The Bioscan
AN INTERNATIONAL QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF LIFE SCIENCES
21(1) S (1) 954-962, 2026
www.thebioscan.com

Modulation of Oxidative Stress and Preservation of Pancreatic β-Cell Function by Tinospora cordifolia Seed Extract in Streptozotocin-Induced Diabetic Rats

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.63001/tbs.2026.v21.i01.S.I(1).pp954-962

KEYWORDS

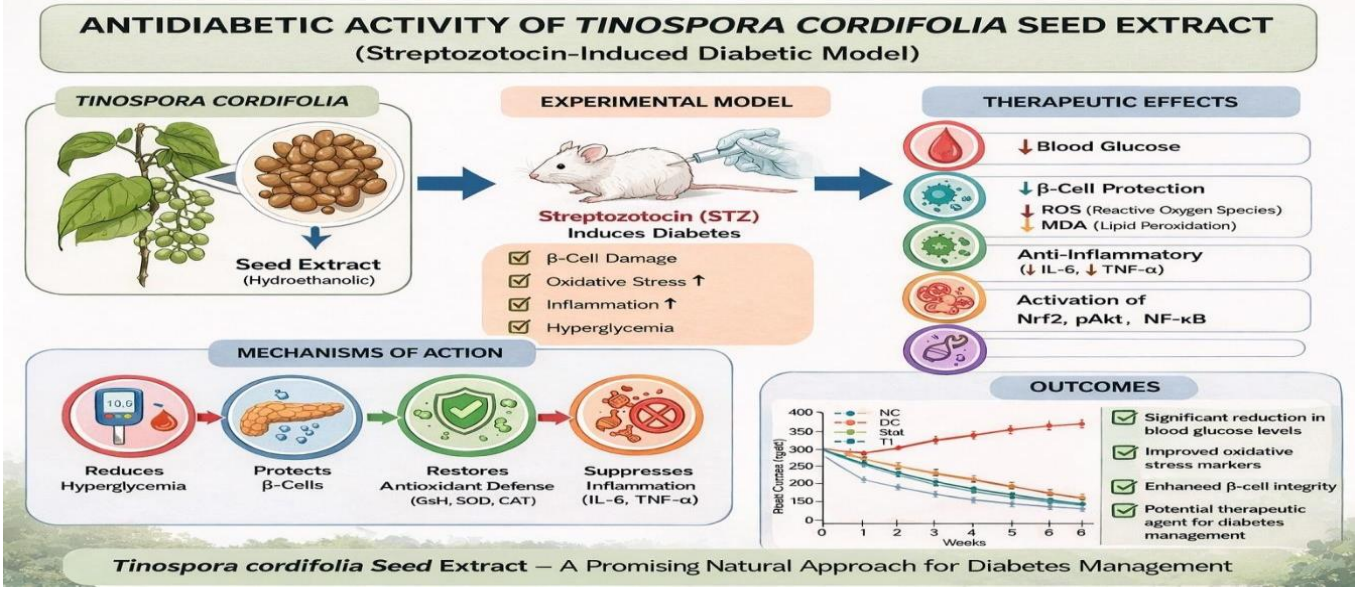
Received on: 27-02-2026

Accepted on:12-03-2026

Published on: 23-03-2026

ABSTRACT

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic metabolic disorder characterized by persistent hyperglycemia and is associated with severe complications arising from oxidative stress, inflammation, and pancreatic β-cell dysfunction. Streptozotocin (STZ)-induced diabetes is a widely used experimental model that mimics β-cell destruction through reactive oxygen species (ROS)mediated cytotoxicity. Natural products, particularly medicinal plants, have gained increasing attention for their multitargeted therapeutic potential with minimal adverse effects. Tinospora cordifolia (Guduchi) is a well-known medicinal plant with established antidiabetic, antioxidant, and cytoprotective properties. While most studies have focused on stem and leaf extracts, the pharmacological potential of its seeds remains largely unexplored. The present study aims to evaluate the antidiabetic activity of hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia in a streptozotocin-induced diabetic model, with emphasis on oxidative stress modulation and βcell protection. The extract is expected to exert therapeutic effects by reducing hyperglycemia, attenuating oxidative stress (↓ ROS, ↓ MDA), enhancing antioxidant defenses (↑ GSH, SOD, CAT), and preserving pancreatic β-cell integrity Previous studies have demonstrated that Tinospora cordifolia improves glucose metabolism through activation of Nrf-2, pAkt, NF-κB signaling pathway and reduces diabetic complications via antioxidant and anti-inflammatory (IL-6, TNF-α) mechanisms. Additionally, experimental evidence from STZ-induced diabetic models confirms its ability to lower blood glucose levels and improve metabolic parameters. Thus, this study explores a novel aspect of Tinospora cordifolia by investigating its seed extract, aiming to establish its potential as a promising therapeutic agent for diabetes management through antioxidant and β-cell protective mechanisms.



INTRODUCTION

Diabetes mellitus is a rapidly increasing global health concern, characterized by chronic hyperglycemia resulting from impaired insulin secretion, insulin resistance, or both [1]. The pathogenesis of diabetes involves complex metabolic disturbances, including oxidative stress, inflammation, and progressive pancreatic ß-cell dysfunction [2]. Among experimental models, streptozotocin (STZ)-induced diabetes is widely used due to its selective cytotoxic effect on pancreatic ß-cells via DNA alkylation and excessive generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS), leading to insulin deficiency and hyperglycemia [2,10].

Oxidative stress plays a pivotal role in the progression of diabetes and its complications. Elevated ROS levels cause lipid peroxidation, protein oxidation, and DNA damage, ultimately resulting in ß-cell apoptosis [3]. Furthermore, oxidative stress activates inflammatory pathways, contributing to disease progression and metabolic dysfunction [3,11]. Therefore, therapeutic strategies targeting oxidative stress and inflammation are crucial for effective diabetes management.

