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Recommended Citation

Mohamed, Ahmed F. Dr.; Said, Helmy Dr; Zaki, Hala F.; and Safar, Marwa M. Prof. Dr., "Modulation of TLR4/NF- κ B, Nrf2/HO-1 and PI3K/Akt signaling by cilostazol mitigates lipopolysaccharide-induced septic acute kidney injury" (2023). *Pharmacy*. 650.

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Manuscript 1034

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Modulation of TLR4/NF- κ B, Nrf2/HO-1 and PI3K/Akt signaling by cilostazol mitigates lipopolysaccharide-induced septic acute kidney injury

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Modulation of Toll-Like Receptor 4/Nuclear Factor-Kappa B, Nuclear Factor Erythroid 2-Related Factor 2/Hemeoxygenase-1, and Phosphoinositide 3-Kinase/Akt Signaling by Cilostazol Mitigates Lipopolysaccharide-Induced Septic Acute Kidney Injury

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Abstract

Aim: Cilostazol was investigated as a protective agent against lipopolysaccharide (LPS)-associated acute kidney damage in mice.

Methods: Cilostazol (50 mg/kg/day; p.o.) administered for 7 consecutive days before a single LPS dose (2 mg/kg; i.p.).

Results: Cilostazol hampered serum creatinine, cystatin C, and renal kidney injury molecule-1 and neutrophil gelatinase-associated lipocalin; repressed toll-like receptor 4 and MyD88 transcription, as well as nuclear factor-kappa B p65, interleukin-1 β , and malondialdehyde content; and boosted Nrf2 mRNA expression, hemeoxygenase-1 activity, and reduced glutathione content. This was synchronous with an upregulation of p-phosphoinositide 3-kinase and p-Akt expressions.

Conclusion: Collectively, cilostazol prevented LPS renal injury, which might correspond to modulation of toll-like receptor 4/nuclear factor-kappa B, nuclear factor erythroid 2-related factor 2/hemeoxygenase-1, and phosphoinositide 3-kinase/Akt pathways.

Keywords: Cystatin C, Kidney injury molecule-1, Neutrophil gelatinase-associated lipocalin

1. Introduction

Septicemia is a grave clinical problem that is linked to multiple organ dysfunction, including acute kidney injury (AKI), which contributes to overall mortality of nearly 26% [1]. Lipopolysaccharide (LPS), a constituent of outer membrane of gram-negative bacteria, is commonly used for septic AKI induction in experimental models [2,3]. Indeed, a wide array of events underlie LPS-associated renal dysfunction, including glomerular ischemia, peritubular microcirculatory dysfunction, local and systemic inflammatory reactions, as well as oxidative tubular damage [4,5].

The noxious renal effects of LPS are probably mediated by toll-like receptor 4 (TLR4) pathway [6], which eventually upregulates pro-inflammatory cytokine synthesis, such as interleukin-1 (IL-1) [7]. These cytokines mediate renal tubular injury via enhanced inflammatory cell accumulation and reactive oxygen species (ROS) upleveling [8].

Nuclear factor erythroid 2-related factor 2 (Nrf2) is a pleiotropic transcriptional regulator that counteracts oxidative tissue insults [9]. Under oxidative stress conditions, Nrf2 nuclear translocation promotes the production of antioxidant enzymes [10].

A number of studies have delineated phosphoinositide 3-kinase (PI3K)/Akt pathway as a central

Received 14 September 2022; accepted 18 December 2022.
Available online 15 February 2023

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<https://doi.org/10.54634/2090-9101.1034>

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moderator of various intracellular signals secondary to inflammatory and apoptotic cues [11,12]. Additionally, several reports highlighted a potential cross-talk between TLR4 and PI3K/Akt signaling [13,14].

Cilostazol, an antiplatelet drug commonly used for the treatment of peripheral arterial disease-associated claudication [15], was shown to alleviate inflammatory and oxidative manifestations in various experimental settings, possibly via suppression of vascular adhesion molecules and nuclear factor-kappa B (NF- κ B) translocation to the nucleus [16,17]. Furthermore, cilostazol demonstrated profound nephroprotective effects against renal I/R, diabetic nephropathy, and cyclosporine-induced nephrotoxicity [18–20]. Nevertheless, its potential value against septic kidney damage is yet to be determined.

Therefore, the current study aimed to examine the nephroprotective potential of cilostazol against endotoxemic AKI. Additionally, modulation of TLR4/MyD88/NF- κ B, Nrf2/hemeoxygenase-1 (HO-1), and PI3K/Akt pathways was targeted to explore some of the molecular machinery underlying cilostazol's potential anti-inflammatory and redox-modulating properties in this model.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Animals

Male Swiss mice (25–30 g) were used in this work with an acclimatization period of 1 week before testing. Housing was done at a temperature of 24–27 °C, humidity of 60 ± 10%, and 12 : 12-h light/dark cycles. Standard pellet chew and water were freely provided. The study procedures adhered to the ARRIVE guidelines as well as the US National Institutes of Health's Guide for Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (NIH Publication No. 85-23, revised Applied Biosystems 1996) and in conformance with the Ethics Committee of Faculty of Pharmacy, Cairo University (PT 1510).

2.2. Chemicals

LPS *Escherichia coli* serotype 0111:B4 (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, Missouri, USA) and cilostazol (Otsuka Pharmaceutical Co., Tokushima, Japan) were used in this investigation. Other chemicals used were of analytical quality.

