

1 **Genetic variants in selenoprotein genes modulate biomarkers of selenium status in**  
2 **response to Brazil nut supplementation (the SU.BRA.NUT study)**

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## 25 **Abstract**

26 **Background:** The beneficial effects of selenium (Se) to human health are exerted by  
27 selenoproteins, which can be quantified in blood and used as biomarkers of Se status.  
28 Different responses of Se biomarkers after supplementation with selenomethionine and  
29 sodium selenite have been observed and some of them could be due to genetic  
30 polymorphisms, mainly single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs). Brazil nuts are  
31 known to be the richest natural source of Se. **Objective:** Investigate how genetic  
32 variations in selenoprotein genes modulate biomarkers of Se status in response to Brazil  
33 nut supplementation. **Methods:** The SU.BRA.NUT study was a four month  
34 interventional trial which involved healthy volunteers of both genders, selected in  
35 University of Sao Paulo. The supplementation was done with one Brazil nut a day for 8  
36 weeks, followed by 8 weeks of washout. Blood samples were collected at 5 time points:  
37 baseline, 4 and 8 weeks of supplementation and 4 and 8 weeks of washout for analysis  
38 of five biomarkers of Se status – erythrocyte GPx1 (Glutathione Peroxidase 1) activity,  
39 plasma GPx3 activity, plasma Se, erythrocyte Se, and plasma selenoprotein P. The gene  
40 expression of *GPXI*, *SELENOP*, *SELENOF* and *SELENOS* was done before and after 8  
41 weeks of supplementation. The volunteers were genotyped for SNPs in *GPXI*  
42 (rs1050450, rs3811699 and rs1800699), *GPX4* (rs713041), *SELENOP* (rs3877899 and  
43 rs7579), *SELENOF* (rs5845) and *SELENOS* (rs34713741). **Results:** A total of 130  
44 volunteers finished the protocol. The concentrations of four biomarkers of Se status  
45 increased significantly after 4 and 8 weeks of supplementation, being modulated by  
46 gender. In addition, erythrocyte GPx1 activity was associated with rs1050450, rs713041  
47 and rs5845. Plasma Se was associated with rs7579 and selenoprotein P with plasma Se  
48 at baseline. Nut supplementation significantly increased *GPXI* mRNA expression only  
49 in subjects with CC genotype at rs1050450. *SELENOP* mRNA expression was

50 significantly lower in subjects with GG genotype at rs7579 before and after  
51 supplementation. **Conclusion:** Genetic variations in *GPXI* and *SELENOP* genes are  
52 associated with different responses of molecular and biochemical biomarkers of Se  
53 status after Brazil nut supplementation in healthy Brazilians. The SU.BRA.NUT study  
54 was registred at [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov) as NCT 03111355.

55 **Keywords:** Glutathione Peroxidase, SNPs, selenium, polymorphisms, nutrigenetics

#### 56 **Abbreviations**

57 Se, Selenium; Sec, selenocysteine; SNP, single nucleotide polymorphisms; GPx,  
58 glutathione peroxidase enzyme; *GPXI*, cytosolic glutathione peroxidase gene or  
59 erythrocyte glutathione peroxidase gene ; *GPX3*, plasma glutathione peroxidase gene ;  
60 *GPX4*, phospholipid glutathione peroxidase gene; *SELENOP*, Selenoprotein P gene;  
61 *SELENOS*, Selenoprotein S gene; *SELENOF*, Selenoprotein 15 gene; SePP,  
62 Selenoprotein P protein; SU.BRA.NUT, Supplementation with Brazil Nuts study.

63

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68 collection, analysis and interpretation of data from the present research.

69

## 70 INTRODUCTION

71 The regular intake of nuts has been proposed to decrease risk for chronic diseases  
72 such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes<sup>1-4</sup>. Brazil nuts (*Bertholletia*  
73 *excelsa*, family Lecythidaceae) are known to be the richest source of selenium (Se), an  
74 essential micronutrient for human health. The main form of Se in Brazil nuts are  
75 selenomethionine<sup>5</sup>. Se is incorporated as the amino acid selenocysteine (Sec) during  
76 translation into 25 selenoproteins encoded by the human genome, many of which show  
77 a wide range of functions, including antioxidant defense, redox function, thyroid  
78 hormone metabolism, immune function, reproduction and fertility<sup>6,7</sup>.

79 Low Se status has been associated with increased risk for several diseases, such  
80 as cancer, cardiovascular disease, viral infections, male infertility and inflammatory  
81 disorders<sup>7</sup>. Potentially, genetic variations could modulate this risk by affecting  
82 responses to Se intake<sup>8</sup>. Several studies have demonstrated that polymorphisms in  
83 genes encoding selenoproteins have functional consequences<sup>9</sup>. For instance, the  
84 rs1050450 (Pro198Leu) in *GPXI* (Glutathione Peroxidase 1) gene was associated with  
85 lower erythrocyte GPx1 activity<sup>10,11</sup> and lower plasma Se in humans<sup>12</sup>. Although the  
86 regulation of selenoproteins expression is mainly during translation, the mRNA  
87 expression of selenoproteins, such as SELENOF (Selenoprotein 15), SELENOK and  
88 SEPHS1 can be altered by Se status, as shown previously<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, human  
89 studies have failed to demonstrate an association between Se status and selenoprotein  
90 transcripts<sup>14-16</sup>. Only three studies have observed a positive association between Se  
91 supplementation and increased selenoprotein expression in humans (SELENOF,  
92 SELENOK, GPX1 and SELENOP)<sup>13,17,18</sup>.

93 Glutathione peroxidase 1 (GPx1) activity is sensitive to alterations in Se status in  
94 individuals with low to moderate intake<sup>19</sup>. The *GPXI* gene contains a single nucleotide

95 polymorphism (SNP) in the coding region, which causes a Proline to Leucine amino  
96 acid change at position 198 (rs1050450)<sup>20</sup>. This variation has been associated with  
97 increased risk for lung, breast, prostate and bladder cancers<sup>11,21–23</sup> and has been found  
98 to modulate the response to Se supplementation in healthy subjects<sup>12,24</sup>. Carriers of the  
99 minor allele T had lower plasma Se at baseline and after one year of supplementation  
100 with selenomethionine they had increased urinary Se excretion<sup>12,24</sup>. Glutathione  
101 peroxidase 4 (GPx4) is the only GPx that can reduce phospholipid hydroperoxides in  
102 cell membranes<sup>25</sup>. There is a C>T substitution located in the 3'UTR of the *GPX4* gene  
103 (rs713041) and this variant affects Se incorporation in cell culture models<sup>26</sup> and the  
104 response to Se supplementation in healthy adults<sup>27</sup>. It was demonstrated that subjects  
105 with the TT genotype had lower GPx3 activity after 6 weeks of supplementation with  
106 sodium selenite and lower GPx4 activity during the washout period. Also, females with  
107 the TT genotype had lower GPx1 and TR1 concentration during the supplementation  
108 and the washout period<sup>27</sup>.

