



# Hepato-protective Effect of *Costus afer* (Okpete) Juice Extract on Alcohol- induced Liver Toxicity in Adult Female Wistar Rats

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## Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The oral intake of alcohol has become a widespread concern due to its high risk to body health. Therefore, our purpose in this study was to reveal the antioxidant efficacies of natural *Costus's afer* stem juice extract on hepatotoxicity induced by ethanol in adult female wistar rats.

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**Methods:** We examined the impacts of liver toxicity, where the experimental animals were given 1ml of 10% ethanol daily for 21 days, thereafter, *C. afer* was administered to evaluate its ameliorative effect in the female albino wistar rats orally treated with *C. afer* juice extract (200 and 400 mg/kg) for 7 days. The rats were divided into four (4) groups; Group A served as the control group, which was given rat chow and water only. Groups B, C and D were given 1ml of 10% ethanol. Afterwards, groups C and D were treated with 200 and 400 mg/kg using 1ml and 2ml of the juice extract of *C. afer*, respectively. A liver function test and histological analysis were carried out.

**Results:** The results showed that treatment with *C. afer* after the oral consumption of ethanol caused elevation in serum liver function parameters (alanine transferases, aspartate transaminase, and alkaline phosphate), which is significant compared to the control group. There was also a slight restoration in histopathological changes in the liver, as revealed by decreased areas of inflammation.

**Conclusion:** The therapeutic efficiency of *C. afer* juice extract could be due to traces of anti-inflammatory properties and the ROS-scavenging agent. Our findings prove that the elevation of liver function markers by *C. afer* enables hepatic tissue to suppress inflammatory and oxidative mechanisms, resulting in enhanced liver structure and function. Therefore, *C. afer* extract is a protective and therapeutic supplement against toxic agents.

**Keywords:** Liver injury; *Costus afer*; liver function; therapeutic agent.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The utilization of herbal remedies for treating or curing illnesses can be traced back to ancient times, such as the Stone Age. The field of pharmacology has seen significant progress over time, leading to the development of numerous synthetic drugs. This underscores the value of ethnomedicinal plants in the quest for new drugs [1]. *Costus afer*, a tall perennial herbaceous plant with an unbranched structure and creeping rhizome, is commonly found in damp or shaded areas of tropical West Africa, including Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon [2]. It belongs to the Zingiberaceae family and is often called ginger lily. In Nigeria, it is known by various names such as "Okpete" or "Okpoto" in Igboland, "Kakizawa" in Hausa, "tete-egun" in Yoruba, and "Mbriem" in Efik [3].

The medicinal attributes of *Costus afer* encompass its ability to protect the kidneys and liver and its antioxidant properties [4,5]. It exhibits antinociceptive characteristics and has a hypolipidemic impact [6,7]. *Costus afer* has also demonstrated antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory effects [8,9,1].

Chronic consumption of alcohol is linked to an increased risk of various chronic and acute diseases, notably alcoholic liver disease (ALD) [10], which can progress to hepatocellular carcinoma [11,12]. Despite its severe implications, there is currently no effective ALD treatment.

The pathogenesis of ALD involves intricate biological and molecular mechanisms, with

alcohol metabolism being a crucial and fundamental aspect [13,14]. "Alcohol metabolism encompasses several enzymatic systems or enzymes, such as the aldehyde dehydrogenase 2 (ALDH2) pathway, alcohol dehydrogenase (ADH), and cytochrome P4502E1 (CYP2E1) system. Chronic ethanol consumption has been shown to inhibit ALDH2 activity, leading to significantly elevated acetaldehyde levels in tissues and plasma" [14]. "Acetaldehyde, a major toxic metabolite of alcohol, plays a pivotal role in mediating alcohol-induced mutagenic and fibrogenic effects in the liver. It accelerates the formation of adducts that impair vital enzymes and proteins, contributing to ALD" [15]. Therefore, the research aimed to investigate the hepatoprotective effects of *Costus afer* stem juice extract against alcohol-induced liver toxicity in adult female albino Wistar rats.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Collection and Identification of *Costus afer*

*Costus afer* was harvested daily from the university environment at Abia State University Uturu, Abia State, Nigeria. The Botanist of the Department of Botany at Abia State University Uturu, Abia State, Nigeria, identified and authenticated the plant material.