2.3. Experimental design

Mice were randomly distributed into three groups of 19 mice each. Groups I and II received the vehicle (1% Tween 80, p.o.). Cilostazol (50 mg/kg; p.o.) in 1% Tween 80 was given for 7 consecutive days to group III [18]. LPS (2 mg/kg; i.p.) was freshly

prepared in endotoxin-free 0.9% saline and was administered as a single dose to mice of groups II and III [21] 1 h following the final dose of the vehicle or cilostazol, respectively. Fig. 1 depicts a diagrammatic representation of the experimental design.

2.4. Preparation of samples

At 24 h after the LPS challenge, mice were killed by decapitation under thiopental (20 mg/kg; i.p.) anesthesia, and blood and kidney specimens were obtained for biochemical and serological estimations. Kidneys were washed in PBS, and each group was further divided into three subsets. In the first set ($n = 8$), kidneys were stored at –80 °C, where one kidney was employed for real-time PCR or Western blot analyses, whereas the other kidney was used for mitochondrial isolation and heme oxygenase-1 assay. The second set ($n = 8$) was used to prepare a 10% (w/v) homogenate in PBS, which was used for colorimetric reduced glutathione (GSH) or malondialdehyde (MDA) determination and ELISA assessments. The last subset ($n = 3$) was used for renal histopathological examination.

2.5. Biochemical examination

2.5.1. Serum creatinine and renal redox biomarkers

Serum creatinine was determined colorimetrically using a test reagent kit (QCA, Spain) as per the manufacturer's directions. GSH in kidney was quantified using Ellman's reagent as previously described [22]. Measurement of lipid peroxidation was done based on tissue MDA reaction with thiobarbituric acid according to the method of Uchiyama and Mihara [23].

2.5.2. Mitochondrial isolation and hemeoxygenase-1 activity assay

HO-1 activity was measured as elaborated previously [24]. In brief, to obtain the mitochondrial pellet, kidneys were homogenized in Tris-HCl buffer (pH 7.6) with 0.4-mM PMSF and 250-mM sucrose and then centrifuged. The supernatant was incubated in PBS with heme (50 μ M), rat liver cytosol (5 mg/ml), G6PDH (1 U), G6P (2 mM), MgCl₂ (2 mM), and NADPH (0.8 mM) at 37 °C for an hour. Absorbance was determined at 463 and 520 nm for chloroform extract of the generated bilirubin. Results were represented as pmol bilirubin/mg protein.

2.5.3. Quantitative RT-PCR analysis

Renal total RNA was extracted using RNeasy Kit (Qiagen, Germantown, MD, USA). Superscript Choice system (Life Technologies, Cleveland, OH, USA) was used for RNA/cDNA reverse transcription.

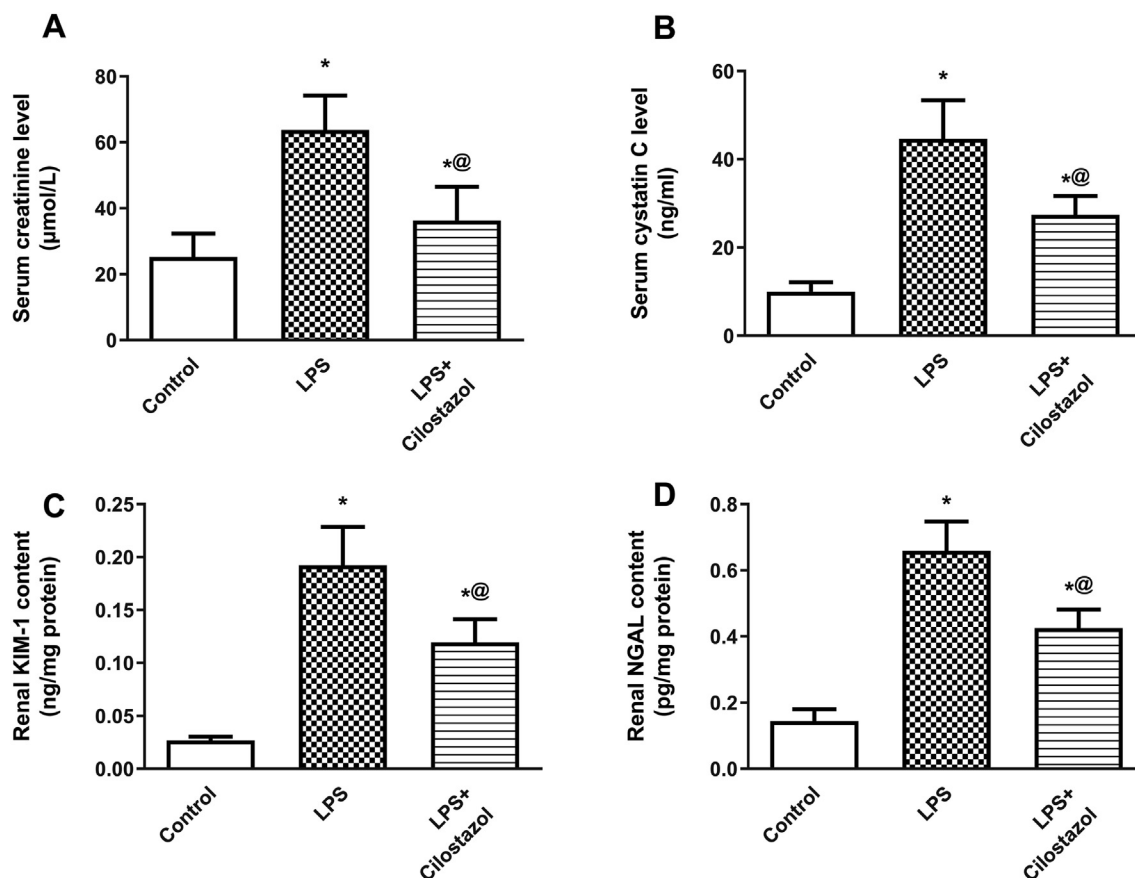


Fig. 1. Diagrammatic representation of the experimental study.