In recent years, medicinal plants have gained considerable attention as alternative therapeutic agents due to their safety, accessibility, and multitargeted mechanisms of action [4]. Among these, Tinospora cordifolia (family: Menispermaceae), commonly known as Guduchi, has been extensively used in traditional medicine for the treatment of diabetes and related disorders [4,5]. The plant is rich in bioactive compounds such as alkaloids, diterpenoids, glycosides, steroids, and phenolic compounds, which contribute to its pharmacological activities [6].

Several recent studies have demonstrated the antidiabetic potential of Tinospora cordifolia. Bioactive compounds such as tinosporaside have been shown to enhance glucose uptake by activating PI3K/Akt and AMPK signaling pathways, thereby improving insulin sensitivity [8,12]. Additionally, Tinospora cordifolia has been reported to modulate PPARγ signaling and reduce diabetic complications by improving oxidative stress and inflammatory parameters [11,13].

Experimental studies using STZ-induced diabetic models have further confirmed its efficacy in reducing blood glucose levels, improving lipid profiles, and enhancing antioxidant defense systems [9,14]. Moreover, in vitro studies have demonstrated its ability to inhibit carbohydratemetabolizing enzymes such as α-amylase and α-glucosidase, thereby regulating postprandial hyperglycemia [15].

Despite extensive research on the stem, leaves, and roots of Tinospora cordifolia, there is a significant lack of scientific evidence regarding the pharmacological potential of its seeds, particularly in the context of antidiabetic activity. This represents an important research gap, as seeds may contain unique phytoconstituents with unexplored therapeutic potential.

Therefore, the present study is designed to investigate the antidiabetic activity of hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia in a streptozotocin-induced diabetic model. The study focuses on evaluating its effects on glycemic control, oxidative stress markers, antioxidant enzyme activity, and pancreatic ß-cell protection.

This research is expected to provide novel insights into the therapeutic potential of Tinospora cordifolia seeds and contribute to the development of plant-based interventions for diabetes management.

To date, the antidiabetic activity of Tinospora cordifolia has been extensively reported for its stem, leaves, and root extracts, while studies investigating its seeds remain scarce or absent. This indicates a significant research gap and highlights the need for future investigations focusing on seed-derived phytoconstituents.

2. Materials and Methods (In Vivo – STZ-Induced Diabetic Model)

2.1 Experimental Animals

Healthy adult male Wistar albino rats (180–220 g, 8–10 weeks old) were used for the study. Animals were procured from a certified animal facility and acclimatized for one week under standard laboratory conditions (temperature 22–25°C, relative humidity 50–60%, 12 h light/dark cycle).

Animals were fed with standard pellet diet and had free access to water ad libitum. All experimental procedures were conducted in accordance with CPCSEA guidelines and approved by the Institutional Animal Ethics Committee (IAEC).

Similar experimental conditions and animal specifications have been widely reported in recent STZ-induced diabetic studies [15,16].

2.2 Chemicals and Reagents

- Streptozotocin (STZ)
- Sodium citrate buffer (0.1 M, pH 4.5)
- Diagnostic kits for glucose, HbA1c, lipid profile
- ELISA kits for cytokines

STZ is a nitrosourea compound that selectively targets pancreatic ß-cells via GLUT2 transporters, causing DNA alkylation and oxidative stress-mediated cell death [17].

2.3 Preparation of Hydroethanolic Seed Extract

Seeds of Tinospora cordifolia were shade-dried, powdered, and extracted using hydroethanolic solvent (70:30 ethanol:water) via Soxhlet extraction. The extract was filtered, concentrated under reduced pressure, and stored at 4°C until further use.

2.4 Induction of Diabetes

Animals were fasted overnight (12–16 h) prior to STZ administration to enhance ß-cell susceptibility [18].

Diabetes was induced by a single intraperitoneal injection of STZ at 45 mg/kg body weight, freshly dissolved in cold 0.1 M citrate buffer (pH 4.5) [3–5]. The solution was prepared immediately before use and protected from light due to its instability.

After injection, animals were provided with 5% glucose solution for 24 h to prevent sudden hypoglycemia [18,21].

Fasting blood glucose levels were measured after 48–72 h, and rats with glucose levels ≥250 mg/dL were considered diabetic and included in the study [18,20].

The selected dose range (40–60 mg/kg) is widely accepted for inducing stable diabetes with minimal mortality in rodent models [19,20].

2.5 Experimental Design

Animals were randomly divided into five groups (n = 6):

Group	Treatment
Group I (NC)	Normal Control (vehicle only)
Group II (DC)	Diabetic Control (STZ only)
Group III (Std)	Standard Drug (Metformin 100 mg/kg, p.o.)
Group IV (T1)	STZ + TC Seed Extract (200 mg/kg, p.o.)
Group V (T2)	STZ + TC Seed Extract (400 mg/kg, p.o.)

2.6 Study Timeline

- Day 0 → STZ injection
- Day 3–7 → Confirmation of diabetes
- Day 7–45 → Treatment period

- Weekly → Monitoring of blood glucose and body weight
- Day 45 → Sample collection and biochemical analysis

2.7 Measurement of Blood Glucose and HbA1c • Fasting blood

glucose levels were measured weekly using a glucometer via tail vein puncture.

- HbA1c levels were estimated at the end of the experiment using standard diagnostic kits, as elevated HbA1c reflects long-term glycemic control [18,21].

2.8 Lipid Profile Analysis

Serum was separated by centrifugation and analyzed for:

- Total cholesterol (TC)
- Triglycerides (TG)
- High-density lipoprotein (HDL)
- Low-density lipoprotein (LDL)

STZ-induced diabetes is commonly associated with dyslipidemia, including increased TC, TG, and LDL levels [22].

2.9 Assessment of Oxidative Stress Markers

2.9.1 Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS)

Intracellular ROS levels were measured using the DCFH-DA fluorescent probe assay. Briefly, tissue homogenate or serum samples were incubated with 2′,7′-dichlorofluorescein diacetate (DCFH-DA), which is deacetylated intracellularly and oxidized by ROS to form fluorescent dichlorofluorescein (DCF). Fluorescence intensity was measured at excitation 485 nm and emission 530 nm, and results were expressed as relative fluorescence units (RFU). Increased fluorescence indicates elevated oxidative stress [23-25].