109 Selenoprotein P (*SELENOP*) is the major component of blood Se and the key Se  
110 transporter in the body<sup>28</sup>. Two SNPs with functional consequences are present in this  
111 gene; one G>A substitution in the coding region causes an amino acid substitution  
112 Alanine to Threonine at position 234 of the protein (rs3877899), and the other G>A  
113 substitution is located in the 3'UTR, important for Sec insertion (rs7579). Both SNPs  
114 modulate the response to Se supplementation in healthy adults<sup>8</sup>. It was demonstrated  
115 that carriers of the minor allele A for both SNPs had higher SePP concentrations after  
116 supplementation. Also, males with the AA genotype for rs7579 had lower GPx3 activity  
117 after supplementation and during the washout period compared with males with the GG  
118 genotype<sup>8</sup>. Selenoprotein S (*SELENOS*) is an endoplasmic reticulum (ER)  
119 selenoprotein involved in protecting ER from stress caused by misfolded proteins<sup>29</sup>. A

120 C>T substitution located in the promoter region of the gene (rs34713741) has been  
121 associated with increased risk for rectal cancer<sup>30</sup>. Selenoprotein 15 (*SELENOP*) is  
122 another selenoprotein involved in maintaining ER integrity<sup>31</sup>. A SNP in the 3'UTR of  
123 this gene, a G>A substitution in position 1125 (rs5845), has been associated with  
124 increased risk for rectal cancer<sup>30</sup> and lung cancer<sup>32</sup>.

125 Most of the studies investigating the effect of Se supplementation on biomarkers  
126 of Se status were conducted using different chemical forms of selenium in different  
127 concentrations<sup>8,12,27,33,34</sup>. The studies with Brazil nut supplementation were conducted  
128 only in specific groups of the population and considered mainly three SNPS in  
129 selenoproteins (rs1050450, rs3877899 and rs7579) genes with just three biomarkers  
130 evaluated before and after supplementation. No study was conducted in healthy  
131 Brazilians using other functional SNPs in selenoproteins, other plasma biomarkers and  
132 evaluated the washout period to investigate how the biomarkers return after  
133 supplementation withdraw. Therefore, this study was conducted to evaluate if the six  
134 functional polymorphisms in selenoprotein genes modulate the response of biomarkers  
135 of Se status, on both molecular and biochemical levels, during supplementation with  
136 Brazil nuts and the washout period in healthy Brazilians.

137

## 138 **SUBJECT AND METHODS**

### 139 **Study population and supplementation protocol**

140 The present study involved 130 unrelated healthy volunteers selected at  
141 University of Sao Paulo who took part of the Supplementation with Brazil Nuts study  
142 (SU.BRA.NUT) described previously<sup>35</sup>. Subjects were excluded if they were pregnant,  
143 younger than 20y and older than 60y taking multivitamins and mineral supplements,  
144 anti-inflammatory drugs, with excessive alcohol consumption, athletes, with chronic

145 diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease and obese (BMI > 35). At  
146 the beginning of the study (baseline), 20 mL venous blood samples were drawn and the  
147 volunteers received. plastic bottles with nuts enough for four weeks. They were oriented  
148 to take a daily supplement of one Brazil nut a day with a meal. At the end of four weeks  
149 of supplementation, they returned and received another plastic bottle with nuts for the  
150 last four weeks. At the end of four (4-week-intervention) and eight weeks (8-week  
151 intervention) of supplementation, another 20 mL blood sample was taken, and then two  
152 more blood samples were taken after a further four (4-week washout) and eight weeks  
153 without intervention (8-week washout) . Volunteers were asked to complete a control  
154 calendar and mark with an “x” when they consumed each nut throughout the  
155 intervention period. Written informed consent was obtained from all volunteers before  
156 blood sampling. The protocol was approved by Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences  
157 Ethical Committee (CAE: 00961112.3.0000.0067) and was conducted according to the  
158 Helsinki Declaration. The SU.BRA.NUT study was registred at clinicaltrials.gov as  
159 NCT 03111355.

#### 160 **Composition and Se content of Brazil nuts**

161 The Se content of a random sample of Brazil nuts representative of the four  
162 batches used in the study was analyzed using hydride generation flame atomic  
163 absorption spectrometry as described previously<sup>36</sup> and the centesimal composition was  
164 done as proposed by the Association of Official Analytical Chemists<sup>37</sup>.

165

#### 166 **Sample collection**

167 Fasting blood samples (20 mL) were drawn by venipuncture into four 5 mL  
168 EDTA tubes for quantification of the five biomarkers of Se status. An aliquot of 1.5 mL  
169 of whole blood from one EDTA tube was stored into 1,5mL sterile plastic tubes used

170 for DNA extraction and subsequent genotyping, and an aliquot of 500  $\mu$ L of whole  
171 blood from the same EDTA tube was stored into 1,5mL sterile plastic tubes used for  
172 RNA extraction and subsequent gene expression. Another 5mL of blood were collected  
173 in a tube without anticoagulant to obtain serum for determination of the lipid profile  
174 which was described previously<sup>35</sup>. The total volume of blood samples collected was  
175 25mL. Plasma was separated by centrifugation at 3,000 *rpm* for 15 min at 4 °C. The  
176 erythrocyte pellet was washed three times with 5 mL sterile 9 g/L NaCl solution, slowly  
177 mixed by inversion, and centrifuged at 10,000 *rpm* for 10 min (Eppendorf, C5408) at 4  
178 °C, and the supernatant fluid was discarded. Aliquots of whole blood, plasma and  
179 erythrocytes were frozen at -80 °C in sterile, demineralized tubes until the analyses  
180 were performed.

#### 181 **Biomarkers of Se status**

182 Plasma Se and erythrocyte Se concentrations were determined by inductively  
183 coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS, Perkin Elmer DRC II) as described  
184 previously<sup>38</sup>. Samples were diluted 1:50 into a 15 mL polypropylene tube with a  
185 solution containing 0.01% (v/v) Triton X-100, 0.5% (v/v) nitric acid and 10  $\mu$ g/L of  
186 each one of the internal standards. The certified reference material Seronorm Trace  
187 Elements Serum (SERO AS, Billingstad, Norway) was used for the quality control  
188 assessment. Erythrocyte GPx activity was determined using commercial kit (Randox,  
189 Labtest, Minas Gerais, Brazil) according to manufacturer's instructions. The enzyme  
190 activity was evaluated spectrophotometrically at 37 °C at 340 nm using an automated  
191 biochemical analyzer Labmax 240 (Labtest, Minas Gerais, Brazil). Hemoglobin (Hb)  
192 concentration was also determined spectrophotometrically in order to express  
193 erythrocyte GPx activity in U/g Hb. Plasma GPx (GPx3) activity was calculated by the  
194 method of Paglia and Valentine (1967), as modified previously<sup>39</sup>, using hydrogen



195 peroxide as a substrate. One unit of GPx3 activity is defined as that which oxidizes 1  
196  $\mu\text{mol}$  NADPH/min. SePP concentration was determined in plasma using an in-house  
197 SePP ELISA (Enzyme Liked Immunosorbent Assay) assays as described previously<sup>40</sup>  
198 using a 96-well microplate reader (FLUOstar Omega microplate reader, BMG Labtech,  
199 Ortenberg, Germany). Each sample was analyzed in duplicate with aliquots of purified  
200 SePP incubated alongside (range 0.25–16 ng/well) acting as the standard curve. A  
201 pooled plasma from a previous study conducted at The Rowett Institute was used as a  
202 quality control.

