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**Author(s)**
El Bohi, Khlood M.; Hashimoto, Yoshiharu; Muzandu, Kaampwe; Ikenaka, Yoshinori; Ibrahim, Zein Shaban; Kazusaka, Akio; Fujita, Shoichi; Ishizuka, Mayumi

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Protective effect of *Pleurotus cornucopiae* mushroom extract on carbon tetrachloride-induced hepatotoxicity

**Khlood M. El Bohi**<sup>1,3)</sup>, **Yoshiharu Hashimoto**<sup>3</sup>, **Kaampwe Muzandu**<sup>3, 4)</sup>, **Yoshinori Ikenaka**<sup>3</sup>, **Zein Shaban Ibrahim**<sup>3, 5)</sup>, **Akio Kazusaka**<sup>3</sup>, **Shoichi Fujita**<sup>3</sup> and **Mayumi Ishizuka**<sup>3, 6)</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Zagazig University, Zagazig, 44519, Egypt  
<sup>2</sup>Laboratory of Anatomy, Department of Biomedical Sciences, Graduate School of Veterinary Medicine, Hokkaido University, Sapporo 060–0818, Japan  
<sup>3</sup>Laboratory of Toxicology, Department of Environmental Veterinary Sciences, Graduate School of Veterinary Medicine, Hokkaido University, Sapporo 060–0818, Japan  
<sup>4</sup>Biomedical Sciences Department, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Zambia, Lusaka P.O. Box 32379, Zambia  
<sup>5</sup>Department of Biochemistry and Physiology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Kafr El-Sheikh University, Kafr El-Sheikh 54363, Egypt

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**Abstract**

*Pleurotus cornucopiae* (PC) mushrooms are found in the field and commonly known in Japan as *Tamogidake* mushrooms. The present study investigated the protective effects of an aqueous extract of PC on carbon tetrachloride (CCL)–induced hepatotoxicity and the possible mechanism involved in this protection including cytochrome P450 (CYP) 2E1. Wistar rats were pretreated with aqueous extracts of PC (0, 100, 200, and 400 mg/kg) orally for 8 days prior to the intraperitoneal administration of a single dose of CCl<sub>4</sub> (0.5 ml/kg) or corn oil. Pretreatment with PC mushroom extract significantly prevented the increased serum enzyme activities of alanine and aspartate aminotransferases in a dose-dependent manner, and suppressed the expression of CYP2E1. PC mushroom extract also protected hepatocytes from the damage effects of CCl<sub>4</sub> as remarked by histological and electromicroscopical findings. It was concluded that repeated daily doses of aqueous extracts of PC mushroom reduced the toxic effects exerted by CCl<sub>4</sub> on the liver.

**Key words:** CCl<sub>4</sub>, CYP2E1, cytochrome P450, mushroom, *Pleurotus cornucopiae*

**Introduction**

Herbs have recently attracted attention as health-beneficial foods (physiologically functional foods) and as source materials for drug development. Herbal medicines derived from plant
Pleurotus cornucopiae extract against CCl₄ and which forms the highly reactive trichloromethyl free radical. This then readily interacts with molecular oxygen to form the trichloromethyl peroxy radical. Both trichloromethyl and its peroxy radical are capable of binding to proteins and lipids, or of abstracting a hydrogen atom from an unsaturated lipid, initiating lipid peroxidation and liver damage, and thus playing a significant role in the pathogenesis of diseases.

Trichloromethyl free radicals can react with sulfhydryl groups such as glutathione and protein thiols. The covalent binding of trichloromethyl free radicals to cell proteins is considered the initial step in a chain of events that eventually leads to membrane lipid peroxidation, and finally, cell necrosis.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the protective effect of PC mushroom extract on CCl₄-induced hepatotoxicity via CYP2E1 and to examine the mechanism(s) of this protection.

**Materials and Methods**

**Chemicals:** CCl₄ was obtained from Wako, Japan, and other chemicals and solvents were of analytical grade. Solutions of CCl₄ were prepared in corn oil (1:1 v/v; Sigma Chemical Co., St. Louis, MO, USA) before experiments.