SYBR Green PCR Master Mix (Applied Biosystems, Cleveland, OH, USA) was used for quantitative RT-PCR. In brief, 5 µl of cDNA, 12.5 µl of 2 × SYBR Green Master Mix, and 200 ng of TLR4, MyD88, and Nrf2 gene primers were mixed. Table 1 describes the used primer sequences. PCR reactions included 40 cycles for 15 s at 95 °C (denaturing), 60 °C for 60 s (annealing), and 72 °C for 60 s (extension). The $2^{-\Delta\Delta CT}$ formula was employed to assess relative gene expression using GAPDH as a housekeeping gene [25].

2.5.4. Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays

Mouse ELISA kits (Cusabio, Wuhan, China) were used for quantification of renal interleukin-1β (IL-

1β) (cat#: CSB-E08054 m), kidney injury molecule-1 (KIM-1) (cat#: CSB-E08809 m), NF-κB p65 (cat#: CSB-E08789 m), and neutrophil gelatinase-associated lipocalin (NGAL) (cat#: CSB-E09410 m) levels. Serum cystatin C was determined with a mouse ELISA kit (cat#: MSCTC0; R&D Systems Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA) as per the manufacturer's directions. Results were represented as ng/mg protein (NF-κB p65 as well as KIM-1), pg/mg protein (NGAL and IL-1β), and ng/ml (cystatin C).

2.5.5. Western blot analysis of p85/p55 (pY458/199)-phosphoinositide 3-kinase and pS473-Akt

Renal tissue was homogenized with RIPA buffer containing phosphatase inhibitor cocktail. Protein concentration was quantified with a BCA assay kit (Thermo Fisher, Waltham, MA, USA). SDS-PAGE was used to separate equal quantities of protein, which was then transferred to a polyvinylidene fluoride membrane before being blocked with 5% bovine serum albumin. The membrane was incubated at 4 °C overnight with rabbit anti-p85/p55 (pY458/199)-PI3K polyclonal antibody (1 : 1000; Thermo Fisher, Cat# PA5-17387, RRID: AB_10985894) or a rabbit anti-pS473-Akt monoclonal antibody (1 :

Table 1. Primer sequences used for RT-PCR analysis.

Gene	Primer sequence
TLR4	F: 5'-AGGCAGCAGGTGGAATTGTATC-3' R: 5'-TCGAGGCTTTTCCATCCAATAG-3'
MyD88	F: 5'-GTCCATTGCCAGCGAGCTAA-3' R: 5'-GGAGACAGGCTGAGTGCAAA-3'
Nrf2	F: 5'-TCTCCTCGCTGGAAAAAGAA-3' R: 5'-AATGTGCTGGCTGTGCTTTA-3'
GAPDH	F: 5'-ACCCAGCAAGGACACTGAGCAAG-3' R: 5'-GGCCCCTCTGTTATTATGGGGT-3'

TLR4, toll-like receptor 4.

500; Thermo Fisher, Cat# OMA1-03061, RRID: AB_557533). As a secondary antibody, we employed HRP-conjugated donkey anti-rabbit immunoglobulin (Amersham, Life Science Inc., Marlborough, MA, USA). A scanning laser densitometer was used to perform immunoblot analysis (GS-800 system; Bio-Rad, California, Marlborough, MA, USA). After normalization with β -actin protein expression, the results are expressed in arbitrary units.

2.6. Histopathology

The kidneys were detached, cleaned with ice cold saline, and preserved for 24 h in 10% formalin. Samples were fixed in paraffin, and 4- μ m slices were cut and stained with hematoxylin and eosin before being studied under a light microscope (Leica Microsystems GmbH, Wetzlar, Germany).

2.7. Statistical analysis

The data were reported as mean \pm SD and compared using a one-way analysis of variance test and Tukey's multiple comparisons test. GraphPad Prism software was used for statistical analysis (version 9). For all tests, the level of significance was set at *P* value less than 0.05.

3. Results

3.1. Effects of cilostazol on kidney dysfunction following lipopolysaccharide challenge

Following LPS treatment, a significant decrease of kidney function was seen, as evidenced by increases in serum creatinine and cystatin C, as shown in Fig. 2, mounting to 253.17 and 446.48%, respectively, in comparison with control mice. Such a rise was largely blunted by pretreatment with cilostazol (56.93 and 61.39%, respectively) when compared with the LPS group. A similar pattern was also noted in renal KIM-1 and NGAL contents, reaching 7.16 = and 4.57-fold in the LPS group, respectively, relative to normal control mice. Cilostazol pretreatment effectively counteracted these effects for both KIM-1 (62.09%) and NGAL (64.46%).

3.2. Effects of cilostazol on toll-like receptor 4 signaling and inflammatory markers following lipopolysaccharide challenge

Fig. 3 depicts a conceivable transcriptional stimulation of TLR4 and its downstream adaptor MyD88 in the LPS group versus the normal control mice (9.06-fold and 12.38-fold, respectively).

Such a spike was mitigated by cilostazol pretreatment for both TLR4 (28.83%) and MyD88 (32.35%) mRNA expressions. Likewise, NF- κ B p65 and IL-1 β , two downstream mediators of TLR4, were increased in the LPS group compared with control mice by 8.83-fold and 4.06-fold, respectively. Pretreatment with cilostazol substantially suppressed the levels of both mediators (47.77 and 61.44%, respectively).