### 203 **Genotyping**

204 Total genomic DNA was extracted from whole blood using the Purelink  
205 Genomic DNA Minikit (Invitrogen, Thermo Scientific, CA, USA) and the final  
206 concentration and purity were measured by spectrophotometry at 260 and 280 nm  
207 (NanoDrop ND 1000 Thermo Scientific, Wilmington, DE, USA). Genotyping was  
208 carried out by real-time PCR using the StepOne Plus Real-Time system with Taqman  
209 SNP Genotyping Assays (Applied Biosystems, Thermo Scientific, Foster City, CA,  
210 USA). The allelic discrimination was obtained by performing an endpoint read. The  
211 SNPs selected were located in *GPXI* gene (rs1050450, rs3811699 and rs1800668),  
212 *GPX4* gene (rs713041), *SELENOP* gene (rs3877899 and rs7579), *SELENOS* gene  
213 (rs34713741) and *SELENOF* gene (rs5845).

### 214 **Selenoprotein gene expression**

215 Total RNA was extracted from whole blood using the Ribopure Blood Kit  
216 (Ambion, Thermo Scientific, Austin, TX, USA) and final concentration was measured  
217 in a NanoDrop ND 1000 spectrophotometer (NanoDrop ND 1000, Thermo Scientific,  
218 Wilmington, DE, USA). cDNA was synthesized by reverse transcription PCR using the  
219 High Capacity Reverse Transcriptase kit (Applied Biosystems, Thermo Scientific,

220 Foster City, CA, USA). Analysis of gene expression was performed by real-time  
 221 quantitative PCR (qPCR) in the QuantStudio 12K Real Time PCR System using  
 222 Taqman Gene expression Assays for *GPX1*, *SELENOP*, *SELENOS* and *SELENOF*  
 223 (Applied Biosystems, Thermo Scientific, Foster City, CA, USA). GPX4 mRNA  
 224 expression was not evaluated because the literature states that this protein is ranked high  
 225 in the hierarchy of selenoprotein expression with no predictable changes in gene  
 226 expression after supplementation. Glyceraldehyde phosphate dehydrogenase (GAPDH)  
 227 mRNA expression was used as a reference gene. Relative gene expression was  
 228 calculated based on the  $2^{-\Delta\Delta Cq}$  method<sup>41</sup>.

229

### 230 **Statistical Analysis**

231 Continuous variables were tested for normality using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov  
 232 test. The data were presented as geometric means (CI 95%). Concentrations of the five  
 233 biomarkers were compared in the different time points using ANOVA repeated  
 234 measures or Friedman’s test. The percentage of variation for each biomarker was  
 235 calculated considering the time point immediate before, for example, the percentage of  
 236 variation for GPx1 activity at 4weeks of nuts was calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{(\text{GPx1 activity 4w}) - (\text{GPx1 activity baseline}) * 100}{(\text{GPx1 activity baseline})}$$

237 The variables used for multiple linear regressions in table 5 were done  
 238 considering only 3 time points: baseline, 8 weeks of nuts and 8 weeks of washout.  
 239 Therefore, change 1 was referring to the entire supplementation period (baseline until 8  
 240 weeks of nuts) and change 2 to the washout period (8 weeks of nuts until 8 weeks of  
 241 washout. For example the variable “Change1\_GPx1” was calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{(\text{GPx1 activity 8w}) - (\text{GPx1 activity baseline}) * 100}{(\text{GPx1 activity baseline})}$$

242 A genetic dominant model was used to evaluate differences in the presence of  
243 the rare allele. In this model, individuals with the rare allele were combined together in  
244 one category, leaving the common genotype in another category. Multiple linear  
245 regression models were created using the biomarkers at each time of intervention as  
246 response variables. Age, body fat percentage, gender, plasma Se, erythrocyte Se and six  
247 SNPs were included as predictors. Only six SNPs were used because the three SNPs in  
248 *GPXI* gene were in linkage disequilibrium with an  $r = 1$  and  $D' > 0,5$ . Repeated  
249 measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was performed to investigate the effect of  
250 the genotypes for SNPs appointed in the linear regression models. The Chi-square test  
251 with continuity correction was used to determine whether genotype frequencies  
252 followed the Hardy-Weinberg Equilibrium. The haplotype distribution and linkage  
253 disequilibrium analysis were done in the software Haploview 4.2. SNPs were  
254 considered in linkage disequilibrium when  $D' > 0,5$ . Differences were considered  
255 significant at  $P < 0.05$ . The analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for  
256 the Social Sciences software version 17.0 for Windows (SPSS, Chicago, IL, USA) and  
257 GraphPad Prism (GraphPad Prism version 5.00 for Windows, GraphPad Software, San  
258 Diego, CA, USA).

## 259 **RESULTS**

260 A total of 135 adults were enrolled in the study during 2013 and started the  
261 supplementation. Of these, 2 females stopped the supplementation complaining of side  
262 effects (ex. sickness), leaving 133 subjects that finished the 8 weeks of intervention. Of  
263 these 133 volunteers, 2 males withdraw during the first month of washout and one male  
264 during the second month, leaving a total of 130 volunteers that finished the entire  
265 protocol.

266

### 267 **Characteristics of the volunteers and nut composition**

268 The characteristics of the volunteers are summarized in **Table 1**. Mean age was  
269  $29.8 \pm 9.2$  y and mean BMI was  $23.3 \pm 3.3$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>. There was a 100% adherence to the  
270 supplementation confirmed by the control calendar given at baseline, the empty plastic  
271 bottles at the end of supplementation and the increase of three times in plasma Se after 8  
272 weeks of supplementation with Brazil nuts. The Se content and centesimal composition  
273 of Brazil nuts are shown in **Table S1**. Four different batches were used during the  
274 supplementation. The mean  $\pm$  standard deviation for Se content of these four batches  
275 was  $100.4 \pm 5.3$   $\mu$ g/g. The average weight of the nuts ranged from 3g to 4g, therefore  
276 each nut provided from 300  $\mu$ g of Se to 400  $\mu$ g of Se, which is approximately six times  
277 higher than the RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowances) for adults (55 $\mu$ g/d).

278

### 279 **Effect of Brazil nut supplementation on five biomarkers of Se status**

280 The concentrations of the five biomarkers of Se status measured during nut  
281 supplementation and washout period are shown in **Table 2**. GPx1 activity decreased

282 significantly after 4 weeks of supplementation, increased by 8 weeks of  
283 supplementation ( $P < 0.001$ ) and remained high during the first 4 weeks of Brazil nut  
284 withdrawal; it finally decreased after 8 weeks washout ( $P = 0.004$ ). Erythrocyte Se  
285 concentrations increased after 4 and 8 weeks intervention and decreased after 8 weeks  
286 washout ( $P < 0.001$ ). There was a significant increase in GPx3 activity after 4 weeks of  
287 supplementation ( $P = 0.004$ ). Similarly, plasma Se concentrations increased  
288 significantly after 4 and 8 weeks of supplementation ( $P < 0.001$ ). During the washout  
289 period, there was a sharp decrease in plasma Se compared to 8 weeks of  
290 Brazil nut intake ( $P < 0.001$ ). The concentrations of plasma SePP were also increased  
291 after the supplementation and reduced after nut withdrawal ( $P = 0.001$ ). The percentage  
292 of the variation for each biomarker during the supplementation and the washout period  
293 is shown in **Figure 1**.