### 2.2 Preparation of the Plant Extract

Fresh stems of *Costus afer* were collected from Uturu environment in Abia State University, they

were washed clean to remove dirt and sand particles. The stems were debarked and cut into sections, crushed with a crucible mortar and pestle; the ground stems were squeezed and filtered to obtain the fresh juice extract [16]. The process was done daily to get freshly prepared extract for daily administration.

### 2.3 Animal Care Handling

Twenty (20) adult female wistar rats weighing 100-120g were bought from the animal house of Abia State University Uturu, Abia State, Nigeria, for the study. The test animals were kept for fourteen days in iron cages under standard conditions following the procedures of Ezeji for and Orisakwe [5]. The animals were given standard feed and water.

### 2.4 Experimental Design

Weight-matched rats were divided into four groups of five rats each. Group A was maintained as the normal control and was given only feed and water, while group B was maintained as the negative control and given 1ml of 10% ethanol only for 14 days. Rats belonging to groups C and D both received 1ml of 10% ethanol for 14 days, 1ml and 2ml respectively of the juice extract at 200 and 400mg/kg for 7 days, this was done using oral gavage. Following the procedures recorded in the work of Alahmari et al. [17]. Based on 1g of stock solution, the volume given to the animals for 200 mg/kg and 400 mg/kg doses of *Costus afer* is 1 ml, and 2 ml, respectively, for 7 days. The volume was calculated according to the average weight of the animals in each treatment group.

### 2.5 Phytochemical Analysis of *Costus afer* Extract

Phytochemical analysis of *Costus afer* extract was conducted using *Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (G.C.-M.S.)* to determine the nature of the extract components, which might contribute to the protective impacts against ethanol toxicity according to the method described by Uchebgu et al. [16].

### 2.6 Sample Collection and Sacrifice

At the end of the treatment, the rats were sacrificed by cervical dislocation (blood was collected by ophthalmic puncture). The liver was quickly removed and fixed in 10% of formaldehyde. After centrifugation of the homogenates (3000 rpm, 15 min), the supernatants were used for biochemical assays related to alcohol-induced liver function damage, described below.

### 2.7 Evaluation of Liver Function

"Heparinized blood was centrifuged at 3000 rpm for 15 min for biochemical analysis. We measured the activities of serum aspartate aminotransferase (AST), alanine aminotransferase (ALT) and alkaline phosphate (ALP). AST and ALT were measured, as described by Reitman and Frankel" [18]. ALP level was estimated by colourimetric endpoint method,

### 2.8 Histological Analysis

The twenty Wistar albino rats used for the study were sacrificed under cervical dislocation, and the liver was harvested and fixed in 10% formalin. After 72 hrs, the organs were dehydrated in graded alcohol, cleared in xylene, and embedded in paraffin. Auto technicians carried out tissue processing, and the prepared 5  $\mu$  thick section was mounted on slides and stained with hematoxylin and eosin. Stained sections were morphologically evaluated, and the pictures of the slides were taken for comparison.

### 2.9 Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis will be performed using the Graphpad Prism for Windows statistical package, version 6.0 (Graphpad Software Inc). Data expressed as means  $\pm$  S.D. The effects of treatments were evaluated statistically using the one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) followed by Turkey's post-hoc test to correct for multiple comparison treatments. Statistical significance is set at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

**Table 1. Experimental design**

GROUP	DESCRIPTION	TREATMENT
Group A	Normal	Water + feed
Group B	Negative control	1ml of 10% ethanol for 14 days
Group C	Low dose	1ml of 10% ethanol for 14 days + 200 mg/kg of extract for 7 days
Group D	High dose	1ml of 10% ethanol for 14 days + 400mg/kg of extract for 7 days

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Phytochemical Screening of *Costus afer* Juice Extract

Table 2 illustrates the phytochemical contents along with the respective traces in the *Costus afer* extract. The chromatographic analysis revealed the presence of 9 components in the extract. A trace amount of alkaloids, tannins, saponins, steroids, carbohydrates, cardiac glycosides, triterpenoids, and proteins is present in the *C. afer* juice extract. All compounds were present in trace amounts, except for a Flavonoid, which occurred in a rare amount.