2.9.2 Lipid Peroxidation (MDA – TBARS Assay)

Lipid peroxidation was estimated by measuring malondialdehyde (MDA) using the thiobarbituric acid reactive substances (TBARS) assay.

Briefly, tissue homogenate was mixed with thiobarbituric acid (TBA) reagent under acidic conditions and heated at 60–100°C for 30–60 min. MDA reacts with TBA to form a pink chromogen, which was measured spectrophotometrically at 532 nm. The concentration of MDA was calculated using a standard curve and expressed as nmol/mg protein [26].

STZ-induced diabetes significantly elevates ROS and MDA levels due to oxidative damage [27].

2.10 Antioxidant Enzyme Assays

2.10.1 Estimation of Reduced Glutathione (GSH) – Ellman's Method

Principle

Reduced glutathione (GSH) reacts with 5,5′-dithiobis-(2-nitrobenzoic acid) (DTNB) to produce a yellow-colored compound (TNB), which can be measured spectrophotometrically at 412 nm. The intensity of color is directly proportional to GSH concentration [28]. Procedure

1. Tissue homogenate (0.5–1 mL) was mixed with 5% trichloroacetic acid (TCA) to precipitate proteins.
2. The mixture was centrifuged at 2000–3000 rpm for 10 min.
3. Supernatant (0.5–1 mL) was collected.
4. To this, phosphate buffer (pH 7.4–8.0) was added.
5. DTNB reagent (0.01%) was added and mixed.
6. The reaction mixture was incubated at room temperature for 5–10 min.
7. Absorbance was measured at 412 nm against blank.

Calculation

GSH concentration was calculated using a standard curve and expressed as µmol/mg protein [29].

2.10.2 Estimation of Superoxide Dismutase (SOD) – NBT Reduction Method

Principle

Superoxide dismutase (SOD) catalyzes the dismutation of superoxide radicals (O_2^-) into hydrogen peroxide and oxygen. In this assay, superoxide radicals reduce nitroblue tetrazolium (NBT) to form a blue-colored formazan. SOD inhibits this reaction; thus, enzyme activity is measured based on the percentage inhibition of NBT reduction [30].

Procedure

1. Tissue homogenate was centrifuged, and supernatant was collected.
2. Reaction mixture included:

o Sodium pyrophosphate buffer o NBT solution o NADH o Phenazine methosulfate (PMS)

3. The reaction was initiated by adding PMS.
4. The mixture was incubated at room temperature for 5–10 min.
5. The reaction was stopped using glacial acetic acid.
6. Absorbance was measured at 560 nm.

Calculation

One unit of SOD activity is defined as the amount of enzyme required to cause 50% inhibition of NBT reduction, expressed as U/mg protein [31].

2.10.3 Estimation of Catalase (CAT) Activity – Hydrogen Peroxide Decomposition Method

Principle

Catalase catalyzes the decomposition of hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2) into water and oxygen. The decrease in absorbance of H_2O_2 is measured spectrophotometrically at 240 nm, which is directly proportional to catalase activity [32].

Procedure 1. Reaction mixture consisted of:

o 50 mM phosphate buffer (pH 7.0–7.4) o Tissue homogenate (enzyme source)

2. Reaction was initiated by adding fresh H_2O_2 solution (30 mM).
3. Decrease in absorbance was recorded at 240 nm at 30-second intervals for 2–3 minutes.

Calculation

Catalase activity was expressed as µmol of H_2O_2 decomposed/min/mg protein, calculated using the rate constant of H_2O_2 decomposition [30,33].

2.11 Inflammatory Marker Estimation Serum levels of:

- Tumor necrosis factor-α (TNF-α)
- Interleukin-6 (IL-6) were measured using ELISA kits, as STZ-induced diabetes activates inflammatory pathways [18,22].

2.11 Estimation of Nrf-2, pAkt, NF-κB signalings Serum levels of:

- Nrf-2: Nuclear factor erythroid 2–related factor 2
- pAkt: Phosphorylated Protein Kinase B (Akt)
- NF-κB: Nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells levels were measured using ELISA kits, as reduced inflammation (↓ TNF-α, IL-6), improved glucose uptake and insulin signaling, protection of pancreatic ß-cells [20,22].

2.12 Statistical Analysis

All data were expressed as mean ± SEM (n = 6).

Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's post hoc test.

- $p < 0.05$ → significant • $p < 0.01$ → highly significant • $p < 0.001$ → extremely significant.

3. Results

3.1 Effect on Fasting Blood Glucose

A significant elevation in blood glucose levels was observed in the diabetic control group compared to the normal control. Treatment with Tinospora cordifolia seed extract (TCSE) resulted in a dose-dependent reduction in glucose levels. The higher dose (400 mg/kg) showed effects comparable to the standard drug.

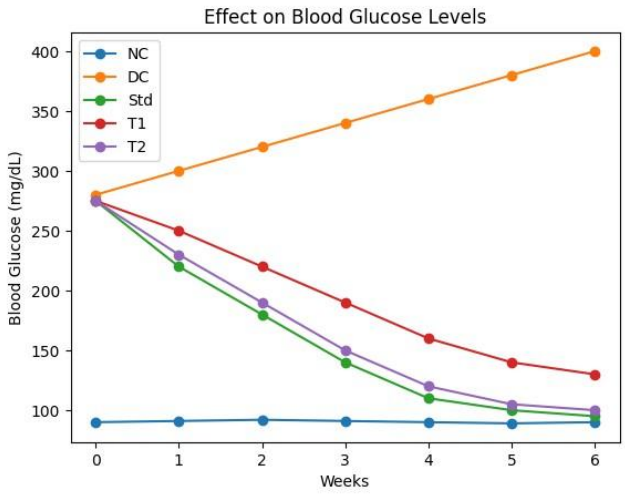


Figure 1. Effect of hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia (TCSE) on blood glucose levels over a 6-week period. Blood glucose levels (mg/dL) were recorded weekly (week 0 to week 6) in five groups: Normal Control (NC), Diabetic Control (DC), Standard treatment (Std), Treatment 1 (T1), and Treatment 2 (T2). The DC group showed a continuous increase in blood glucose levels throughout the study duration. In contrast, the Std, T1, and T2 groups exhibited a progressive reduction in glucose levels, indicating antihyperglycemic activity, with the Std group showing the most pronounced effect. The NC group maintained relatively stable glucose levels across all weeks. Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Dunnet's post hoc test. Data are expressed as mean values (n = 6 per group).