#### 294 **Genotypes and haplotypes in selenoprotein genes**

295 Genotype and allele frequencies of SNPs in selenoprotein genes are shown in **Table 3**.  
296 All SNPs were in Hardy-Weinberg Equilibrium. Haplotype analyses showed evidence  
297 of linkage disequilibrium for SNPs in *GPX1* gene: rs1050450 x rs1800668 ( $D' = 1.0$  and  
298  $r^2 = 0.98$ ) and rs1050450 x rs3811699 ( $D' = 1.0$  and  $r^2 = 1.0$ ). In fact, in Table 3 the  
299 genotypes frequencies of the three SNPs are exactly the same. Only two haplotypes  
300 were observed, the common haplotype CCG for rs1050450, 1800668 and rs3811699  
301 with a frequency of 74% and the rare haplotype TTA with 25%. Therefore, only  
302 rs1050450 was used for further analysis. For the SNPs in the *GPX4*, *SELENOF* and  
303 *SELENOS* genes, the frequency of the rare genotypes was between 19% and 8%. No  
304 haplotype analysis was performed in those genes because only one SNP was genotyped  
305 in each gene. **Variables influencing biomarkers of Se status during Brazil nut**  
306 **supplementation and washout period**

307 Multiple linear regression models for the five biomarkers of Se status in each time  
308 point of the protocol are shown in **Table 4**. GPx1 activity was associated with  
309 rs1050450 after 4 ( $P = 0.037$ ) and 8 weeks ( $P = 0.017$ ) of intervention and with rs5845  
310 after 4 weeks ( $P = 0.003$ ) of intervention with both SNPs reducing GPx1 activity. After  
311 8 weeks of washout, GPx1 activity was associated with rs5845 in *SELENOF*, which was  
312 lower in the presence of the rare allele A ( $P = 0.049$ ) and with rs713041 in *GPX4*,  
313 which increased GPx1 activity in individuals carrying the rare allele T ( $P = 0.036$ ). The  
314 SNP rs713041 in *GPX4* gene was associated with Erythrocyte Se concentrations at  
315 baseline, reducing its concentrations in the presence of the rare allele T ( $P = 0.038$ ).

316 Plasma Se concentration was associated with rs7579 in *SELENOP* ( $P = 0.034$ )  
317 and rs34713741 in *SELENOS* ( $P = 0.038$ ) after 4 weeks of supplementation, which was  
318 lower in the presence of the rare allele for both SNPs. Plasma SePP concentrations  
319 were positively associated with plasma Se at baseline and GPx3 activity was positively  
320 associated with plasma Se after 4 ( $P = 0.050$ ) and 8 weeks ( $P = 0.025$ ) of  
321 supplementation, as expected due to the same blood compartment location of both  
322 biomarkers (Table 4). A complete table of the biomarkers stratified by all functional  
323 SNPs can be seen at Supplementary table 2 (Table S2).

324 Erythrocyte GPx1 activity was stratified by rs1050450, as appointed in the  
325 multivariate regression analysis (**Figure 2**). During the intervention, GPx1 activity was  
326 lower in carriers of the rare allele T (CT+TT), almost reaching statistical significance at  
327 4 weeks of supplementation ( $P = 0.057$ , Figure 2a). SePP concentrations were stratified  
328 by rs7579 (Figure 2b). At baseline, SePP concentrations were higher for carriers of the  
329 rare allele A, when the interaction with gender was considered ( $P = 0.048$ ).

330 The percentage of variation on the concentrations of biomarkers of Se status is  
331 shown in **Table 5**. The difference in GPx1 activity comparing baseline and 8 weeks of

332 supplementation (Change1\_GPx1) was associated with rs7579 in *SELENOP* ( $P = 0.044$ )  
333 and with rs5845 ( $P < 0.001$ ), in which the presence of the rare allele increased this  
334 difference, meaning that the values were higher for carriers of the rare allele A after 8  
335 weeks of supplementation. The difference in Erythrocyte Se concentrations during the  
336 supplementation (Change1\_ Erythrocyte Se) was associated with rs34713741 in  
337 *SELENOS* ( $P = 0.010$ ), in which the presence of the rare allele T also increased this  
338 difference. BMI and gender had a negative effect on the variation in Erythrocyte Se, in  
339 which individuals with higher BMI and females had higher values at baseline. The  
340 change in GPx3 activity in response to the supplementation (Change1\_ GPx3 activity)  
341 was negatively associated with rs5845 in *SELENOF* ( $P = 0.014$ ), in which carriers of  
342 the rare allele A had higher GPx3 activity at baseline. However, interaction with BMI  
343 increased the variation ( $P = 0.011$ ). The only two variables affecting the variation in  
344 Plasma Se were gender and BMI, both having a negative effect. The difference in GPx1  
345 activity comparing 8 weeks of washout and 8 weeks of supplementation  
346 (Change2\_GPx1) was negatively associated with gender, in which females had higher  
347 GPx1 activity after 8 weeks of supplementation. However, the interaction with  
348 rs713041 had the opposite effect: females carriers of the variant allele T had higher  
349 GPx1 activity at 8 weeks of washout. Finally, the difference in SePP concentrations  
350 comparing 8 weeks of washout and 8 weeks of supplementation (Change2\_SePP) was  
351 negatively associated with rs5845 in *SELENOF* gene, in which carriers of the rare allele  
352 A had higher SePP concentrations after supplementation (Table 5).

### 353 **Effect of Brazil nut supplementation on mRNA expression of selenoprotein genes**

354 Gene expression of four selenoprotein genes (*GPX1*, *SELENOP*, *SELENOS* and  
355 *SELENOF*) was analyzed on previously genotyped volunteers before and after 8 weeks  
356 of Brazil nut supplementation. The results are shown in **Figure 3**. *GPX1* mRNA

357 expression increased after supplementation in individuals with the CC genotype for  
358 rs1050450 ( $P = 0.026$ ) while it did not change for carriers of the T allele (Figure 3a).  
359 Consequently, after Brazil nut supplementation, *GPX1* mRNA expression was lower in  
360 individuals with the CT and TT genotypes compared to the CC group ( $P < 0.05$ ).  
361 *SELENOP* mRNA expression was higher in carriers of the rare allele A for rs7579  
362 either before or after supplementation (Figure 3b,  $P < 0.05$ ), and nut supplementation  
363 did not significantly changed *SELENOP* mRNA expression whatever the genotype  
364 group. No effect of genotypes on *SELENOF* and *SELENOS* mRNA expression was  
365 observed either before or after the supplementation (Figure 3c and 3d).