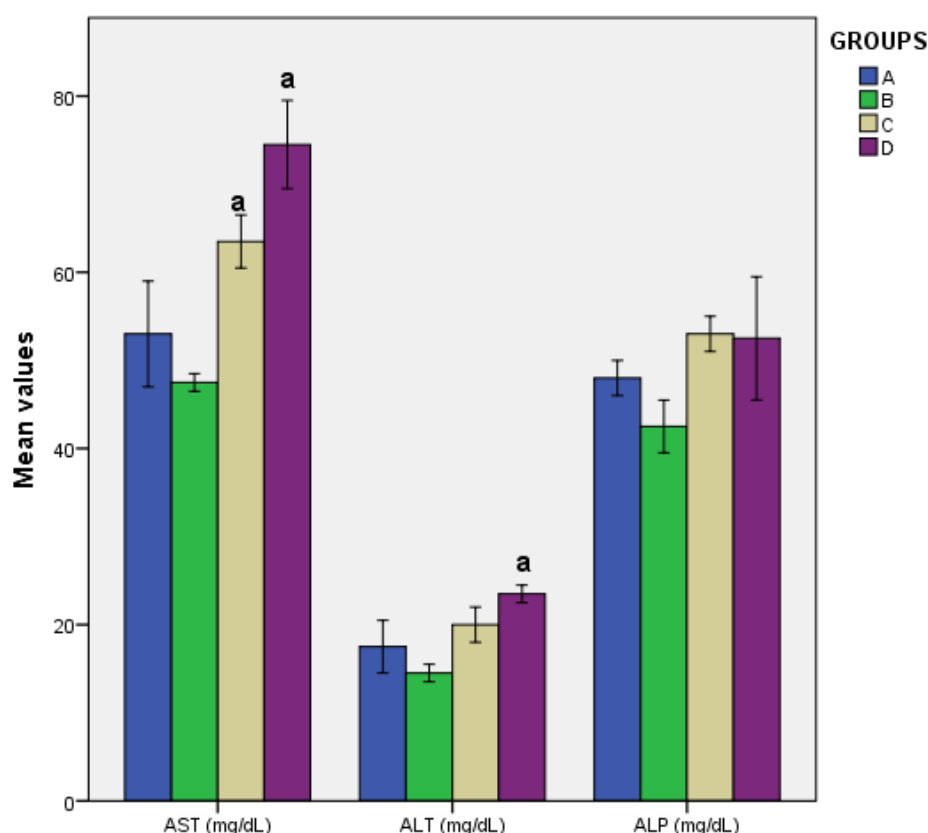
#### 3.2 Liver Function Test

The hepatic function parameters we tested in this experiment were AST, ALT, and ALP (Table 3, Fig. 1). Group B, which received ethanol only,

showed a decrease in the levels of liver function parameters tested; we recorded no significant differences in the values of AST, ALT, or ALP ( $p > 0.05$ ) in comparison with group 1 (control). We found highly significant elevations in AST, ALT, and ASP levels ( $p < 0.003$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ;  $p > 0.05$ , respectively) in group C and D rats after cotreatment with *C. afer* extract at low and high doses, respectively.

#### 3.3 Effect of *Costus afer* Juice Extract on the Histoarchitecture of Alcohol-induced Liver Toxicity in adult Female Wistar rat Histological Examination

Histopathological examination of the liver showed marked inflammation and cytoplasmic vacuolation in the ethanol group (b), indicating toxicity, which was slightly restored dose-dependently in the treated group, as seen in Fig. 2.