**Animals:** Seven-week-old male Wistar rats (Shizuoka Laboratory Animal Center, Hamamatsu, Japan) were housed in cages at 24 ± 1°C with a 12-h light and 12-h dark cycle and given laboratory feed and water ad libitum. The study was carried out under the guidelines for experiments using experimental animals at Hokkaido University (No. 16089).

**Aqueous extract (tea-like preparation):** Fresh PC mushroom was minced and dried under vacuum at room temperature (25°C) for 2 hr. Distilled water (40 ml/g) was added with agitation for one hour and then the homogenate was placed in a water bath at 60°C for 15 min. The resultant
homogenate was filtered under suction, and the filtrate was centrifuged at 10,000 × g for 20 min to remove any mushroom debris. The supernatant was sterilized by filtration through two Millipore filters (0.22 μm) and then stored at 4°C. We used it within 3 days from preparation.

*Treatments:* The protocol of this study was summarized in Table 1. Animals were assigned to one of eight groups of 4 rats each. The first group served as a control, and they were intubated orally with water at dose of 1 ml/kg for 8 days. On the 9th day, control group was received a single i.p. dose of corn oil. The second and third groups received crude PC mushroom extract which corresponding to 100 mg of PC/kg body weight using a gavage technique once a day for 8 days. The fourth and fifth groups received 200 mg/kg of crude PC mushroom extract by gavage once a day daily for 8 days. The sixth and seventh groups received 400 mg/kg of crude PC mushroom extract by gavage once a day daily for 8 days. The last CCl₄ group was intubated orally with water for 8 days and on the 9th day received a single intraperitoneal (i.p.) dose of CCl₄ (0.5 ml/kg) dissolved in corn oil. On the 9th day of the experiment, rats of groups 3, 5 and 7 received a single i.p. dose of CCl₄ (0.5 ml/kg) dissolved in corn oil. One day after administrations of CCl₄, the rats were anesthetized with carbon dioxide, and liver and blood samples (serum) were collected for histological and biochemical analyses.

*Sampling for histological and electron microscopic analysis:* Livers were removed and weighed, and part of the right lobe was sliced, fixed in 10% buffered formaldehyde solution, and used for histological examination. Liver tissue was embedded in paraffin and sectioned. A series of 5 μm sections was cut and stained with hematoxylin and eosin. Lipid vacuoles recorded in CCl₄ treated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>PC 0 mg/kg</th>
<th>PC 100 mg/kg</th>
<th>PC 200 mg/kg</th>
<th>PC 400 mg/kg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>corn oil</td>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Group 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCl₄</td>
<td>Group 8</td>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>Group 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rats are orally administrated with water (control) or PC extracts for 8 days. At the 9th day, we intraperitoneally injected corn oil (control) or 0.5 ml/kg CCl₄ to each group of rats.

**Table 2. Effects of PC extract on liver tissue injury by CCl₄**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Lipid vacuoles / field (mean of 5 independent fields)</th>
<th>Hemorrhage</th>
<th>Leukocyte infiltration</th>
<th>Special notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCl₄</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>Perfused hemorrhage between hepatocytes due to destruction of endothelial lining</td>
<td>Massive infiltration with leukocytes</td>
<td>Hepatocytes with lost nuclei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC 100 + CCl₄</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Slight hemorrhage between hepatocytes</td>
<td>Some leukocytes</td>
<td>Edema around blood vessels with damaged hepatocytes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC 200 + CCl₄</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Dilatation of sinusoidal capillaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC 400 + CCl₄</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>Some hemorrhage among hepatocytes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and PC co-treated rats were counted per microscopical field and we took the mean of 5 different fields as summarized in Table 2. For electron microscopic analysis, small pieces of liver tissues were fixed with 3% glutaraldehyde in 0.1 M phosphate buffer (pH 7.4) for 2 hr and post fixed with 1% osmium tetroxide (OsO₄) in 0.1 M phosphate buffer (pH 7.3) for 2 hr. Then, the tissues were dehydrated in ethanol and embedded in Quetol 812 (Nissin EM, Tokyo, Japan), then, ultrathin sections were doubly stained with uranium acetate and lead citrate and photographed using a transmission electron microscope (JEM 1210, JEOL, Tokyo, Japan).