## 366 **DISCUSSION**

367 The influence of genetic variants on the response to Se supplementation have  
368 been proposed before<sup>8,12,27,34</sup>. Our results not only confirm these earlier observations,  
369 but also extend them by demonstrating that the rs5845 in *SELENOF* gene modulated  
370 erythrocyte GPx1 activity, the variation of GPx1, GPx3 activity after supplementation  
371 and the variation on SePP after nut withdraw. This study is the first to report this  
372 unexpected association between rs5845 in *SELENOF* and Se biomarkers after  
373 supplementation with Brazil nuts, the first to use SePP concentrations as a biomarker of  
374 Se status in Brazilians and the first to measure all five biomarkers during the washout  
375 period. Moreover, this study demonstrated that Brazil nut supplementation was effective  
376 in increasing mRNA expression of *GPX1* and *SELENOP* and that this effect was  
377 modulated by functional polymorphisms on those genes.

378 It was observed a delayed response of the two erythrocyte biomarkers of Se  
379 status to Brazil nut supplementation, with values increasing up to the first four weeks of  
380 the washout period. This apparently slow response could be explained by erythrocytes  
381 having a lifespan of 120 days so that it takes time for changes in selenoprotein synthesis



382 to appear in the mature red cell population<sup>42,43</sup>. This is the first study to use plasma  
383 SePP concentrations as a biomarker of Se status in healthy Brazilians. The baseline  
384 plasma Se concentration of 96.7 µg/L (1.22 µmol/L) would be expected to maximize  
385 plasma GPx activity, but not SePP concentration since earlier work has shown that the  
386 plasma Se concentration needed to maximize GPx3 activity is about 90 µg/L<sup>44</sup> and to  
387 maximize plasma SePP concentration it is approximately 120 µg/L<sup>45</sup>. As a result, the  
388 studied population could be considered to have a moderate to adequate Se status which  
389 was able to respond to Se supplementation with an increase in concentrations of plasma  
390 Se and SePP<sup>43,46</sup>. We suggest that the threshold for maximize GPx3 activity be  
391 reviewed, as our work demonstrated that this population with a baseline plasma Se of  
392 90µL/L had a significant increase in GPx3 activity after 4 weeks of supplementation.

393 In our study subjects with the rare allele T for rs1050450 in *GPX1* gene had  
394 lower GPx1 activity. This observation is consistent with previous studies<sup>10,11,47,48</sup>. It is  
395 hypothesized that the change of the amino acid Proline to Leucine alters the secondary  
396 structure of the protein, which can have profound effects on its activity and stability<sup>21</sup>.  
397 This was confirmed by *in vitro* studies where Se supplementation reduced enzyme  
398 thermostability for the Leu-variant<sup>49</sup>. It was observed that the SNPs rs1050450,  
399 rs3811699 and rs1800668 were in linkage disequilibrium. This linkage was also  
400 observed in a Japanese study conducted with type 2 diabetic patients<sup>10</sup>. One possible  
401 explanation for the reduced GPx1 activity is that the presence of these three genetic  
402 variations affected the transcriptional process and, as a result, the final enzyme activity  
403 was lower. Moreover, in our work, the Brazil nut supplementation was effective in  
404 increase *GPX1* mRNA expression in whole blood, only in individuals with the CC  
405 genotype at rs1050450. Previous studies did not find a positive association of Se  
406 supplementation and selenoprotein gene expression<sup>14-16</sup>, however, three studies confirm

407 our results<sup>13,17,18</sup>. Differences may be explained by the lack of the genotype analysis on  
408 previous studies, maybe to observe this effect of Se supplementation on mRNA levels  
409 of *GPX1* is necessary to stratify by genotypes.

410 The presence of rs7579 in the *SELENOP* gene influenced not only SePP plasma  
411 concentrations but also *SELENOP* mRNA expression. SePP protein concentrations were  
412 higher at baseline in carriers of the variant allele A for this 3'UTR SNP. Furthermore,  
413 A-carriers had higher *SELENOP* mRNA levels than GG at baseline and after  
414 supplementation. Previous work with humans have not found an association between Se  
415 supplementation and *SELENOP* mRNA expression in white blood cells<sup>14,16</sup>. It should  
416 be noted that the present work used whole blood for the mRNA expression. Only one  
417 study found a positive association by showing that rs7579 influenced *SELENOP* mRNA  
418 expression<sup>17</sup>. The SePP protein has two isoforms in plasma, the 50kDa and the 60kDa,  
419 that are influenced by the genotype for both SNPs in *SELENOP* gene. Individuals with  
420 the GA genotype for rs3877899 had a lower proportion of the SePP 60kD, with the Sec-  
421 rich domain<sup>50</sup>. This difference in the proportion of SePP isoforms may affect Se  
422 availability in plasma for selenoprotein synthesis in different tissues.

423 The 3'UTR region of *SELENOP* gene has two SNPs which are in the same  
424 haplotype. The first one is a located a C>T substitution at position 811 (rs5859) and the  
425 other is a G>A substitution at position 1125 (rs5845). The two possible haplotypes are  
426 811C/1125G or 811T/1125A<sup>51</sup>. Previous work has demonstrated that the SECIS  
427 element containing the A variant is less responsive to Se supplementation and may  
428 influence the translation of Selenoprotein 15 protein<sup>52</sup>. Two biomarkers of Se status  
429 were associated with rs5845 in *SELENOP* gene in our study: erythrocyte Se  
430 concentrations and GPx1 activity. We also observed that this SNP modulated the  
431 percentage of variation of GPx1 and GPx3 activities after supplementation and the

432 variation in SePP during washout period. To our knowledge, this is the first time that  
433 rs5845 is associated with these biomarkers. These were unexpected associations, since  
434 the SNP is located in the SELENOF gene and the biological effect was observed in  
435 other selenoproteins. However, the biological function of the Selenoprotein 15 is still  
436 unknown and maybe the hierarchy of selenoprotein expression may help explain these  
437 associations with other selenoproteins.

438         This study has several limitations. The first one is the small sample size, which  
439 could have masked significant associations of the genotypes with the biomarkers. The  
440 second one is the absence of a control group, however, since the main goal of this  
441 before-after interventional trial was to investigate the effect of the genotypes on the  
442 response to the dietary intervention, we decided that each person before  
443 supplementation would be a better control. The other limitation is the small number of  
444 males in the study group which could have biased the gender effect in the statistical  
445 modeling.

446         In summary, the results of this study suggest that genetic variants in  
447 selenoprotein genes and gender influence the response of plasma and erythrocyte  
448 biomarkers of Se status to a daily supplementation with one unit of Brazil nut in healthy  
449 adults in Brazil. Furthermore, the genotypes for rs1050450 and rs7579 affected the gene  
450 expression of *GPXI* and *SELENOF*. Future nutritional interventions with Brazil nuts  
451 should consider the genetic background of the volunteers when evaluating the  
452 biomarkers of Se status used in this study.

453

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458 Erythrocyte Selenium; AS: provided essential reagents for Selenoprotein P  
459 concentrations and Glutathione Peroxidase 3 activity; JLSD, EMGS, CD, PB:  
460 performed data analysis and statistics; JLSD, MMR, JH, PB: wrote the manuscript. All  
461 authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission. The  
462 authors declare no conflict of interest.

