Effect of Thymoquinone as Prophylactic Treatment Against CCl₄-Induced Hepatotoxicity on Antioxidants Status

Hanane KHITHER*, Asma MOSBAH, Soraya MADOUI, Kamel MOKHNACHE, Widad SOBHI

Laboratory of Applied Biochemistry, Faculty of Nature and Life Sciences, Ferhat Abbas Setif -1- University, Setif 19000, Algeria

ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aims to study the effect of thymoquinone as prophylactic treatment against CCl₄-induced hepatotoxicity on antioxidants status.

Methodology: Hepatotoxicity was induced in rats by intraperitoneal administration of 3 ml/kg, 1:1 (V/V) mixture of CCl₄ and olive oil after treatment for 7 days with TQ, using two doses. The method consists of studying the antioxidant effect of thymoquinone pretreatment by measuring superoxide dismutase (SOD) and catalase (CAT) activities, with reduced glutathione level in both plasma and liver homogenate.

Results: The results revealed that hepatotoxicity is accompanied by significant decrease (p ≤ 0.01) of SOD and CAT activities with GSH level, in both plasma and liver homogenate. While prophylactic treatment using TQ at doses of 0.5 and 0.5 mg/kg increase significantly the status of the antioxidants, as dose dependent manner, in both plasma and liver homogenate.

Conclusion: The results of this study show that thymoquinone has an antioxidant effect when it used as prophylactic treatment against CCl₄-induced hepatotoxicity.

Keywords: Thymoquinone, hepatotoxicity, CCl₄, prophylactic and antioxidant.

INTRODUCTION

Hepatotoxicity induced by carbon tetrachloride (CCl₄), is widely used for modeling liver injury in rats ¹. Because liver is the principal site for CCl₄ biotransformation. The hepatotoxicity of CCl₄ is the result of cytochrome P-450-dependent reductive dehalogenation to form a highly reactive trichloromethyl free radical, CCl₃⁺ ². This type of hepatotoxicity is oxidative stress dependent.

Oxidative stress is an imbalance between antioxidants and oxidants. This imbalance is manifested by overproduction of free radicals and/or failure of the antioxidant system. There are two kinds of antioxidants: enzymatic antioxidants (CAT, SOD,..) and non-antioxidants (GSH, vitamins,..) enzymatic.

Thymoquinone (TQ) is the major active compound derived from the medicinal Nigella sativa ³. It is a member of bioflavonoid with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, properties ³⁴. Our previous study revealed the power of TQ as prophylactic and also curative treatment against CCl₄-induced hepatotoxicity in male rats ⁵.

The aim of this research was to evaluate the effects of TQ as prophylactic treatment against CCl₄-induced hepatotoxicity on antioxidants status (SOD, CAT and GSH) in both plasma and liver homogenate.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Chemicals

Thymoquinone, Complete Freund’s Adjuvant, Incomplete Freund’s adjuvant, ethylene diamine tetra-acetic acid (EDTA), Trisma base, 5, 5-dithiobis-(2- nitrobenzoic acid) (DTNB), pyrogallol, hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), pyrogallol, trichloroacetic acid (TCA), thiobarbituric acid (TBA), and all others products were purchased from Sigma Aldrich.
Animals

Twenty-eight male Wistar rats (200g) were purchased from the Animal House of Pastor institute Alger, Algeria. The animals were acclimatized for one week and maintained under standard conditions of temperature (23 ± 2°C), humidity (60 ± 10%) and 12 hours light/dark cycle. The rats were fed with a standard diet and water.

Experimental design

Induction of hepatotoxicity by CCl₄

Hepatotoxicity induced by intraperitoneal injection of CCl₄ is the most widely used model for studying liver toxicity in rats. The induction of hepatotoxicity is carried out according to the protocol of Wang and his collaborators (2004). Male rats are divided into four groups of seven rats as follows:

Group 01 (Negative control): The rats in this group are treated by gavage of NaCl 0.9% which contains 0.1% tween 80. On the seventh day, 1.5 ml / kg of olive oil are injected into the animals. Group 02 (Positive control): the rats of this group are treated by gavage 0.9% NaCl for 7 days. On the seventh day, they are injected with 03 ml / kg of CCl₄ previously diluted in 50% (V/V) olive oil.

Prophylactic treatments

Group 03 (Pro 2.5) and Group 04 (Pro 5): The rats in these groups are treated with gavage of 2.5 and 0.5 mg / kg of thymoquinone, respectively, for 7 days. On the 7th day, they are injected with 03 ml / kg of CCl₄ 30 min after the last dose of thymoquinone.

On the eighth day, all rats of different groups are sacrificed under anesthesia with diethyl ether. The liver is immediately recovered, cleaned with sterile 0.9% NaCl and cold.