3.3. Effects of cilostazol on redox biomarkers and Nrf2 signaling following lipopolysaccharide challenge

As presented in Fig. 4, a state of oxidative stress was evoked after LPS insult. A notable escalation in renal MDA content (231.90%) coupled with a drastic GSH depletion (52.77%) was observed in the LPS untreated group. Cilostazol pretreatment reversed these outcomes, which was reflected by the reduced renal MDA (65.98%) and the replenishment of GSH (128.26%). Upregulation of Nrf2 mRNA (3.51 fold) and HO-1 activity (135.81%) in LPS mice marked the adaptive renal response to oxidative insult; such effects were further magnified by cilostazol pretreatment, reaching 1.88-fold and 1.33-fold (Nrf2 and HO-1, respectively) as compared with the LPS group.

3.4. Effects of cilostazol on phosphoinositide 3-kinase/Akt signaling following lipopolysaccharide challenge

Fig. 5 shows that LPS administration elicited a rise of *p*-PI3K and *p*-Akt protein expressions (347.70 and 382.24%, respectively), which was distinctly augmented in mice that were administered cilostazol, reaching 2.54 fold (*p*-PI3K) and 2.08 fold (*p*-Akt).

3.5. Effects of cilostazol on renal histopathology following lipopolysaccharide challenge

Histopathological findings presented in Fig. 6 confirm cilostazol-mediated renal protection. Normal structure of the renal glomeruli and tubules was portrayed in the control mice. Conversely, mice challenged with LPS showed focal periglomerular inflammatory cell infiltration together with vacuolar degeneration of tubular lining epithelium. Cilostazol pretreatment afforded a marked amendment of the deleterious renal effects of LPS, which was verified by the normal histological renal appearance in cilostazol-pretreated mice.

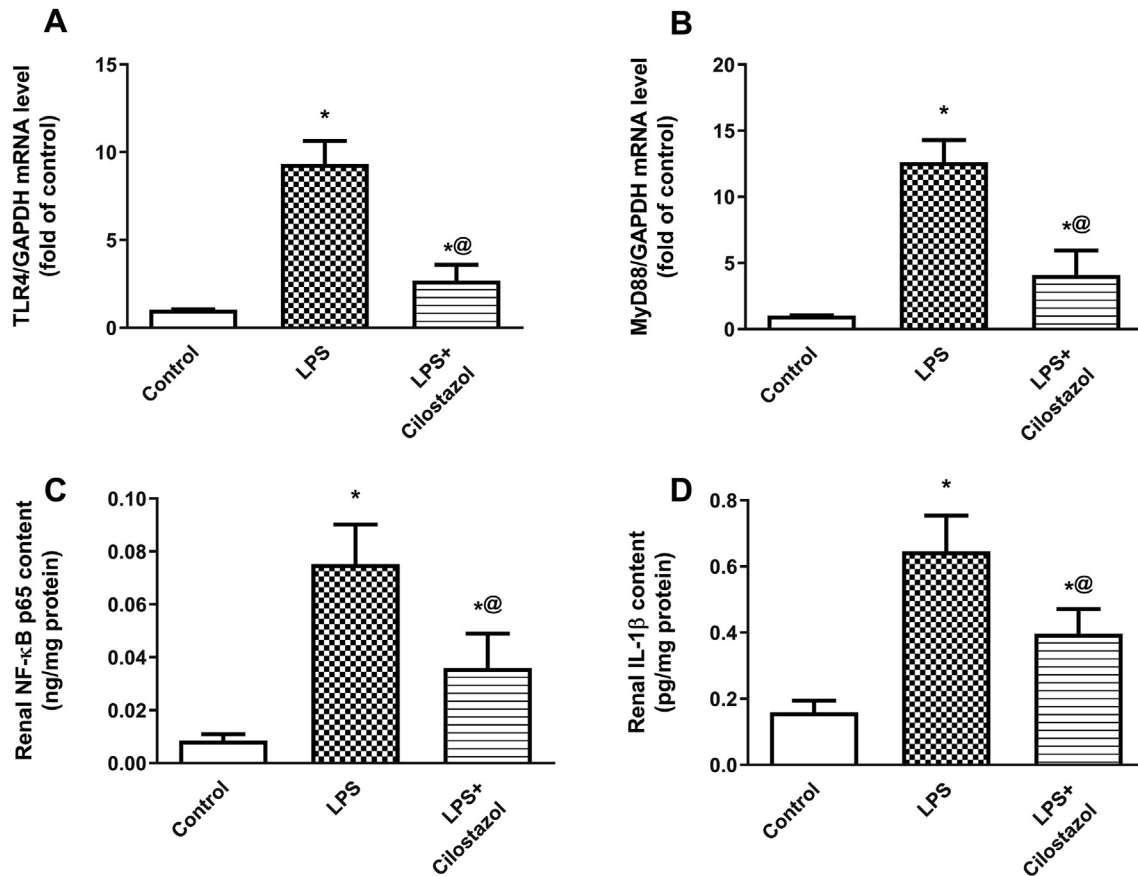


Fig. 2. Cilostazol's effect on serum creatinine (a) and cystatin C (b) levels, renal KIM-1 (c) and NGAL (d) contents. $n = 6-8$ (mean \pm SD). *versus control, @ versus LPS (one-way analysis of variance, Tukey's multiple comparisons test, $P < 0.05$). KIM-1, kidney injury molecule-1; LPS, lipopolysaccharide; NGAL, neutrophil gelatinase-associated lipocalin.