Biochemical analysis: A conventional blood chemical analyzer (COBAS Ready; Roche Diagnostic Systems, Basel, Switzerland) was used to quantify the alanine aminotransferase (ALT) and aspartate aminotransferase (AST) activities.

Microsome preparation: The liver was homogenized in 3 volumes of 1.15% potassium chloride and centrifuged at 9,000 × g for 20 min. The supernatant fraction was centrifuged at 105,000 × g for 70 min and the precipitates were used as microsomal fraction. The washed microsomes were then suspended in 0.1 M potassium phosphate buffer, pH 7.4. Microsomal protein concentrations were determined by the method of Lowry using bovine serum albumin (Sigma Chemical Co.) as a standard.

Western immunoblotting of CYP2E1 protein: The effects of PC mushroom extract treatments and CCl₄ administration on expression levels of CYP isoforms 2E1 was studied using Western immunoblot analysis. Liver microsomes (5 mg protein) were electrophoresed (Mini-Protean II, Bio-Rad Laboratories, Richmond, CA, USA) through 10% sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE) slab gel. Resolved proteins were transferred to nitrocellulose Trans-Blot membranes (Bio-Rad Laboratories). The blots were stained with Ponceau S (Sigma Chemical Co.) to confirm that the protein concentration was approximately the same in all lanes. Membrane filters were soaked in phosphate buffer solution, pH 7.5 (PBS), to remove the Ponceau S and incubated overnight in PBS containing 5% dried skimmed milk and 0.1% Tween-20 to block excess protein binding sites. The membranes were then incubated with goat polyclonal anti-rat CYP2E1 antibody (Gentest Co., Woburn, MA), detected with horseradish peroxidase-labeled rabbit anti-goat IgG and enhanced chemiluminescence reagents (Amersham Pharmacia Biotech, Ltd, Buckinghamshire, UK), and visualized. The CYP2E1 content was quantified by densitometric scanning using NIH image software 1.61.

RNA extraction: Total RNA was isolated from 50 mg of liver using Trizol reagent (Life Technologies Inc, Grand Island, NY, USA). Briefly, liver tissue samples were homogenized in 1 ml of Trizol, and then 0.3 ml of chloroform was added to the sample. The mixtures were then shaken for 30 sec, followed by centrifugation at 4°C and 15,000 × g for 20 min. The supernatant layers were transferred to a new set of tubes, and an equal volume of isopropanol was added to the samples, shaken for 15 sec, and centrifuged at 4°C and 15,000 × g for 15 min. The RNA pellets were washed with 70% ethanol. RNA was dissolved in diethylpyrocarbonate-treated (DEPC) water. The integrity of the prepared RNA was checked by electrophoresis, and then the optic density (OD) was measured on a spectrophotometer. The OD of all RNA samples was 1.7 to 1.9 based on the 260/280 ratio.