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**TABLE 1**  
 Characteristics of the study volunteers<sup>1</sup>

Parameters	Total (n= 130)
Gender, <i>n (%)</i>	
male	32 (24.6)
female	98 (75.4)
Age (y), <i>n (%)</i>	
20 – 30y	92 (70.8)
31 – 40y	20 (15.4)
41 – 50y	9 (6.9)
51 – 60y	9 (6.9)
BMI (kg/m <sup>2</sup> ), <i>n (%)</i>	
< 25	93 (71.5)
25 – 30	31 (23.8)
> 30	6 (4.6)
Smoking status, <i>n (%)</i>	
Never	104 (80.0)
ex-smoker	20 (5.4)
current	6 (4.6)
Physical activity, <i>n (%)</i>	
yes	94 (72.3)
no	36 (27.7)
History of chronic diseases, <i>n (%)</i>	
yes	113 (86.9)
no	17 (13.1)
Race, <i>n (%)</i>	
caucasian	94 (72.3)
black	26 (20.0)
asian/indigen	10 (7.7)
Plasma Se (µg/L)	
before supplementation	96.7 ± 29.6
after supplementation	292.8 ± 95.4

<sup>1</sup> Numerical variables are presented as mean ± standard deviation (sd). Categorical variables are presented as n (%).

**TABLE 2**

Concentrations of biomarkers<sup>1</sup> of Se status during supplementation with Brazil nuts and washout period in healthy adults ( $n = 130$ )

Biomarker	Supplementation period			<i>P</i> value <sup>2</sup>
	baseline	4 weeks	8 weeks	
GPx 1 activity (U/g Hb)	61.8 (58.8 – 65.1) <sup>a</sup>	54.4 (52.0 – 57.1) <sup>b</sup>	61.3 (57.7 – 65.1) <sup>a</sup>	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>
Erythrocyte Se (µg/L)	169.8 (158.8 – 181.4) <sup>a</sup>	360.2 (342.5 – 378.9) <sup>b</sup>	438.8 (406.6 – 464.8) <sup>c</sup>	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>
GPx 3 activity (U/L)	528.1 (510.2 – 546.6) <sup>a</sup>	574.1 (554.4 – 594.5) <sup>b</sup>	544.4 (523.5 – 566.2) <sup>ab</sup>	<b>0.004</b>
Plasma Se (µg/L)	90.7 (86.4 – 95.2) <sup>a</sup>	219.5 (208.4 – 231.2) <sup>b</sup>	267.0 (252.8 – 282.0) <sup>c</sup>	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>
SePP (mg/L)	3.4 (3.2 – 3.5) <sup>a</sup>	na	3.9 (3.7 – 4.1) <sup>b</sup>	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>
Biomarker	Washout period			<i>P</i> value
	8 weeks	4 weeks	8 weeks	
GPx 1 activity (U/g Hb)	61.3 (57.7 – 65.1) <sup>a</sup>	68.5 (65.3 – 71.9) <sup>b</sup>	62.8 (58.9 – 67.0) <sup>ab</sup>	<b>0.005</b>
Erythrocyte Se (µg/L)	438.8 (406.6 – 464.8) <sup>a</sup>	484.1 (452.7 – 517.5) <sup>b</sup>	332.1 (307.0 – 359.3) <sup>c</sup>	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>
GPx 3 activity (U/L)	544.4 (523.5 – 566.2) <sup>a</sup>	507.1 (486.9 – 528.2) <sup>ab</sup>	480.9 (457.7 – 505.2) <sup>b</sup>	0.021
Plasma Se (µg/L)	267.0 (252.8 – 282.0) <sup>a</sup>	195.3 (186.8 – 204.2) <sup>b</sup>	160.2 (154.3 – 166.2) <sup>c</sup>	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>
SePP (mg/L)	3.9 (3.7 – 4.1) <sup>a</sup>	na <sup>3</sup>	3.5 (3.4 – 3.7) <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.001</b>

<sup>1</sup> Values are geometric means (CI 95%).

<sup>2</sup> ANOVA repeated measures with post hoc Tukey for GPx1 activity; Friedman test with post hoc Dunn for Erythrocyte Se, GPx3 activity and Plasma Se; Wilcoxon test for SePP concentrations. Different letters in the row mean statistical difference in the time points. GPx1 activity and Erythrocyte Se measured in erythrocytes and GPx3 activity, Plasma Se and SePP measured in Plasma. GPx, Glutathione Peroxidase; SePP, Selenoprotein P.

<sup>3</sup> na: not analyzed

**TABLE 3**

Genotype and allele frequency of SNPs in selenoprotein genes

Gene	SNP	N	CC/GG	CT/GA	TT/AA	alleles	MAF	HWE ( <i>p</i> value)
GPX1	rs1050450	130	53.85	40.77	5.38	C > T	T: 0.25	0.560
	rs3811699	130	53.85	40.77	5.38	C > T	T: 0.25	0.560
	rs1800668	130	53.85	40.77	5.38	C > T	T: 0.25	0.560
GPX4	rs713041	130	38.46	42.31	19.23	C > T	T: 0.40	1.914
SELENOP	rs3877899	130	53.85	36.15	10.00	G > A	T: 0.28	1.428
	rs7579	130	38.46	42.31	19.23	G > A	T: 0.40	1.914
SELENOS	rs34713741	130	53.85	37.69	8.46	C > T	T: 0.27	0.332
SELENOF	rs5845	130	42.31	46.15	11.54	C > T	T: 0.35	0.050

GPX1: Glutathione Peroxidase 1, GPX4: Glutathione Peroxidase 4, SELENOP: Selenoprotein P; SELENOF: Selenoprotein 15; SELENOS: Selenoprotein S.

**TABLE 4**

Multiple Linear Regression models for biomarkers of Se status during daily supplementation with Brazil nuts and washout period in healthy subjects

Dependent Variables	Predictors	$\beta$ coefficient	Standard error	<i>P</i> value
<b>GPx1 activity (U/g Hb)</b>				
Baseline	Erythrocyte Se	0.050	0.019	0.011
4 weeks nuts	Erythrocyte Se	0.029	0.012	0.014
	rs1050450 ( <i>GPXI</i> )	-5.385	2.546	0.037
	rs5845 ( <i>SELENOF</i> )	-7.959	2.605	0.003
8 weeks nuts	rs1050450	-8.300	3.424	0.017
8 weeks washout	rs5845	-8.333	4.189	0.049
	rs713041	8.955	4.231	0.036
<b>Erythrocyte Se concentration (<math>\mu\text{g/L}</math>)</b>				
Baseline	Plasma Se	1.570	0.215	< 0.001
	rs713041 ( <i>GPX4</i> )	-26.698	12.752	0.038
4 weeks nuts	Plasma Se	0.405	0.150	0.008
8 weeks nuts	Plasma Se	0.692	0.158	< 0.001
<b>Plasma Se concentration (<math>\mu\text{g/L}</math>)</b>				
4 weeks nuts	rs7579 ( <i>SELENOP</i> )	-0.115	0.054	0.034
	rs34713741	-0.110	0.053	0.038
	( <i>SELENOS</i> )			
<b>SePP concentration (mg/dL)</b>				
Baseline	Plasma Se	0.007	0.003	0.015
<b>GPx3 activity (U/L)</b>				
4 weeks nuts	Plasma Se	0.323	0.165	0.050
8 weeks nuts	Plasma Se	0.304	0.134	0.025

<sup>1</sup> Multivariate linear regression models were done separately in different time points for each biomarker using SPSS. Only significant p values (< 0.05) are shown in the table. GPx1 activity and Erythrocyte Se measured in erythrocytes and GPx3 activity, Plasma Se and SePP measured in Plasma. GPx, Glutathione Peroxidase; SePP, Selenoprotein P. All the models were adjusted for age, gender and body fat percentage.