4. Discussion

To the best of the authors' knowledge, the current investigation provides the first direct evidence that cilostazol, an antiplatelet with documented anti-inflammatory properties, exhibits perceivable nephroprotective effects in a murine model of LPS-associated AKI that mimics sepsis-related endotoxemic acute renal damage in humans. This is supported by (a) improved biochemical as well as histopathological renal perturbations instigated by LPS, (b) amendment of acute tubular injury biomarkers KIM-1 and NGAL, (c) declined TLR4 gene expression along with downstream MyD88/NF- κ B/IL-1 β inflammatory cascade, (d) mitigation of mitochondrial dysfunction and renal oxidative stress via Nrf2/HO-1 signaling, and (e) stimulation of the survival pathway PI3K/Akt.

A marked improvement of biochemical indicators of kidney function, namely creatinine and cystatin C, validated the nephroprotection attained by cilostazol pretreatment. The maintained glomerular and tubular architecture following cilostazol administration

reiterated these findings. This is supported by findings of Hafez et al. [26] and Ragab et al. [18] among others [27–29] in rat models of thioacetamide-induced renal toxicity, renal ischemia/reperfusion, Bothrops alternatus envenomation, diclofenac-induced nephrotoxicity, and amikacin-induced nephrotoxicity.

Serum creatinine is considered the primary indicator for kidney function evaluation. However, its use as a sole indicator of kidney dysfunction is limited owing to being influenced by a number of non-renal factors [30]. More recently, other biomarkers have arisen as more reliable tools for kidney function and renal tubular injury evaluation, namely, cystatin C, KIM-1, and NGAL [31–33].

KIM-1, a prominent biomarker of renal tubular damage [34], is a phosphatidylserine receptor that facilitates the uptake of necrotic cell debris, thus restraining epithelial shedding and tubular obstruction [35]. NGAL is another molecule that signifies renal tubular injury [36]. It was initially detected as a component of neutrophil granules. NGAL expression was found to be unequivocally enhanced following renal injury, where it regulates

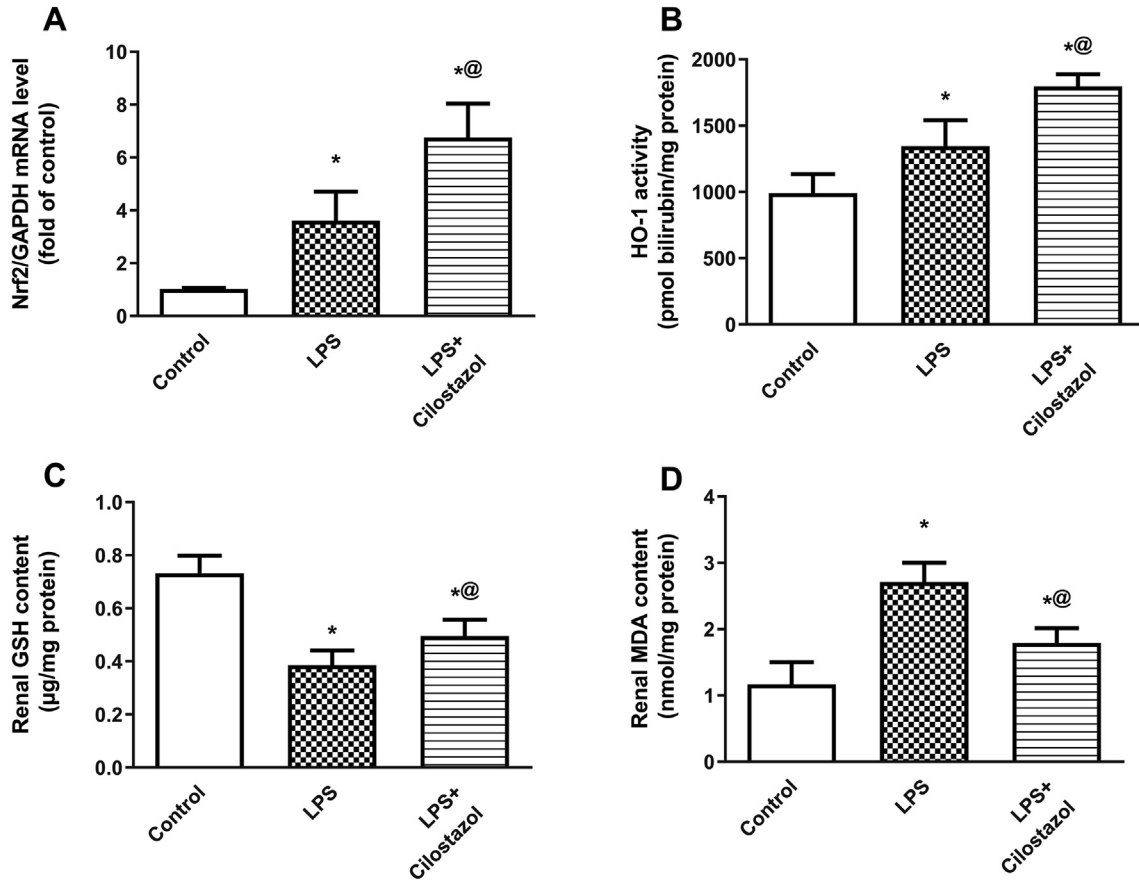


Fig. 3. Cilostazol's effect on renal TLR4 (a) and MyD88 (b) mRNA expression, NF- κ B p65 (c) and IL-1 β (d) contents. $n = 6-8$ (mean \pm SD). *versus control, @versus LPS (one-way analysis of variance, Tukey's multiple comparisons test, $P < 0.05$). LPS, lipopolysaccharide; TLR4, toll-like receptor 4.