Semi-quantitative RT-PCR: A mixture of 5 μg total RNA and 0.5 ng oligo dT primer in a total volume of 24 μl sterilized ultra-pure water was incubated at 70°C for 10 min, then removed from the thermal cycler and adjusted to 40 μl with a mixture of 8 μl (5X) RT-buffer, 2 μl 10 mM dNTP, 2 μl DEPC water, and 2 μl of reverse transcriptase (Toyobo Co., Ltd., Osaka, Japan). It was incubated in the thermal cycler at 30°C for 10 min,
42°C for 1 hr, and 90°C for 10 min. For PCR, 1 μl aliquots of the synthesized cDNA were added to 20 μl of a mixture containing sterilized ultra-pure water, 2 μl of PCR buffer, 2 μl of dNTP (2.5 mM), 0.3 μl of sense and anti-sense primers (10 μM), and 0.1 μl of Taq polymerase (Takara Shuzo Co. Ltd., Shiga, Japan). Specific CYP2E1 primers were designed according to Gonzalez et al.4: 5’-GAAAAAGCCAAGGAAACC-3’ (sense) and 5’-GCAGACAGGAGCAGAAACA-3’ (antisense). For semi-quantitative RT-PCR assays, a co-amplification approach was used with glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase (G3PDH) as the control gene. Rat liver and PCR conditions were the same as described above, except that 10 pmol of G3PDH primers (sense: 5’-TGAAGGTCGGTGTGAACGGATGGC-3’, and antisense: 5’-CATGTAAGGCTAGGTCACCAC-3’) was used. Amplification was initiated by 1 cycle of denaturation at 95°C for 1 min followed by denaturation at 94°C for 1 min, and annealing at the proper temperature for 1 min, then extension at 72°C for 1 min for the proper number of cycles for each gene using a DNA thermal cycler (BioRad Laboratories). The samples were finally incubated for 7 min at 72°C after the last cycle of amplification. The amplified PCR products were separated by electrophoresis on 1–1.5% agarose gel. Bands of cDNA were stained with ethidium bromide and visualized by ultraviolet illumination. The CYP2E1 and G3PDH concentrations were densitometrically scanned using NIH image software 1.61. G3PDH mRNA levels were used for the correction of CYP2E1 mRNA expression as endogenous genes; the ratio between CYP2E1 and G3PDH was determined by densitometry.

Statistical analyses: The results are expressed as mean values ± SD. Multiple comparisons were performed using the Student’s t-test followed by adjusting the p-values using the Bonferroni correction. p < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

Biochemistry

A single dose of CCl₄ (0.5 ml/kg i.p.) caused hepatotoxicity in Wistar rats, as indicated by increased ALT (Fig. 1A) and AST (Fig. 1B) serum levels compared to those of controls and those with PC extract pretreatment at each dose. Pretreatment with an aqueous extract of PC mushroom drastically prevented the CCl₄-induced elevation of ALT and AST serum levels in a dose-dependent manner (Fig. 1).

Histology

Fig. 2 shows the results of light microscopy analyses. Perfused hemorrhage was observed covering hepatocytes 24 hr post CCl₄ (0.5 ml/kg) injection, and fat globules of different sizes were observed all over the livers of CCl₄-treated group. Some leukocyte infiltration was also observed in the livers of CCl₄-treated rats. We summarized the CCl₄-injection results in Table 2, and photomicrographs are shown in Fig. 2. On the other hand,
pretreatment of rats with aqueous extract of PC mushroom prior to injection of CCl₄ ameliorated the hepatic injury in a dose-dependent manner, leading to a lower percentage of fat droplets and absence of marked hemorrhage. Rats that received only aqueous extract of PC mushroom had apparently normal livers.

**Electron microscopy**

Fig. 3 shows the results of electron microscopy analyses. The cytoplasm of hepatocytes of CCl₄-treated rats showed many large lipid droplets, some fusing into larger ones, accumulated around the nucleus. Hepatocytes appeared dark colored with condensed lipid droplets as a step toward degenerative changes. Among the lipid droplets there are many mitochondria (massive in size compared to controls) with cross association with rough endoplasmic reticulum. The mitochondria have begun to change from spherical to elongated to increase the surface area as a method of cell defense. The cytoplasm was darkened with smaller nuclei. The percentage of fat globules was lower and proportional to the dose in groups pre-treated with aqueous PC mushroom extract prior to CCl₄ injection. In addition, the cytoplasmic and mitochondrial changes were not observed in PC extract-treated rats.
It is known that CCl₄ requires CYP2E1-associated bioactivation to produce liver injury. Therefore, the inhibitory activities of aqueous extract of PC mushroom on hepatic microsomal CYP2E1-specific microsomal monooxygenase activities were confirmed by immunoblot analysis. The hepatic microsomes from control, CCl₄-treated, and PC-treated rats were resolved by SDS-PAGE and immunoblotted with anti-CYP2E1 antibody. A CYP2E1 protein immunoblot is shown in Fig. 4A. In CCl₄ non-treated rats, CYP2E1 expressions were suppressed by treatment with aqueous extract of PC mushrooms in a dose-dependent manner. In addition, aqueous extract of PC mushroom significantly reduced mRNA expression of CYP2E1 gene in a dose-dependent manner in comparison to control rats (p < 0.05, Fig. 4B). However, in the CCl₄ and PC co-treated rats, the expressions of CYP2E1 apoprotein and mRNA were lower than those of non-treated control rats, but higher than those of CCl₄-alone treated rats.