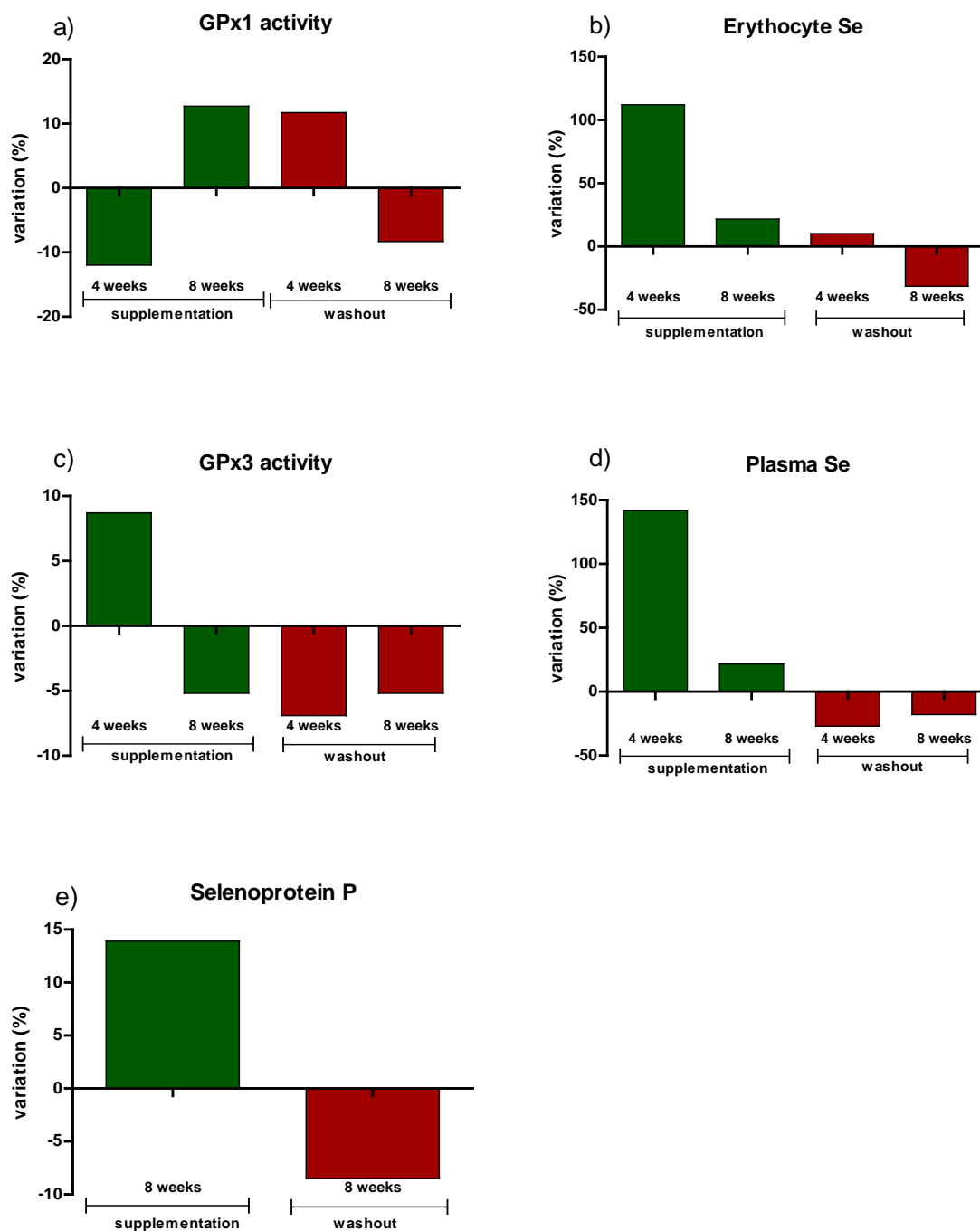
**TABLE 5**

Multiple Linear Regression models for the change<sup>1</sup> on biomarkers concentrations during daily supplementation with Brazil nuts

Dependent Variables	Predictors	$\beta$ coefficient	Standard error	<i>P</i> value
Change1_GPx1	rs7579	7.372	3.624	<b>0.044</b>
	rs5845	54.582	11.334	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>
Change1_Erythrocyte Se	rs34713741	262.445	100.909	<b>0.010</b>
	BMI	-11.849	4.348	<b>0.007</b>
	gender	-107.745	32.802	<b>0.001</b>
Change1_GPx3	rs5845	-397.353	158.625	<b>0.014</b>
	BMI*rs5845	17.412	6.769	<b>0.011</b>
Change1_Plasma Se	gender	-57.110	18.159	<b>0.002</b>
	BMI	-8.429	2.440	<b>0.001</b>
Change2_GPx1	gender	-40.057	18.162	<b>0.029</b>
	gender*rs713041	26.269	10.728	<b>0.016</b>
Change2_SePP	rs5845	-3.110	1.521	<b>0.043</b>

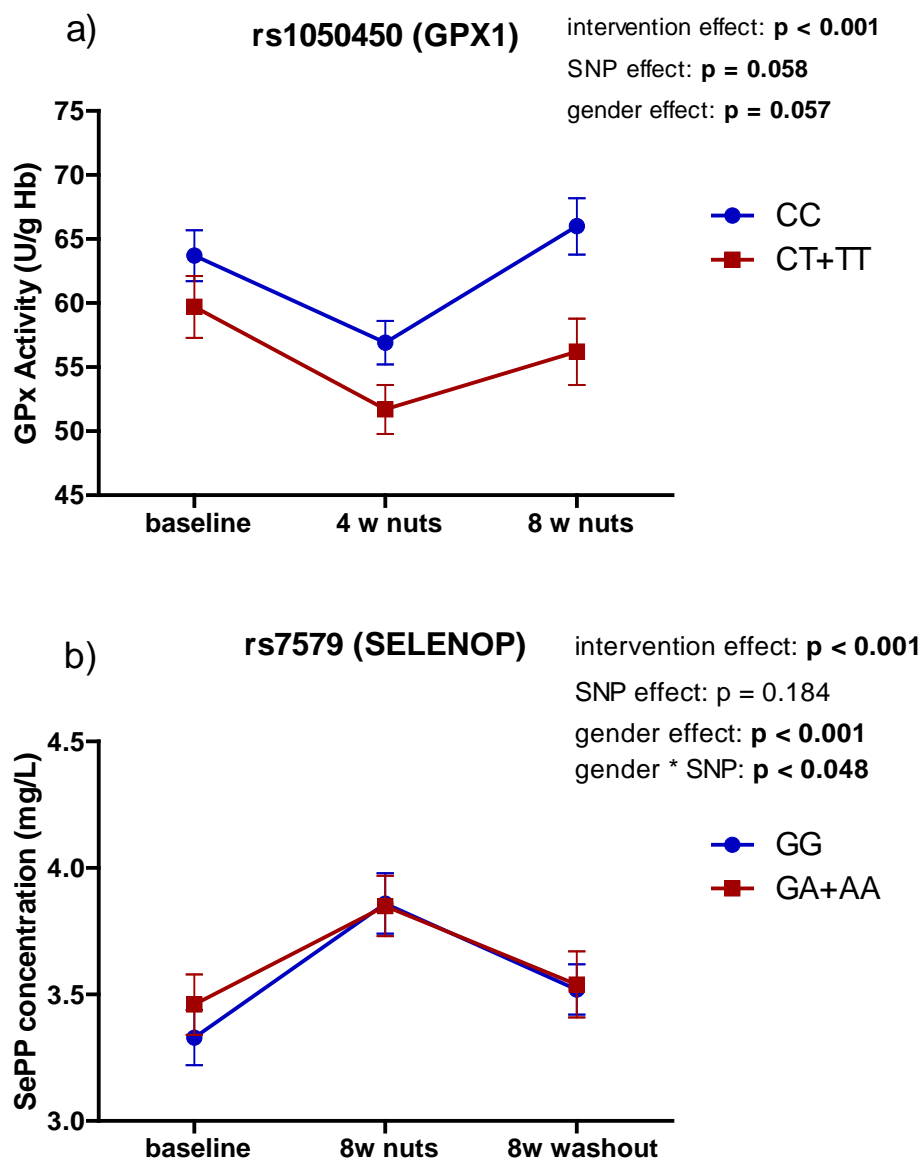
<sup>1</sup>: Change 1 = (8 weeks nuts) – (baseline) and Change 2 = (8 weeks washout) – (8 weeks nuts)