Blood sample

Blood samples are taken under anesthesia with diethyl ether from the retro-orbital sinus of the eye. The blood recovered in heparinized tubes is immediately centrifuged at 4000 rpm for 10 minutes. The sera are recovered and stored at -4 ° C until used for biochemical assays.

Preparation of liver homogenate

After weighing the sample, the homogenate of the liver is prepared by homogenization of 500 mg of the liver in 5 ml of KCl buffer (0.15 M) at 4 ° C. The homogenates are centrifuged at 3000 rpm for 10 min and supernatants are aliquoted and then used for biochemical assays.

Determination of antioxidants status in both plasma and liver homogenate

Determination of catalase activity

Catalase is the enzyme responsible for the decomposition of H₂O₂. The activity of this enzyme is estimated by following the decrease in absorbance of H₂O₂ at 240 nm, which is converted into water and molecular oxygen in the presence of an enzyme source (liver homogenate or plasma). Briefly, 983.5 μL of H₂O₂ (0.091M, prepared in buffer KHPO₄ 0.1 M, pH 7.2) are added to 16.5 μL of the homogenate and plasma. The variation of the absorbance is monitored for 30s at 240 nm. The enzymatic activity in μmol of H₂O₂ / min / mg of protein at the tissue level and in μmol of H₂O₂ / min / ml at the plasma level is calculated using the molar extinction coefficient 436 M⁻¹ cm⁻¹.8

Determination of total protein

The total proteins in the plasma and the liver homogenate are determined according to the Biuret method using the Kit (Spinreact BSIS30-1). The principle of this test is based on the complexation between proteins and copper salts to give an intense blue-violet complex in an alkaline medium. The intensity of the color formed is proportional to the total protein concentration in the sample which is determined by measuring the absorbance at 540 nm against a calibration curve. Briefly, 1 ml of the reagent is added to 25 μl of the model, homogenate or plasma. Absorances are measured at 540 nm, after 10 min of incubation at room temperature.

Dosage of SOD activity

Superoxide dismutase (SOD) is a metallo-enzyme that catalyzes the disproportionation of the superoxide anion into H₂O₂ and O₂. The determination of the enzymatic activity of SOD at the level of the homogenate and the plasma is carried out according to the method of Nandy and his collaborators 10. The principle of this method is based on the inhibition of the auto-oxidation of pyrogallol by SOD. Briefly, 1000 μl of Tris-EDTA buffer (pH 8.14) is added to 36 μl of the pyrogallol (100 mM in 0.01N HCl) in a quartz vial. The absorbance is measured for 60s at 420 nm in the presence or absence of the 16 μL of the sample. One unit of SOD is equivalent to the amount of enzyme required to inhibit the auto-oxidation of pyrogallol by 50%. The activity of SOD expressed in Units / mg is calculated using the following equation:

\[
\text{Speed (V) = (Final Abs - Abs Initial) / (Final T - Initial T)}
\]

The percentage inhibition (I%) is calculated according to the following formula

\[
I\% = \left( \frac{\text{[VP - VS]} \times 100}{\text{VP}} \right)
\]

The enzymatic activity of the SOD in international unit is calculated according to the following equation:

\[
\text{SOD (U) = \left( \frac{\text{[Vp-Vs]} \times \text{[Vp} \times 0.5]}{\text{[VP} \times \text{[Vp]}} \right) \times 100}
\]

\[
\text{Vp = Speed of auto-oxidation of pyrogallol in the absence of the enzyme.}
\]

\[
\text{Vs = rate of auto-oxidation of pyrogallol in the presence of the enzyme.}
\]

0.5 = 50% inhibition.

Reduced Glutathione dosage

The principle of this test is to fractionate the DTNB molecule by GSH in an alkaline pH (9-9) thus releasing the thionitrobenzoic acid (TNB) which has an absorbance at 412 nm 11. The determination of reduced GSH at the level of the plasma and the homogenate is determined according to the protocol of Beutler et al. (1993). Briefly, 25 μl of plasma or liver homogenate are diluted in 5 ml of the phosphate buffer (0.1 M, pH 8). Then, 3 ml of the solution of the diluted sample are mixed with 20 μl of DTNB (0.01 M). The mixture is incubated at room temperature for 5 minutes. Then the absorbance is read at 412 nm against a blank prepared under the same conditions with the TCA 10%. The concentration of GSH is determined using the molar extinction coefficient 14150 M⁻¹ cm⁻¹ and the values are expressed in nmol / ml in the plasma or nmol / mg of protein in the homogenate.

Statistical Analysis

The data obtained were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), followed by Tukey's test for all parameters and expressed as mean ± SEM. The p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Effect of thymoquinone on antioxidants status

The status of the different markers is evaluated for CCl₄-induced hepatotoxicity at the liver homogenate and plasma levels.

Status of antioxidants in liver homogenate

The status of antioxidants for hepatotoxicity in rats treated with CCl₄ in the presence and absence of TQ is evaluated by colorimetric assay. The results are presented in fig. 01.

