PEO NFs enriched
430 with pomegranate peel extract which substantially extended the self-life of beef. In this study, PEO,
431 as a water-soluble and biodegradable synthetic polymer, was utilized to avoid the formation of CS
432 gel via hydrogen bond at the tip of the needle and thus facilitate its spinnability. The resultant NFs
433 were able to reduce the population of *E. coli* O157:H7 up to 2.96 and 5.80 log CFU/g at 4 and 25 °C,
434 respectively.

435 To date, it seems that ENs can prolong the shelf-life and freshness of meat products; for instance,
436 Shavisi et al. [85] observed that CS/gum Arabic mats enriched with anthocyanins acted as a protective
437 barrier for chicken fillets. Apart from that, such NFs changed their colour tonality, from white to light
438 khaki, as a response to ammonia vapor presence. Potentially, these composite mats could be used as
439 a quality indicator of these products. Herein, the colour response to ammonia vapor needs to be further
440 evaluated in terms of volatile nitrogen-based compounds, which are typically produced during
1 perishable food spoilage [91]. In this regard, Duan et al. [87] recently proposed a hypothetical
2 mechanism attributed to the colour change, as graphically shown in Figure 6. The gas state NH₃
3 mixed with water in the ENs produces forms of NH₄⁺ and OH⁻. After this, OH⁻ induced the generation
4 of an alkaline environment on the ENs, inducing the phenolic hydroxyl group to be transformed into

445 a phenolic oxygen anion in the curcumin structure [92], and thus producing the visible colour shift.
 446 As a concluding remark, Duan et al. also proposed ENs based on CS/gelatin containing curcumin as
 447 smart packaging material for the preservation and quality indicator of the freshness of protein-rich
 448 food items. The authors selected these both polymer considering that both display good fiber-forming
 449 ability, non-toxicity and biocompatibility, which are crucial characteristics for food-grade materials
 450 in edible items. It is worth mentioning that the addition of bioactive compounds in composite mats
 451 results in the enhancements of specific fiber properties, e.g., the addition of curcumin can greatly
 452 influence diameter of nanofiber mats, varying from 160 to 180 nm; however, the right concentration
 453 of the curcumin (ca. 0.2%, m/m) allowed to generate a stronger intermolecular interactions, resulting
 454 in improved the thermal stability and tensile strength of the resultant nanofibers [87].



455 **Figure 6.** Hypothetical mechanism for the colour changes in CS/gelatin nanofiber loaded with curcumin. Taken with
 456 permission from Duan et al. [87].
 457
 458

459 To boost the antimicrobial properties of CS/gelatin ENs, Liu et al. [83] added 3-phenylacetic acid
 460 into such fiber blends. This latter carboxylic acid displays antimicrobial properties towards different
 461 fungi and bacteria. As for its production, the acid is produced in honey, various lactic acid bacterial
 462 species and fermented food. Experimentally, 3-phenylacetic acid offered potential antibacterial
 463 features to the ENs, e.g., it reduced the presence of *Salmonella enterica* Enteritidis and *S. aureus*
 464 around 4 log CFU/mL in 30 min. As for the ENs loaded with 2% 3-phenylacetic acid, they exhibited
 5 a homogenous and smooth structure with fiber diameters ranging from 40 to 70 nm. Interestingly, CS
 6 and 3-phenylacetic acid positively interacted and formed hydrogen bonds under acidic conditions,
 7 conducting to decrease the crystallinity of ENs. Considering previous findings of Li et al. [68], such
 8 crystallinity decrease is favourable for the water resistance properties of the films, which was proven

469 by increasing the water contact angle from 82 to 88° [83].
470 Regarding novel biopolymers, Karami et al. [84] proposed a natural polysaccharide, like flaxseed
471 mucilage, to be blended with CS and subsequently fabricated ENs. This mucilage was proposed due
472 to its discovered nanofiber-forming property credited to its polysaccharide fractions, including a
473 pectin-rich composed of rhamnogalacturonan I and hemicelluloses-rich comprising mainly of
474 arabinoxylan. However, the resultant mucilage-based mats lack in mechanical stability; therefore, CS
475 has been selected to offset mucilage properties. In these fibers, the authors added two different oils,
476 including *Ziziphora clinopodioides* EOs and sesame oil, which display antimicrobial and antioxidant
477 properties. Especially, *Ziziphora clinopodioides* EOs is composed of natural antioxidant elements,
478 such as carvacrol, thymol, γ -terpinene, and p-cymene. During the ES, it was noticed that the fiber
479 diameter increased when adding such EOs, from 323 to 451 nm. While doped ENs exhibited smoother
480 structures compared with the pristine ones. As for the EE, the fibers efficiently encapsulated over
481 93% of both fragrances, proving their ability for hosting high molecular weight compounds and long-
482 term release over 96 h.