All the models were adjusted for age, gender and body fat percentage. GPx, Glutathione Peroxidase; SePP, Selenoprotein P.



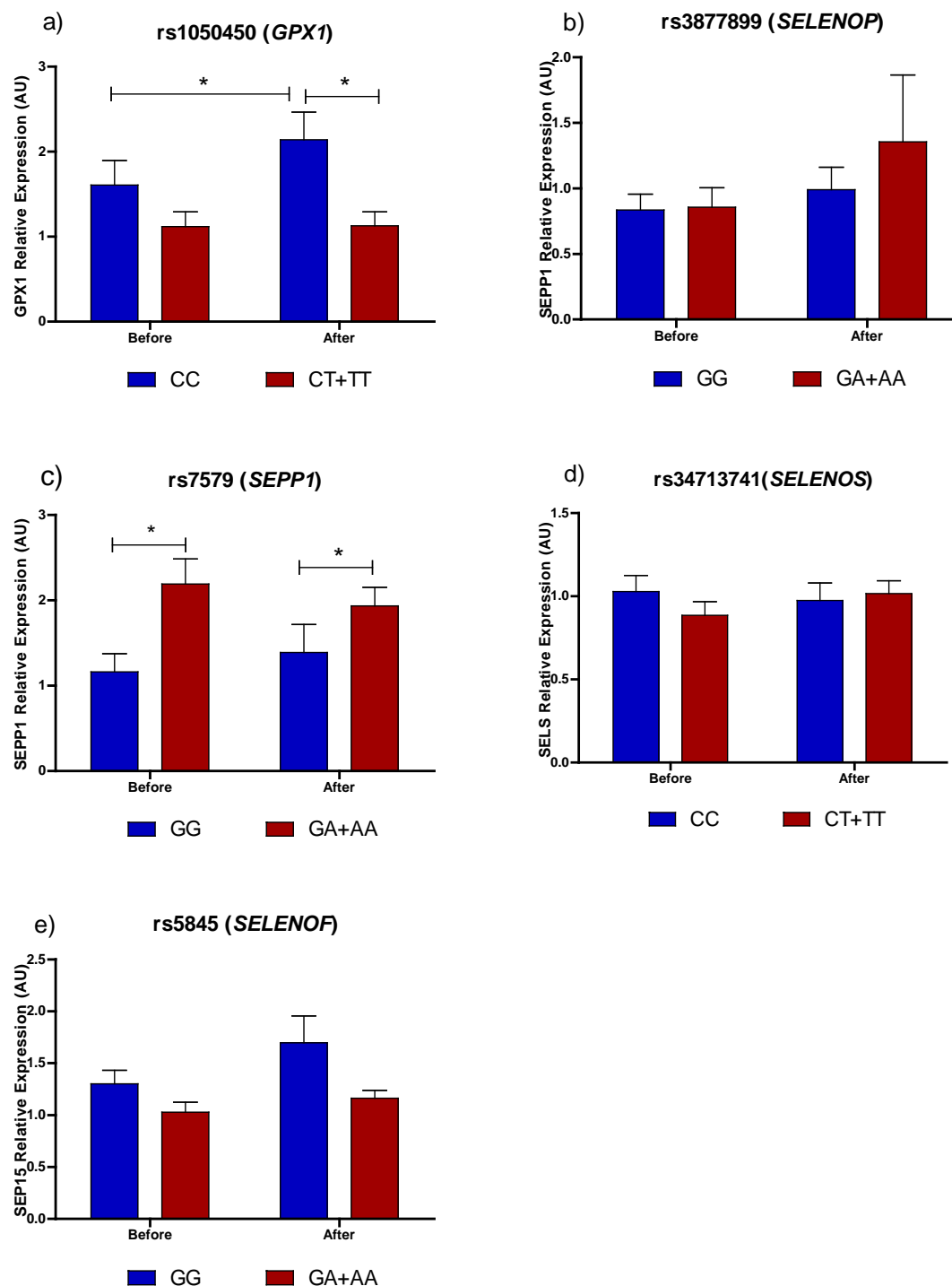
**FIGURE 1.** Percentage of variation<sup>1</sup> in five biomarkers of Se status during and after daily supplementation with one unit of Brazil nuts in healthy adults

<sup>1</sup> The variation was calculated comparing with the time point immediate before: 4 weeks nuts compared to baseline, 8 weeks nuts compared to 4 weeks nuts, 4 weeks washout compared with 8 weeks nuts and 8 weeks washout compared to 4 weeks washout. a) percentage of variation for GPx1 activity, b) percentage of variation for Erythrocyte Se, c) percentage of variation for GPx3 activity, d) percentage of variation for Plasma Se, e) percentage of variation for SePP.



**FIGURE 2.** Biomarkers of Se status stratified by SNPs in *GPX1* and *SELENOP* genes<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Values are geometric means  $\pm$  standard errors. Two way ANOVA repeated measures adjusted for multiple comparisons with Bonferroni test. a) Erythrocyte GPx1 activity stratified by rs1050450 genotypes, b) Plasma SePP concentration stratified by rs7579 genotypes.



**FIGURE 3.** Pattern of selenoprotein gene expression in response to Brazil nut supplementation on previously genotyped volunteers<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gene expression relative to GAPDH a) GPx1 mRNA expression separated by rs1050450 genotypes, b) SELENOP mRNA expression separated by rs3877899 genotypes, c) SELENOP mRNA expression separated by rs7579 genotypes, d) SELENOS mRNA expression separated by rs34713741 genotypes, e) SELENOF mRNA expression separated by rs5845 genotypes.

\*  $P < 0.05$ , Mann-Whitney test, \*\*  $P < 0.05$ , Wilcoxon test