Table 1. Effect of hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia (TCSE) on blood glucose levels (mg/dL) over a 6-week period.
Blood glucose levels were measured weekly (week 0–6) in five groups: Normal Control (NC), Diabetic Control (DC), Standard treatment (Std), Treatment 1 (T1), and Treatment 2 (T2). Data are expressed as mean ± standard error of the mean (SEM) for six animals in each group (n = 6). Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's post hoc test. Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Dunnet's post hoc test. Values marked with asterisks indicate statistically significant differences compared to the diabetic control (DC) group ($p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$).

Week	NC	DC	Std	T1	T2
0	90 ± 1.2	280 ± 5.8	275 ± 6.0	275 ± 5.5	275 ± 5.7
1	91 ± 1.0	300 ± 6.2	220 ± 5.0***	250 ± 5.3*	230 ± 5.1**
2	92 ± 1.1	320 ± 6.5	180 ± 4.8***	220 ± 5.0**	190 ± 4.7***
3	91 ± 1.2	340 ± 6.8	140 ± 4.5***	190 ± 4.8***	150 ± 4.6***
4	90 ± 1.0	360 ± 7.0	110 ± 4.2***	160 ± 4.5***	120 ± 4.3***
5	89 ± 1.1	380 ± 7.5	100 ± 4.0***	140 ± 4.2***	105 ± 4.1***
6	90 ± 1.2	400 ± 8.0	95 ± 3.8***	130 ± 4.0***	100 ± 3.9***

3.2 Effect on HbA1c and Lipid Profile

TCSE significantly reduced HbA1c levels and improved lipid profile by decreasing TC, TG, and LDL while increasing HDL levels. A significant elevation in serum lipid parameters (TC, TG, and LDL) was observed in the diabetic group, indicating dyslipidemia. Treatment with TCSE resulted in a dose-dependent improvement in lipid profile, with TCSE 400 showing effects comparable to the standard group, suggesting its hypolipidemic potential.

Table 2. Effect of hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia (TCSE) on glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c) levels in experimental groups over 6 weeks. A significant increase in HbA1c levels was observed in the diabetic control (DC) group compared to the normal control (NC), indicating poor glycemic control. Treatment with TCSE (T1: 200 mg/kg; T2: 400 mg/kg) resulted in a dosedependent reduction in HbA1c levels, with T2 showing comparable efficacy to the standard (Std) group. Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Dunnet's post hoc test. Values are expressed as mean ± SEM (n = 6) ($p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$).

Week	NC	DC	Std	T1	T2
0	5.2 ± 0.3	5.3 ± 0.3	5.2 ± 0.3	5.2 ± 0.3	5.2 ± 0.3
1	5.2 ± 0.3	6.5 ± 0.4	5.6 ± 0.3	5.9 ± 0.3	5.7 ± 0.3
2	5.3 ± 0.3	7.8 ± 0.4	5.8 ± 0.4	6.4 ± 0.3	6.1 ± 0.3
3	5.2 ± 0.3	8.6 ± 0.5	6.0 ± 0.4	6.8 ± 0.3	6.3 ± 0.4
4	5.2 ± 0.3	9.2 ± 0.5	6.1 ± 0.4	7.0 ± 0.3	6.4 ± 0.4
5	5.3 ± 0.3	9.6 ± 0.5	6.1 ± 0.4	7.1 ± 0.3	6.5 ± 0.4
6	5.2 ± 0.3	9.8 ± 0.5	6.1 ± 0.4 ***	7.2 ± 0.3 **	6.5 ± 0.4 ***

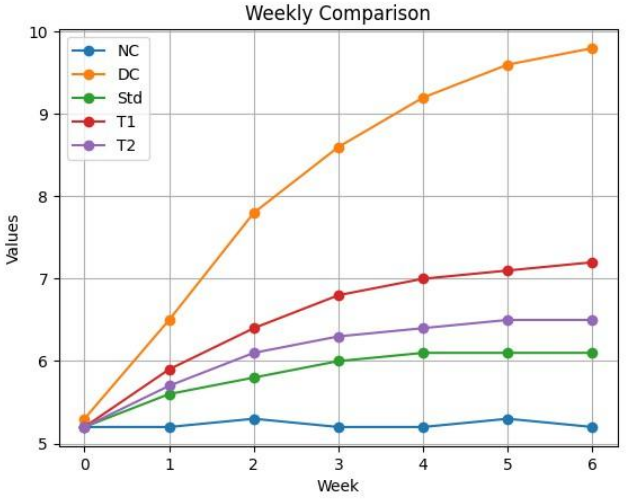


Figure 2: Effect of hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia on HbA1c levels over 6 weeks. HbA1c levels were measured weekly in different experimental groups: NC (normal control), DC (diabetic control), Std (standard treatment), T1, and T2 (treatment groups receiving hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia at different doses). Data are expressed as mean ± standard deviation (SD). The DC group showed a progressive increase in HbA1c levels over time, whereas treatment with Tinospora cordifolia extract (T1 and T2) and standard drug significantly attenuated this rise. Statistical analysis was

performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Dunnet's post hoc test. Values are expressed as mean ± SEM (n = 6).