Discussion

The results of the present study demon-
Pleurotus cornucopiae extract against CCl₄ demonstrated that pretreatment of rats with aqueous extract of PC mushroom effectively protected them against CCl₄-induced hepatotoxicity, as evidenced by a dose-dependent decrease in serum enzymatic activities of alanine and aspartate aminotransferase (Fig. 1). Increased serum levels of aminotransferases have been attributed to damage to the structural integrity of the liver because these enzymes are cytoplasmic in location and released into the circulation after CCl₄-induced cellular damage, which is manifested histologically by fat vacuoles, massive hemorrhage, and increased numbers of mitochondria, which take an elongated shape to increase the surface area, with some degenerative changes in blood vessels (Table 2, Fig. 2 and 3).

The constituent(s) responsible for the hepatoprotection afforded by the edible PC mushroom have not been identified. Analysis of PC mushroom components revealed that it contained (1-3) β-D-glucans, ergosterol, mannitol, phenolic compounds, linoleic acid, peptides, and carbohydrates. Recently, oleanolic acid, a triterpenoid saponin found in medicinal plants, was shown to be effective at inhibiting CCl₄-induced liver injury, and this protective effect is associated with inhibition of the CCl₄-induced biotransformation by the reduced CYP2E1 protein level.

CYP2E1 is involved in the biotransformation of several organic chemicals, including ethanol, acetone, pyridine, nitrosamines, CCl₄, and many others. The metabolic activation of CCl₄ is thought to be mediated through CYP2E1. The regulation of CYP2E1 by some of these chemicals is highly complex and occurs at transcriptional, post-transcriptional, translational, and post-translational levels. In the current study, the expressions of both mRNA and apoprotein CYP2E1 were reduced after treatment with the PC extract. The suppression of CYP2E1 may reduce the levels of reactive metabolites, and thus decreased tissue injury. Actually, compounds that induce CYP2E1 potentiate the hepatic toxicity of CCl₄, and conversely, compounds that inhibit CYP2E1 protect against CCl₄-induced toxicity. Our results partially support this hypothesis because a good correlation was found in the immunoblot results: PC extract treatment reduced the expression of CYP2E1 (Fig. 4) in a dose-dependent manner, and the decreased levels of CYP2E1 due to PC extract treatment were consistent with the biochemical and histological results. However, the co-treatments of CCl₄ and PC extract did not show the strong inhibition of CYP2E1 expressions compared to those of rats treated with CCl₄ alone, due to the drastic suppression and degradation of CYP2E1 in this group. The slight elevation of CYP2E1 expression in CCl₄ and PC extract co-treated group compared to that of CCl₄ treated animals suggested to be recovering process of cell injury.

Jayakumar et al. reported that the antioxidative effects of PC extract against CCl₄ in kidney, heart and brain. In a previous study, we also reported the scavenging of reactive oxygen...
species in hepatocytes by PC extract\(^2\). Further study is needed to elucidate exactly which part in the PC mushroom is responsible for the hepatoprotection. However, in addition to the radical scavenging ability of PC components reported in previous studies, our current results suggest that the hepatoprotection obtained by ingestion of aqueous extract of PC mushroom may be partially due to the blocking of bioactivation of CCl\(_4\) by the inhibition of CYP2E1.

References


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