**Fig. 1. Effects of *C. afer* juice extract (200 and 400 mg/kg) and 1ml of 10% ethanol intake on the liver function parameters. Aspartate transaminase (AST), Alanine transaminase (ALT), and alkaline phosphate (ALP) levels are expressed as milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL). All values are expressed as mean  $\pm$  standard error (S.E.) of  $n = 5$ . <sup>a</sup>  $p < 0.05$  vs. control group**

**Table 2. Phytochemical analysis of *Costus Afer***

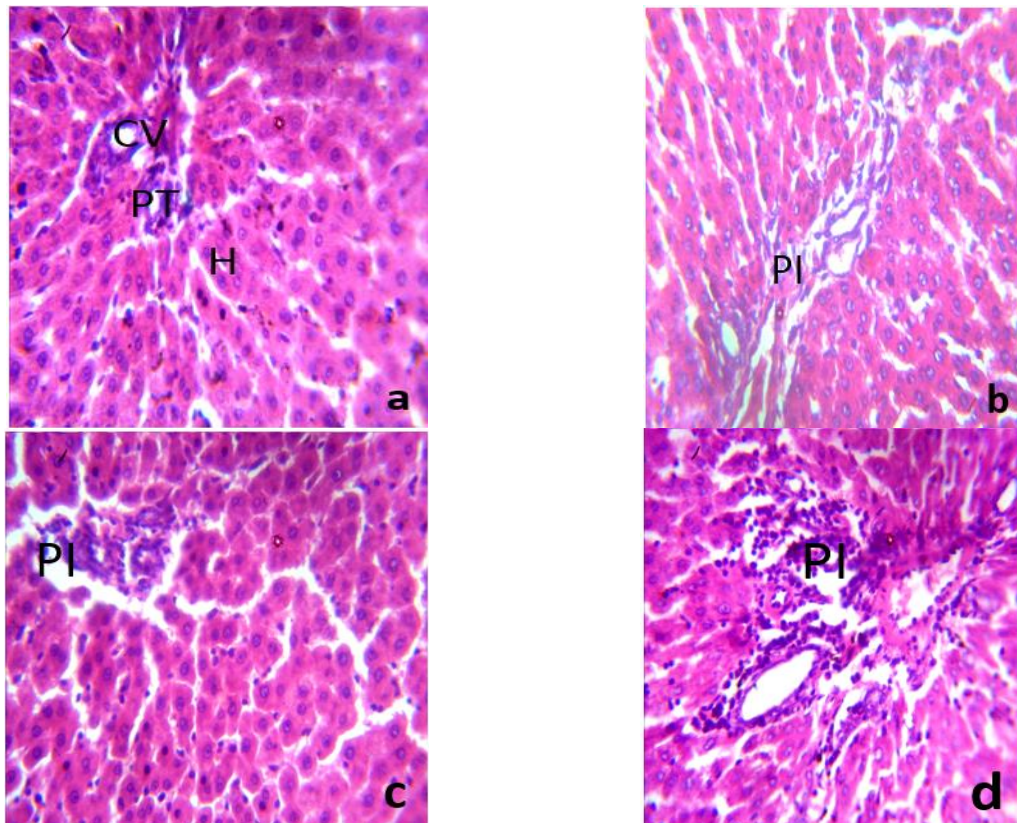
Phytochemical	Juice Extract
Alkaloid	+
Flavonoid	-
Tannins	+
Saponins	+
Steroid	+
Carbohydrate	+
Cardiac glycoside	+
Triterpenoid	+
Protein	+

Keys: -rare; + trace;

**Table 3. Effect of *Costus afer* juice extract on the liver biochemical parameters following alcohol-induced toxicity in adult female Wistar rat**

Liver Biomarkers (mg/dL)	Groups				p-value
	A	B	C	D	
AST	52.00±3.00	47.50±0.50	63.50±1.50a	74.50±2.50a	0.003
ALT	17.50±1.50	14.50±0.50	20.00±1.00	23.50±0.50a	0.011
ALP	48.00±1.00	42.50±1.50	53.00±1.00	52.50±3.50	0.062

Values are given as Mean ± S.E. for each group where S.E. is the Standard Error. 'a' indicates a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) compared to Group A (Control)



**Fig. 2. Photomicrograph of the liver of alcohol-induced hepatotoxic rats treated with *Costus afer* juice extract. (a) Normal control. (b) Toxic control. (c) ethanol ± 200mg/kg *Costus afer*. (d) ethanol ± 200mg/kg *Costus afer* (X400)**

#### 4. DISCUSSION

In this study, we investigated the protective effects of *Costus afer* (*C. afer*) juice extract against alcohol-induced hepatotoxicity in rats, considering the widespread health risks associated with oral alcohol consumption. Our focus was on evaluating improvements in liver function and structure using hepatic function markers and histopathological examinations, as the precise role of this natural extract in mitigating alcohol-induced liver damage still needs to be completed.