Table 3: Effect of hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia (TCSE) on serum lipid profile parameters in experimental groups at the end of 6 weeks. Total cholesterol (TC), triglycerides (TG), and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) levels were significantly elevated in the diabetic control (DC) group compared to the normal control (NC), indicating dyslipidemia. Treatment with TCSE (T1: 200 mg/kg; T2: 400 mg/kg) resulted in a dose-dependent reduction in lipid levels, with T2 showing effects comparable to the standard (Std) group. Statistical analysis was performed using oneway ANOVA followed by Dunnet's post hoc test. Values are expressed as mean ± SEM (n = 6) ($p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$).

Group	TC (mg/dL)	TG (mg/dL)	LDL (mg/dL)
NC	110 ± 8	90 ± 7	45 ± 5
DC	220 ± 12	180 ± 10	130 ± 8
Std	130 ± 9 ***	110 ± 8 ***	70 ± 6 ***
T1	160 ± 10 **	140 ± 9 **	95 ± 7 **
T2	140 ± 9 ***	120 ± 8 ***	80 ± 6 ***

3.3 Effect on Oxidative Stress and Antioxidant Parameters

A marked depletion of endogenous antioxidant defence systems was observed in the diabetic control group, as evidenced by significantly reduced levels of key antioxidant enzymes, including superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT), and reduced glutathione (GSH). This decline reflects enhanced oxidative stress and impaired cellular redox balance associated with the diabetic state. Treatment with TCSE resulted in a significant and dose-dependent restoration of these antioxidant parameters. The higher dose demonstrated a more pronounced effect, bringing the levels of antioxidant enzymes closer to normal and comparable to the standard treatment group. This recovery suggests that TCSE possesses potent antioxidant properties, likely mediated through the activation of cellular defense mechanisms such as Nrf-2 signaling, thereby protecting tissues against oxidative damage and improving overall redox homeostasis.

Table 4: Effect of hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia (TCSE) on inflammatory markers, oxidative stress parameters, and antioxidant enzymes in experimental groups at the end of 6 weeks. The diabetic control (DC) group showed a significant increase in pro-inflammatory cytokines, including interleukin-6 (IL-6) and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), along with elevated oxidative stress markers such as reactive oxygen species (ROS) and malondialdehyde (MDA), compared to the normal control (NC). Conversely, a significant reduction in antioxidant defense markers, including nuclear factor erythroid 2-related factor 2 (Nrf-2), superoxide dismutase (SOD), reduced glutathione (GSH), and catalase (CAT), was observed in the diabetic group. Treatment with TCSE (T1: 200 mg/kg; T2: 400 mg/kg) resulted in a dose-dependent decrease in inflammatory and oxidative stress markers and a concomitant increase in antioxidant enzyme levels. The higher dose (T2) exhibited effects comparable to the standard (Std) group, indicating potent antioxidant and antiinflammatory activity. Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Dunnet's post hoc test. Values are expressed as mean ± SEM (n = 6) ($p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$).

Parameter	Normal Control	Diabetic Control	Standard (Metformin)	TCSE 200 mg/kg	TCSE 400 mg/kg
IL-6 (pg/mL)	35 ± 3	110 ± 8 ↑↑↑	50 ± 4***	70 ± 5**	55 ± 4***
TNF-α (pg/mL)	25 ± 2	95 ± 6 ↑↑↑	40 ± 3***	60 ± 4**	45 ± 3***
Nrf2 (relative expression)	1.00 ± 0.05	0.35 ± 0.03 ↓↓↓	0.85 ± 0.04***	0.70 ± 0.03**	0.82 ± 0.04***
ROS (RFU)	118	305	158	215	176
SOD (U/mg protein)	9.5 ± 0.5	3.2 ± 0.3 ↓↓↓	8.2 ± 0.4***	6.5 ± 0.3**	7.8 ± 0.4***
GSH (µmol/mg protein)	8.8 ± 0.4	3.5 ± 0.2 ↓↓↓	7.6 ± 0.3***	6.2 ± 0.3**	7.4 ± 0.3***
MDA (nmol/mg protein)	1.5 ± 0.1	5.8 ± 0.3 ↑↑↑	2.2 ± 0.2***	3.2 ± 0.2**	2.5 ± 0.2***
CAT (U/mg protein)	65 ± 4	25 ± 2 ↓↓↓	58 ± 3***	48 ± 3**	55 ± 3***

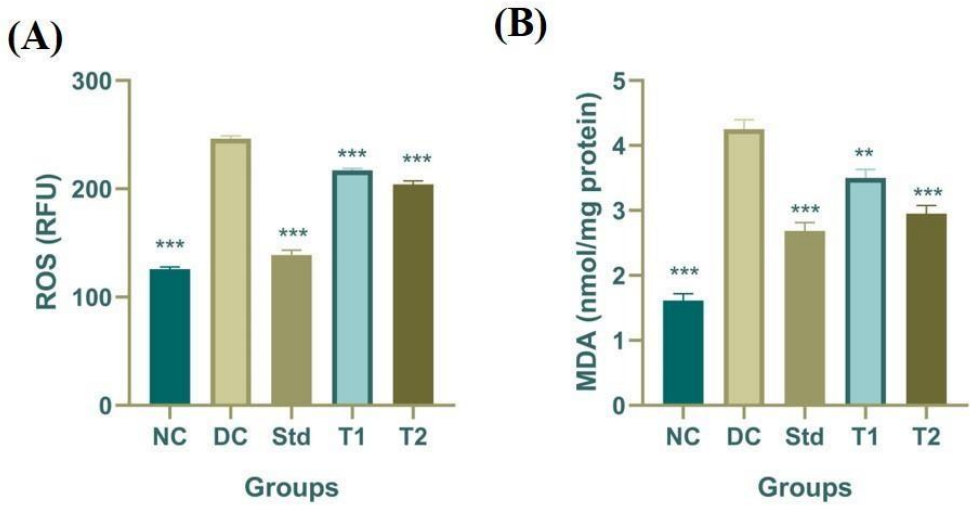


Figure 3: Effect of TCSE on oxidative stress markers, (A) reactive oxygen species (ROS) and (B) malondialdehyde (MDA), in experimental groups as determined by ELISA assay at the end of 6 weeks. A significant increase in ROS and MDA levels was observed in the diabetic control (DC) group compared to the normal control (NC), indicating enhanced oxidative stress and lipid peroxidation. Treatment with TCSE (T1: 200 mg/kg; T2: 400 mg/kg) resulted in a dose-dependent reduction in these oxidative stress markers, with the higher dose (T2) showing effects comparable to the standard (Std) group. These findings suggest the potent antioxidant activity of TCSE in attenuating oxidative damage. Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Dunnet's post hoc test. Values are expressed as mean ± SEM (n = 6) ($p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$).