483 4. Conclusion and perspectives

484 Over the last 2-3 years, CS has been mainly used as a base biopolymer for possible food packaging
485 applications, in which its multiple chemical functionalities confer to the polymer an exceptional
486 ability to be blended with several biopolymers, including PCL, PLA, zein, xanthan and gellan gum,
487 gelatin, hordein, among many others (see **Table 2**). Thanks to its ability to generate stable composites,
488 CS is likely to be a target of study for fabricating sustainable packaging material together with new
489 green materials. It is important to mention that the multiple advantages of CS in terms of
490 biodegradation, biocompatibility, anti-microbial activities, low price, good transparency, high impact
1 resistance and processing, non-toxicity, acceptable mechanical and film-forming properties will also
2 support the application of this biopolymer in the manufacturing of ENs aimed for food packaging and
3 as an encapsulation support of food ingredients [93]. However, the well-designed structure properties
4 of CS nanofibers allow extending their implementation in other fields, such as water and air filtration,

495 wound dressings, tissue repair by controlled drug release, etc. [59,94,95]. Furthermore, new green
496 solvents and additives, such as deep eutectic solvents, are also an alternative to tune specific
497 physicochemical properties (e.g., transport, selective, mechanical, thermal and adsorption properties)
498 of CS structures [15,20,96,97]. As an evidence, Wen et al. [98] used hydrophobic DES based on
499 thymol and octanoic acid to boost the water barrier properties in CS/gelatin ENs, which displayed
500 interesting antimicrobial properties as well. Therefore, the merging of different DESs and CS is also
501 a latent perspective in the field.

502 The resultant composite ENs exhibit favourable properties and structures for hosting not only
503 bioactives but also probiotic cells. However, the application of CS-based ENs has been extended to
504 other approaches, e.g., within the formulation of meat products (like sausages) to replace some
505 harmful ingredients [81]. The addition of bioactives not only provides nutraceutical, antimicrobial or
506 antioxidant properties to the resultant CS-based mats; in this review, it has been found that specific
507 bioactives (e.g., 3-phenylacetic) are able to decrease intrinsically the crystallinity of the fibers
508 resulting in an enhanced water resistance with hydrophobic properties [68,83]. This latter property is
509 pursued when dealing with the long-term integrity of the materials aimed at food packaging. For
510 instance, CS-based mats tend to display rough surfaces translated to hydrophobic surface nature,
511 resulting in water resistance and long-term stability.

512 Considering that these smart materials can interact with nitrogen-based compounds produced during
513 food spoilage of meat products (like chicken fillets) and consequently change the colour properties
514 of the material [85,87,92], CS nanofibers can be introduced as quality indicators in smart food packaging.
515 Based on these findings, it seems that CS fibers and their blends with other biomaterials will be
516 explored in the coming years since the food industries are looking for materials that not only protect
7 the main food items but also meet the criteria of eco-sustainability, as well as indicate the freshness
8 of the product. It is worth mentioning that all literature compiled in this review finds the successful
9 fabrication of novel concepts of CS-mats with great advances, but they still remain at the lab scale.
0 At this point, the researchers in the field should start to evaluate the feasibility of fabrication at a

521 larger scale conspiring also the possible scale-up of ES devices [95,99].
522 As a final perspective in the field, different chemical modification methods are applied to CS in order
523 to improve specific physicochemical properties, such as solubility, biodegradability,
524 biocompatibility, and drug-carrying capacity. In fact, such CS derivatives (such as quaternized CS)
525 with improved properties have started to be used in electrospun nanofiber fabrication [100] but have
526 not been exploited for encapsulating food ingredients. Therefore, it is likely that these CS derivatives
527 will be explored in this field in near future.

528

529 Acknowledgments

530 Financial support from Nobelium Joining Gdańsk Tech Research Community (contract number DEC
531 33/2022/IDUB/1.1; NOBELIUM nr 036236) is gratefully acknowledged. R. Castro-Muñoz also
532 acknowledges the School of Engineering and Science and the FEMSA-Biotechnology Center at
533 Tecnológico de Monterrey for their support through the Bioprocess (0020209I13) Focus Group.

534 Conflict of Interest

535 The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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