Our results revealed that ethanol administration at a concentration of 10% significantly decreased hepatic function parameters, indicating hepatotoxicity. Histopathological changes in hepatic tissue supported this observation. These findings align with previous studies conducted on rat models [19]. "Ethanol-induced oxidative stress in hepatocytes plays a crucial role in hepatotoxicity and liver dysfunction, as indicated by previous research" [20]. "The reduced levels of serum alanine transaminase (ALT), aspartate transaminase (AST), and alkaline phosphatase (ALP) are indicative of increased permeability, damage, and necrosis of hepatocytes, a common consequence of ethanol consumption" [19].

Ethanol metabolism generates toxic byproducts that damage liver cells. Enzymes such as ALT and AST are released into the bloodstream, initially increasing serum levels and decreasing them with chronic administration. Moreover, elevated levels of hepatic tumour markers may serve as indicators of liver injury and mechanisms of cellular damage [21]. Therefore, measuring these markers during the 21-day experiment provided early evidence of cellular damage onset.

Histopathological examination of the liver revealed significant inflammation and cytoplasmic vacuolation in the group treated with ethanol alone (Group B), indicating toxicity, which is consistent with findings from previous studies by Arshed et al. [22] and Hyun et al. [19]. Conversely, the control group (Group A) exhibited normal liver histology without inflammation or tissue distortion, with clearly visible central veins, hepatocytes, and portal tracts. Treatment with *Costus afer* extract showed mild restoration of liver hepatocytes and reduced inflammation. However, it did not fully reverse the hepatic injury caused by ethanol during the treatment period.

"To assess its efficacy against ethanol toxicity, we administered ethanol + 400 mg/kg of *C. afer* extract to the animals (group d). Our data indicated that treatment with *C. afer* extract in combination with ethanol (group d) resulted in increased levels of ALT, ALP, and AST, with a significance level of  $P < 0.05$  compared to the control group. These findings confirm that *C. afer* could mitigate the hepatotoxic effects induced by ethanol consumption. Similar results have been observed in multiple studies investigating the protective effects of *C. afer* extract against various toxic agents" [4,9,23,24]. Amadi and AnyasorM [24] demonstrated that "*C. afer* extract can alleviate liver function biomarker disorders in a concentration-dependent manner, attributed to its natural bioactive components that may attenuate hepatic damage caused by free radicals". Furthermore, Anyanwu et al. [23] reported that "*C. afer* can inhibit hepatocarcinogenesis proliferation in a dose-dependent manner".

"The beneficial effects of *C. afer* observed in our study may be linked to its antioxidant activities. These activities play a crucial role in hepatoprotection by scavenging free radicals, restoring antioxidant defense activity, and maintaining cell membrane integrity and stability, as evidenced in previous research" [5]. "These mechanisms contribute to improving the structure and function of the liver" [25].

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In summary, administration of 10% ethanol at a dose of 1ml/kg for 21 days led to (i) a notable reduction in liver function parameters, which are key indicators of liver damage and toxicity, and (ii) histopathological changes in rat hepatic tissues, indicating mechanisms of cellular injury. Concurrent treatment with *Costus afer* alongside ethanol appeared to offer protective effects on the liver, evidenced by increased liver function biomarkers and improved liver histology, attributed to its phytochemical properties and ROS-scavenging activities. However, this combined treatment did not completely restore the liver's histoarchitecture. Our study indicates that the stem juice extract of *C. afer* may prevent or alleviate the risks associated with exposure to various toxic agents.

#### CONSENT

It is not applicable.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

The protocol for the experiment was approved by the Abia State University Faculty of Basic Medical Science Research Ethics Committee.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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