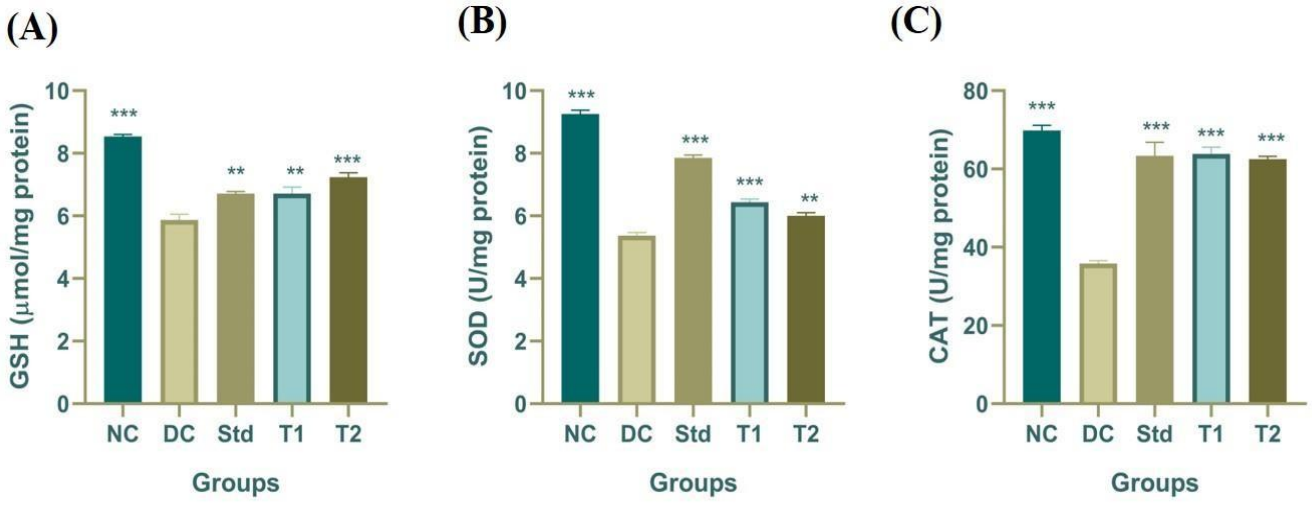


Figure 4: Effect of TCSE on endogenous antioxidant markers, (A) Glutathione (GSH), (B) Superoxide dismutase (SOD), and (C) catalase (CAT), in experimental groups at the end of 6 weeks. A significant decrease in antioxidant enzyme levels was observed in the diabetic control (DC) group compared to the normal control (NC), indicating impaired antioxidant defense and increased oxidative stress. Treatment with TCSE (T1: 200 mg/kg; T2: 400 mg/kg) resulted in a dose-dependent restoration of GSH, SOD, and CAT levels, with the higher dose (T2) showing effects comparable to the standard (Std) group. These findings suggest that TCSE enhances the antioxidant defense system and protects against oxidative damage. Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Dunnet's post hoc test. Values are expressed as mean ± SEM (n = 6) ($p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$).

3.4 Effect on Inflammatory marker Parameters

A significant elevation in pro-inflammatory cytokines, including interleukin-6 (IL-6) and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), was observed in the diabetic control group, indicating the presence of a chronic inflammatory state associated with diabetes. This increase reflects activation of inflammatory signaling pathways and contributes to cellular damage, insulin resistance, and disease progression. Treatment with TCSE resulted in a marked and dosedependent reduction in the levels of these inflammatory markers. The higher dose (T2) demonstrated a more pronounced anti-inflammatory effect, with cytokine levels approaching those observed in the standard treatment group. These findings suggest that TCSE possesses potent anti-inflammatory properties, potentially mediated through the modulation of key inflammatory pathways and suppression of cytokine production, thereby contributing to improved metabolic and cellular homeostasis.