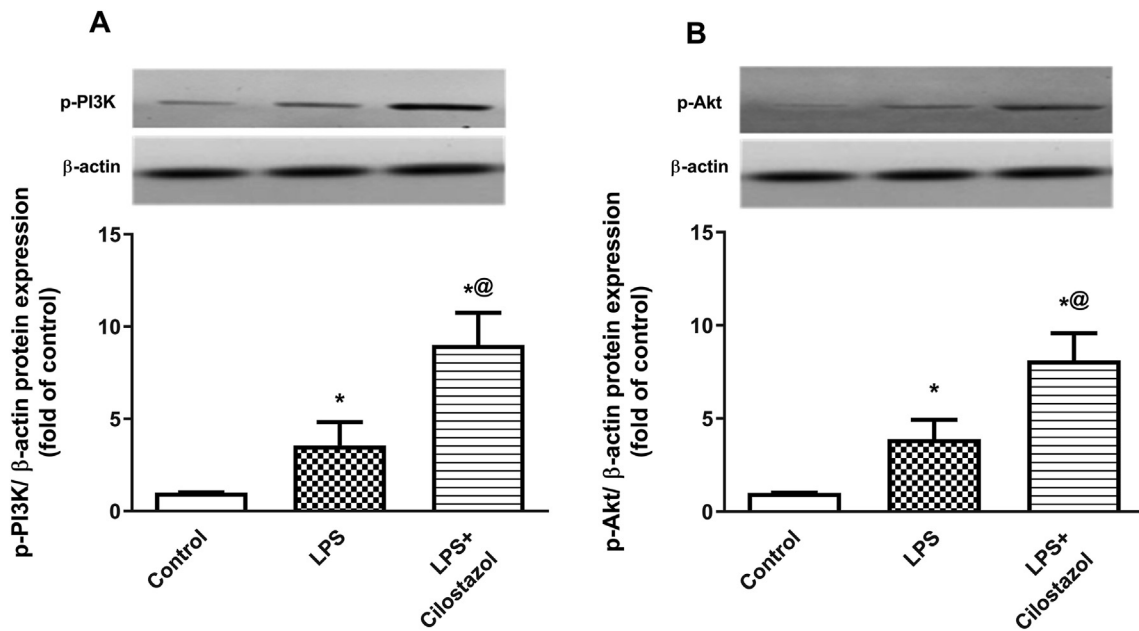


Fig. 4. Cilostazol's effect on renal Nrf2 mRNA expression (a), HO-1 activity (b), GSH (c) and MDA contents (d). $n = 6-8$ (mean \pm SD). *versus control, @versus LPS (one-way analysis of variance, Tukey's multiple comparisons test, $P < 0.05$). GSH, reduced glutathione; HO-1, hemeoxygenase-1; LPS, lipopolysaccharide; MDA, malondialdehyde.

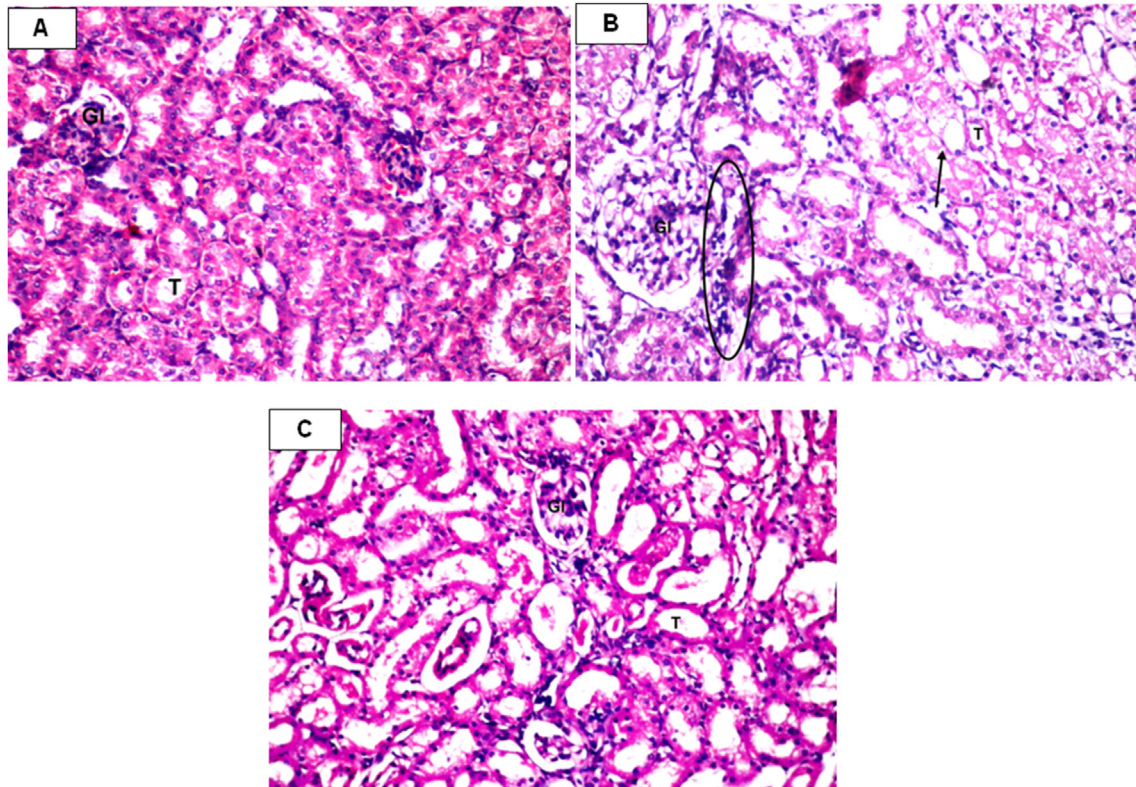


Fig. 5. Cilostazol's effect on renal p-PI3K (a) and p-Akt (b) protein expression. $n = 6-8$ (mean \pm SD). *versus control, [®]versus LPS (one-way analysis of variance, Tukey's multiple comparisons test, $P < 0.05$). LPS, lipopolysaccharide; PI3K, phosphoinositide 3-kinase.