Hepatotoxicity induced by CCl₄ is accompanied by a slight decrease in GSH levels (50.2 ± 8.78 μmol/mg compared to 56.3 ± 5.58 μmol/mg in the negative control group). In addition, a significant decrease in antioxidants enzymes activities (CAT and SOD) was observed in the positive control as CCl₄-intoxicated group, compared to the negative control group (4.25 ± 0.49 compared to 7.09 ± 0.75 U/mg protein and 42.0 ± 05.56 compared to 79.9 ± 08.31 U/mg protein, respectively). Results of the evaluation of antioxidants enzymes activities (CAT and SOD) in prophylactic pre-treatment of rats with TQ using 2.5 and 05 mg/kg/day, for 7 days showed that TQ led to a significant increase with the dose of 05 mg/kg/day (p 0.01) compared to the positive control group treated with CCl₄ only. The highest increase in antioxidant enzyme activity is recorded at a dose of 05 mg/kg/day. The activity of CAT was 10.7 ± 1.25 U/mg protein, while that of SOD was 80.7 ± 16.65 U/mg protein.

Prophylactic treatment with TQ did not restore GSH levels. Pretreatments applied with the 2.5 mg/kg/day dose showed a decrease. The treatments applied with the dose of 2.5 mg/kg/day showed a significant decrease (p 0.01) compared to the rats treated with CCl₄. The dose of 05 mg/kg/day showed a significant increase in GSH compared to the GSH level of 2.5 mg/kg/day. The results suggest that TQ induces an increase in GSH in a dose-dependent manner.

Figure 1: Effect of thymoquinone on hepatic antioxidants status. Values are expressed as the mean ± SEM, (n = 7); ns: no significant difference, ***: p ≤ 0.001 a significant difference with negative control group, * #: p ≤ 0.01 a significant difference with positive control group treated by CCl₄ only.
Status of antioxidants in Plasma

Assay results for antioxidants level in plasma showed a slight decrease in the activity of antioxidants enzymes (CAT and SOD) and GSH levels was recorded. In contrast, pretreatment with TQ in rats intoxicated with CCl₄ restored antioxidants enzymes activities and plasma level of GSH to values very close to those observed in the negative control group. This restoration was in dose-dependent manner (Fig.02).

Figure 2: Effect of thymoquinone on plasma antioxidants status. Values are expressed as the mean ± SEM, (n = 7); ns: no significant difference, ***: p ≤ 0.001 a significant difference with negative control group, #: p ≤ 0.05 a significant difference with positive control group treated by CCl₄ only.

DISCUSSION

Hepatotoxicity induced by CCl₄ is widely used as a model for the study of experimental liver damage in rats, since the liver is the main site of its biotransformation. This hepatotoxicity model is the result of cytochrome P450-dependent reductive dehalogenation, during which CCl₄ induces liver damage in the rat following its biotransformation by the cytochrome P450 system into trichloromethyl (CCl₃). It is a highly reactive free radical, which reacts rapidly with molecular oxygen to produce trichloromethyl peroxy (CCl₃O₂). These highly toxic radicals can react with cellular macromolecules; proteins, DNA and membrane lipids then induce oxidation of unsaturated fatty acids of phospholipids present in the cell membrane, resulting in lipid peroxidation in hepatocyte membranes 12, thus disrupting the homeostasis of Ca²⁺ that causes liver cell destruction 13.

The results of the evaluation of antioxidants stats show that poisoning of rats with CCl₄ led to a significant decrease in CAT, SOD and GSH levels. The activity of catalase and SOD is reduced after the poisoning of rats by CCl₄. Free radicals produced during the biotransformation of CCl₄ inactivate the expression of antioxidant enzymes, reduce the levels of antioxidant enzymes leading to oxidative stress, which is responsible for all liver damage 14. The rate of GSH is decreased following poisoning of rats by CCl₄. This decrease can be explained by its oxidation by free radicals released during biotransformation of CCl₄ and lipid peroxidation 15.

Prophylactic pretreatment of rats using TQ has restored the activity of CAT and SOD, in a dose dependent manner. These results are in similar with those previously found by Manssour and his collaborators 16 and EL-Tawil and Moussa 17 which showed that the CCl₄ induces a decrease in the GSH.
The results are also consistent with those of Zafeer and his collaborators \(^8\) and Al-Malki and Sayed \(^9\) who showed that the TQ restores the activity of CAT, SOD and GSH in the case of cadmium-induced and cisplatin-induced hepatotoxicity.

**CONCLUSION**

The present study demonstrated that TQ is an in vivo antioxidant when it was used as prophylactic treatment against CCl\(_4\)-induced hepatotoxicity. Through the improvement of antioxidants enzymes activities (SOD and CAT), and the increase of non-enzymatic antioxidant level (GSH), in both plasma and liver.

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**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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