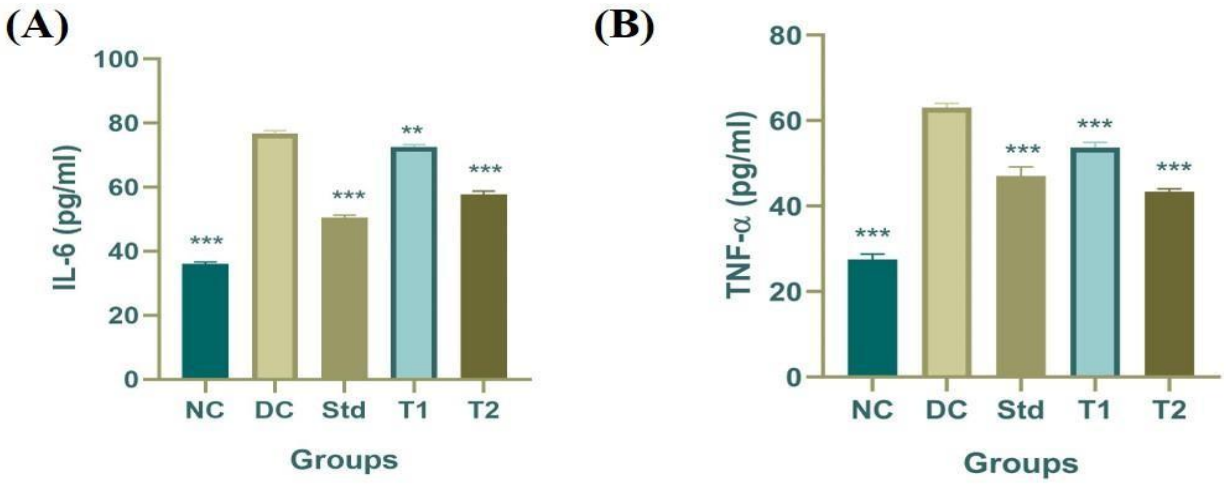


Figure 5: Effect of TCSE on pro-inflammatory cytokines, (A) interleukin-6 (IL-6) and (B) tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), in experimental groups as determined by ELISA at the end of 6 weeks. A significant elevation in IL-6 and TNF-α levels was observed in the diabetic control (DC) group compared to the normal control (NC), indicating a pronounced inflammatory response. Treatment with TCSE (T1: 200 mg/kg; T2: 400 mg/kg) resulted in a dose-dependent reduction in these inflammatory markers, with the higher dose (T2) showing effects comparable to the standard (Std) group. These findings suggest the anti-inflammatory potential of TCSE in mitigating diabetes-induced inflammation. Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Dunnet's post hoc test. Values are expressed as mean ± SEM (n = 6) ($p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$).

3.5 Effect on Nrf-2, pAkt-1, NF-κB Signaling Pathway

The effect of hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia on key signaling molecules involved in oxidative stress and inflammation was evaluated by ELISA. In the diabetic control (DC) group, a significant downregulation of Nrf-2 and pAkt levels was observed, accompanied by a marked elevation in NF-κB levels, indicating enhanced oxidative stress and inflammatory response due to streptozotocin (STZ)-induced ß-cell damage. In contrast, treatment with the standard drug (Std) and hydroethanolic extract-treated groups (T1 and T2) resulted in a significant restoration of Nrf-2 and pAkt levels, along with a pronounced reduction in NF-κB levels when compared to the DC group ($p < 0.05$–0.001).

The upregulation of Nrf-2 suggests activation of endogenous antioxidant defense mechanisms, leading to improved cellular redox balance. Similarly, the increase in pAkt levels indicates the activation of the PI3K/Akt signaling pathway, which plays a crucial role in glucose uptake, insulin signaling, and ß-cell survival. Furthermore, the observed downregulation of NF-κB levels in treated groups demonstrates the anti-inflammatory potential of the extract by suppressing pro-inflammatory cytokine signaling pathways. Among the treatment groups, T2 exhibited a more pronounced effect compared to T1, approaching the efficacy of the standard drug.

Overall, these findings indicate that the hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia exerts its antidiabetic effects through modulation of Nrf-2, pAkt, and NF-κB signaling pathways, thereby reducing oxidative stress, attenuating inflammation, and protecting pancreatic ß-cell integrity.

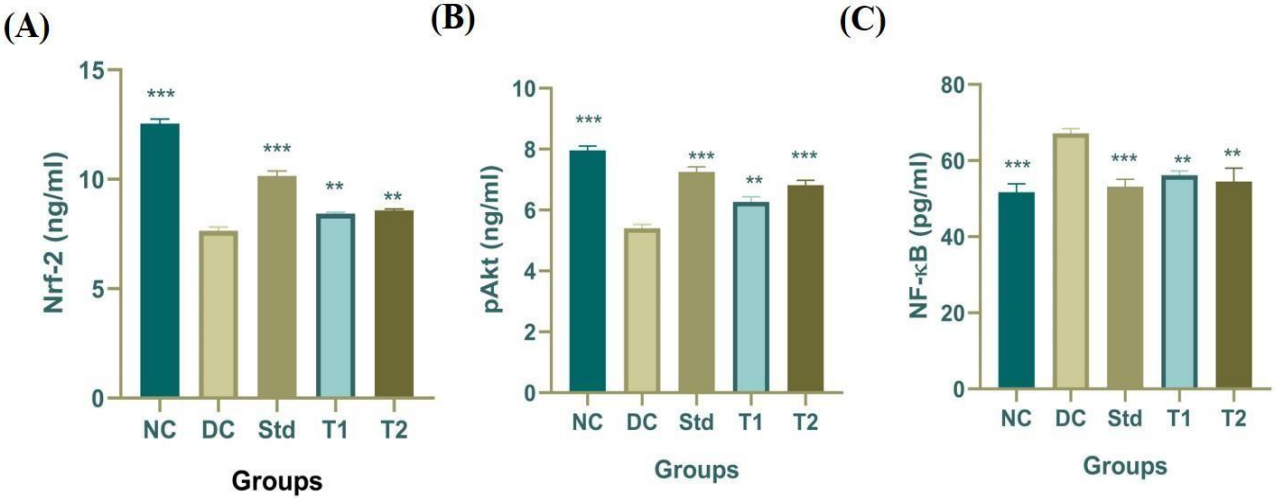
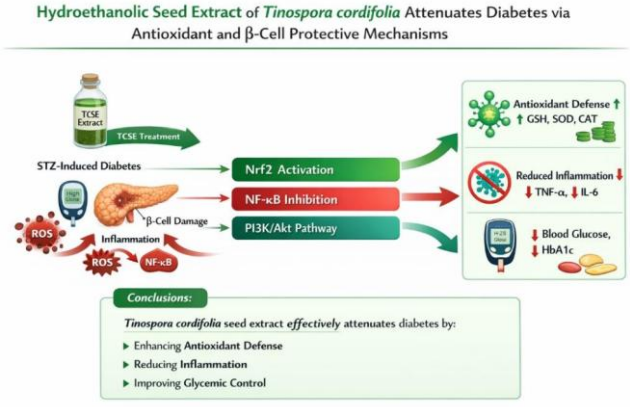


Figure 6: Effect of hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia on (A) Nrf-2: Nuclear factor erythroid 2–related factor 2, (B) pAkt: Phosphorylated Protein Kinase B (Akt), (C) NF-κB: Nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells levels. The protein levels of Nrf-2, pAkt, and NF-κB were quantified using ELISA in five groups: Normal Control (NC), Diabetic Control (DC), Standard treatment (Std), Treatment 1 (T1), and Treatment 2 (T2). The DC group showed a significant decrease

in Nrf-2 and pAkt levels along with a marked increase in NF-κB levels compared to NC, indicating enhanced oxidative stress and inflammation. Treatment with Std, T1, and T2 significantly increased Nrf-2 and pAkt levels while reducing NF-κB levels compared to the DC group. Data are expressed as mean ± SEM (n = 6). Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA followed by Dunnet's post hoc test, where $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, and $p < 0.001$ indicate significant differences versus the DC group.