tubular cell differentiation, apoptosis, and re-epithelialization [33]. Consistent with this evidence, both KIM-1 and NGAL levels were amplified in endotoxemic mice kidneys, which upholds the findings of previous studies [37,38]. Cilostazol affirmed its renal protective endowment by the prohibition of both biomarkers. This is in conformance with Ragab et al. [18], who reported a comparable decline of KIM-1 and NGAL contents following kidney ischemia/reperfusion injury in rats pretreated with cilostazol.

The interplay between the pro-inflammatory cytokine storm elicited in response to the endotoxemic malady and the development of AKI has been stated by many [2,39]. The overproduction of these cytokines is probably instigated by enhanced TLR4 signaling on tissue macrophages and circulating monocytes by LPS [8]. As demonstrated herein, LPS triggers transcriptional activation of TLR4 and its adaptor MyD88, initiating a signaling cascade that eventually enhances the phosphorylation of the inhibitor of kappa B-alpha ($I\kappa B-\alpha$). NF- κB is normally sequestered in the cytoplasm by $I\kappa B$. Once $I\kappa B$ is phosphorylated, NF- κB detaches and is transported to nucleus where it orchestrates pro-inflammatory repertoires production such as IL-1 β

[7], prompting systemic inflammation, redox perturbations, and multiple organ injury [40]. Therefore, inhibition of TLR4 signaling might provide a key strategy to alleviate LPS renal injury. To this end, this study delineated that cilostazol pretreatment conspicuously revoked TLR4 signaling as depicted by the transcriptional downregulation of TLR4 and MyD88, along with diminished renal NF- κB p65 and IL-1 β levels. Cilostazol's anti-inflammatory capabilities were largely ascribed to the hindrance of neutrophils' vascular adhesion [16] and NF- κB activation [17]. The present results coincide with those of Park et al. [41] in LPS-stimulated RAW macrophages, where cilostazol reverted NF- κB nuclear transfer as well as DNA binding with a subsequent restriction of NF- κB -dependent cytokine production. In another study, cilostazol downregulated PU.1, a transcription factor linked to augmented TLR4 expression and TLR4/MyD88/NF- κB signaling, in LPS-stimulated synovial macrophages from patients with rheumatoid arthritis [42], thus explaining cilostazol-mediated halting of TLR4 mRNA expression documented herein. In a similar context, olprinone, a selective PDE3 inhibitor, was recently found to hamper inflammatory burst in experimental acute respiratory distress

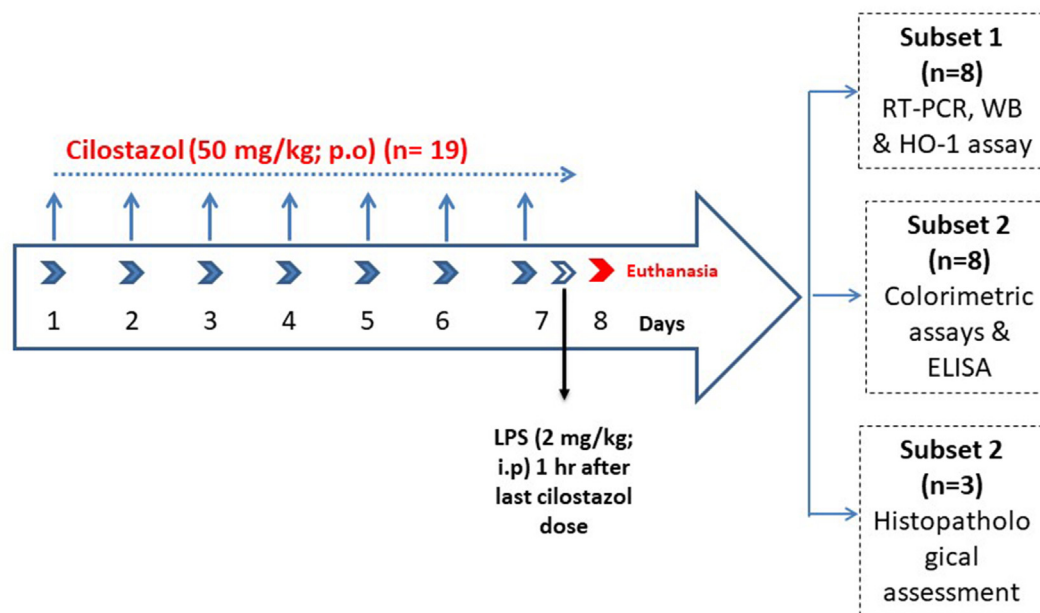


Fig. 6. Cilostazol's effect on renal histopathology following LPS challenge. Characteristic hematoxylin and eosin renal photomicrographs from control mice (a) depicting normal structure of the glomeruli (Gl) and tubules (T), LPS mice (b) showing inflammatory cell infiltration in the periglomerular tissue (circle) together with tubular epithelial degeneration (arrow), and mice pretreated with cilostazol (c) revealing no histopathological alterations of renal structures (hematoxylin and eosin $\times 40$). LPS, lipopolysaccharide.

model [43]. PDE inhibition induces the synthesis of anti-inflammatory cytokines via upregulating CREB and, subsequently, activating transcription factor-1 [44].