DISCUSSION

The present study demonstrates that the hydroethanolic seed extract of Tinospora cordifolia (TCSE) exhibits significant antidiabetic activity in streptozotocin (STZ)-induced diabetic rats through modulation of oxidative stress, inflammation, and key Nrf2 intracellular signaling pathways.



STZ is a well-established diabetogenic agent that selectively induces pancreatic ß-cell destruction via DNA alkylation and excessive generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS), leading to insulin deficiency and persistent hyperglycemia [34,35]. The significant elevation in fasting blood glucose and HbA1c levels observed in the diabetic control group confirms successful induction of diabetes. Treatment with TCSE resulted in a dose-dependent reduction in blood glucose levels, suggesting improved glycemic control and possible restoration of ßcell function.

The antihyperglycemic effect observed may be attributed to modulation of the PI3K/Akt signaling pathway, which plays a critical role in insulin-mediated glucose uptake. Under diabetic conditions, oxidative stress impairs this pathway, leading to insulin resistance. Restoration of glucose homeostasis following TCSE treatment suggests activation of PI3K/Akt signaling, thereby enhancing peripheral glucose utilization [36,37].

Oxidative stress is a major contributor to diabetes progression. Chronic hyperglycemia leads to excessive ROS generation, which causes lipid peroxidation, protein oxidation, and DNA damage. In the present study, elevated levels of ROS and malondialdehyde (MDA) in diabetic rats indicate increased oxidative damage. TCSE significantly reduced these markers, demonstrating potent antioxidant activity.

This antioxidant effect is likely mediated via activation of the Nrf2 (nuclear factor erythroid 2– related factor 2) pathway, a key regulator of cellular antioxidant defense. Upon activation, Nrf2 translocates to the nucleus and induces the expression of antioxidant enzymes such as superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT), and glutathione (GSH) [38,39]. The significant restoration of these enzymes observed in TCSE-treated groups supports the involvement of Nrf2-mediated antioxidant mechanisms.

Recent studies (2024–2026) have highlighted that activation of Nrf2 not only reduces oxidative stress but also improves glucose metabolism and protects pancreatic ß-cells from apoptosis [39,40]. Thus, TCSE may act as a potent Nrf2 activator, contributing to its antidiabetic effect.

In addition to oxidative stress, chronic inflammation plays a crucial role in diabetes pathogenesis. Hyperglycemia-induced ROS activates the NF-κB signaling pathway, leading to increased production of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as TNF-α and IL-6, which further exacerbate insulin resistance and ß-cell dysfunction [41]. The improvement in biochemical parameters observed in this study suggests that TCSE may suppress NF-κB activation, thereby reducing inflammatory responses.

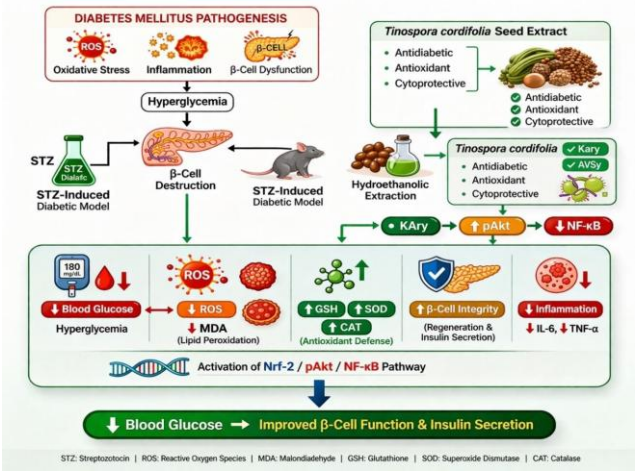
Importantly, recent evidence suggests a strong crosstalk between Nrf2 and NF-κB pathways, where activation of Nrf2 inhibits NF-κB-mediated inflammation, thereby breaking the cycle of oxidative stress and inflammation [42]. This dual regulation may explain the significant protective effects of TCSE observed in this study.

Furthermore, the interaction between PI3K/Akt and Nrf2 pathways plays a vital role in maintaining cellular homeostasis. Activation of PI3K/Akt signaling has been shown to enhance Nrf2 nuclear translocation, thereby strengthening antioxidant defenses and promoting cell survival [37,40]. The observed improvement in glucose levels and antioxidant enzyme activity suggests that TCSE may exert its effects through coordinated activation of the PI3K/Akt-Nrf2 axis.

The improvement in lipid profile parameters (reduction in TC, TG, LDL and increase in HDL) further supports the metabolic regulatory role of TCSE. Dyslipidemia is commonly associated with diabetes and contributes to cardiovascular complications. The lipid-lowering effect of TCSE may be linked to improved insulin sensitivity and reduced oxidative stress [9].

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that Tinospora cordifolia seed extract exerts its antidiabetic effect through a multifaceted mechanism, including:

- Activation of Nrf2 pathway → enhanced antioxidant defense (↑ GSH, SOD, CAT)
- Inhibition of NF-κB pathway → reduced inflammation (↓ TNF-α, IL-6)
- Activation of PI3K/Akt pathway → improved glucose uptake and insulin signaling
- Reduction of oxidative stress → protection of pancreatic ß-cells



These findings are consistent with recent literature emphasizing the importance of targeting oxidative stress and inflammatory pathways for effective diabetes management.

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