Increasing evidence exists regarding the importance of ROS and cellular oxidative status upheaval in LPS-mediated nephrotoxicity [45]. Besides the damage inflicted to cellular macromolecules, ROS can stimulate redox-sensitive transcription factors like NF- κ B, leading to magnified inflammatory response as well as tissue damage [46]. One of the compensatory mechanisms to guard against oxidative injury is the up-leveling of endogenous antioxidant enzymes [10], a fact that fits in with our findings where LPS injury caused a subtle, yet significant enhancement of Nrf2/HO-1 signaling, which denotes the cellular adaptation to the overwhelming ROS production secondary to LPS insult. Previously, Yin and Cao [47] reported that LPS enhanced Nrf2 activation by virtue of inhibiting Keap1, a major Nrf2 sequestrant, via promoting its incorporation in autophagosomes. The upregulation of Nrf2 and the magnified downstream HO-1 activity were even more vivid in cilostazol-pretreated mice, thus establishing this pathway as a cardinal weapon in cilostazol's antioxidant effects. Zuo et al. [48] affiliated this outcome to induction of cAMP-dependent PKA/CREB pathway by cilostazol, which leads to boosted expression of PGC-1 α along with its downstream targets like Nrf2. Additionally, the

arrested NF- κ B levels, which negatively regulate the Nrf2 pathway via promoted binding of the co-repressor histone deacetylase 3 (HDAC3) to ARE [49], by cilostazol provides another validation for the reinforced downstream Nrf2 signaling interceded by the drug. Increased HO-1 activity, regulated by Nrf2, impedes cellular oxidative insults, which may be attributed to the breakdown of heme by HO-1 into biliverdin [50] and subsequently bilirubin, a powerful inhibitor of lipid peroxidation [51]. Furthermore, the anti-inflammatory effects of carbon monoxide can be anticipated as a contributor to the overall repression of the inflammatory process by cilostazol [52].

Cilostazol extended its antioxidant effect to entail the perturbed redox status where it partly preserved renal GSH, a crucial endogenous antioxidant that acts as a superoxide scavenger and a suppressor of hydrogen peroxide production [53]. Meanwhile, it counteracted LPS-triggered surplus levels of lipid peroxides, possibly reflecting the free radical quenching properties of cilostazol. Such effects are in close agreement with earlier observations on cilostazol in renal damage induced by ischemia/reperfusion [18] and diabetic nephropathy [17]. Cilostazol's ability to modulate tissue thiols and MDA might be related to the induction of Nrf2 pathway where γ -glutamylcysteine ligase enzyme, the rate-limiting step in GSH production, is positively affected by Nrf2 [54]. Moreover, aldo-keto

reductase 1C, a key player in neutralization of toxic aldehydes [55], is another downstream target of Nrf2 that might clarify the abrogated production of renal MDA following cilostazol administration [56]. As the build-up of ROS contributes to the sustained inflammatory response and the undermined renal integrity by LPS, their suppression by cilostazol identifies another mechanism for the nephroprotective effects of the drug.

A number of studies pinned down PI3K/Akt signaling as an influential regulator of pro-inflammatory responses [12,57]. In particular, a negative effect on TLR4 signaling and TLR-mediated NF- κ B induction is supported by various reports [14,58]. We, among others [13,59], have elucidated increased *p*-PI3K and *p*-Akt protein levels in LPS mice, a finding that designates one of protective cellular machinery against endotoxemic tissue injury. The expression of both proteins in cilostazol-treated mice exceeded that of the LPS group, suggesting that the rescinded TLR downstream NF- κ B level by cilostazol might arise from its capacity to incite PI3K/Akt signaling. Contrariwise, evidence exists that PI3K/Akt signaling might enhance NF- κ B activation, which is potentially accredited to direct phosphorylation of I κ B- α by Akt [60]. In context, Laird et al. [13] suggested that transformation of membrane phosphatidylinositol (4,5)-bisphosphate (PIP2) to phosphatidylinositol (3,4,5)-trisphosphate (PIP3) by PI3K/Akt stimulation impedes the former's binding to Toll-IL-1 resistance domain-containing adapter protein (TIRAP), which is a decisive factor for MyD88 recruitment and subsequent TLR4 downstream signaling, a fact that supports the current findings. Although cilostazol-associated PI3K/Akt pathway upregulation was formerly attested in human neuroblastoma cells [61], the current investigation offers the first evidence for a PI3K/Akt-facilitated nephroprotection exerted by cilostazol in the LPS-induced AKI model. Cilostazol's effect on PI3K/Akt signaling was previously attributed to retardation of tumor necrosis factor- α -provoked increased phosphatase and tensin homolog, an endogenous repressor of PI3K/Akt signaling [61]. It is noteworthy that a positive link exists between PI3K/Akt signaling and the Nrf2 pathway [62], representing another prospective mechanism for cilostazol's antioxidant quality.

4.1. Conclusion

In summary, these findings verified that cilostazol averted LPS-induced renal injury as evidenced by amendment of proximal tubular dysfunction, redox disturbance, and pro-inflammatory cytokine

release. The underlying mechanisms may include modification of TLR4/MyD88/NF- κ B and Nrf2/HO-1 signaling, which might be related to stimulation of PI3K/Akt pathway. Therefore, this study provides a strong impetus for cilostazol to be further evaluated as a valuable therapeutic option for the management of endotoxemic renal complications.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Prof. Adel M. Bakeer (Department of Pathology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Cairo University, Egypt) for conducting histopathological examinations.

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