

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Cromakalim, a Potassium Channel Opener, Ameliorates the Organophosphate and Carbamate-Induced Seizure in Mice

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Received: 02 Nov. 2016; Accepted: 12 Dec. 2017

**Abstract-** Organophosphates (OPs) and carbamates are acetylcholine esterase inhibitors (AChEIs), which can cause seizure and lethality. Anticonvulsant properties of potassium channel openers including cromakalim have been determined in previous studies. In the present experiment, the possible effect of cromakalim on the convulsion and death induced by OPs and carbamates was studied in mice. Dichlorvos (an OP, 50 mg/kg) and physostigmine (a carbamate, 2 mg/kg) were used to induce seizure in animals. Cromakalim at doses of 0.1, 10, and 30  $\mu$ g/kg was injected 30 min before dichlorvos and physostigmine, and 5 min before glibenclamide (a potassium channel blocker, 1 mg/kg) administration. All injections were performed intraperitoneally. After drugs administration, the onset of convulsion, death, the severity of seizure, and rate of mortality were investigated. Results revealed that both dichlorvos and physostigmine induced seizure activity and lethality in 100% of the animals. Cromakalim at doses of 0.1, 10, and 30  $\mu$ g/kg significantly increased the latency of both seizure and death ( $P<0.05$ ). Also, cromakalim decreased the mortality rate induced by dichlorvos and physostigmine ( $P<0.05$ ). On the other hand, glibenclamide blocked all aspects of the anticonvulsant effect of cromakalim ( $P<0.05$ ). This study revealed for the first time that cromakalim (a  $K_{ATP}$  channel opener) diminishes the seizure and death induced by dichlorvos and physostigmine in mice, and introduces a new aspect to manage the patients who suffer from OPs/carbamates-induced seizure.

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*Acta Med Iran* 2018;56(1):14-20.

**Keywords:** Organophosphates; Carbamates; Potassium channel opener; Seizure; Mice

## Introduction

Organophosphates (OPs) and carbamates have primarily been employed as pesticides in agriculture (1). Some kinds of OPs have shown therapeutic properties and have been used as drugs for the treatment of some neurologic disorders including Alzheimer's disease (2). Both agricultural and medical usages of OPs and carbamates are attributed to their ability to disrupt the function of the cholinergic nervous system by inhibiting acetylcholine esterase (AChE) (3). This enzyme is responsible for the hydrolysis of acetylcholine (ACh) in physiological condition; thus, its blockade leads to the ACh accumulation in the nervous system (2).

In humans, poisoning with OPs/carbamates may result in convulsions (4). The cellular mechanisms by

which these agents induce seizure are not fully understood (5). Because of that, there is no effective treatment to manage patients suffering from OPs/carbamates-induced seizure. Although past studies, relying on the disruption of the cholinergic system due to these chemicals, suggest the use of atropine, oximes, and benzodiazepines to control this kind of seizure, all such treatments are not satisfactory and showed severe adverse effects (6,7). Hence, the mechanisms of action of seizure induction by OPs and carbamates must be explained and the importance of such studies to discover new therapies and drugs with favorable pharmacologic properties and side effect profile is unquestionable.

Potassium ion ( $K^+$ ) channels may play an important role in the control of all features of neuronal excitability including resting membrane potential (8). The opening

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of K<sup>+</sup>-channels is expected to hyperpolarize neurons and inhibit action potential firing and prevent hyper-synchronous neuronal discharges, which occur during a seizure (9,10). Therefore, K<sup>+</sup>-channel opening is one of the potential anti-epileptic mechanisms (11,12). On the other hand, past reports have shown that K<sub>ATP</sub> channels, one of the different types of K<sup>+</sup> channel family, play an important role in the management of seizure threshold in several *in vitro* and *in vivo* models (13,14). These findings have been confirmed by other clinical trials (15). However, there is no study to show the protective effects of K<sup>+</sup>-channel openers on seizure induced by OPs and carbamates.

This study was carried out to investigate the possible effect of cromakalim (a potassium channel opener) on OP and carbamate-induced seizure in mice. Therefore, dichlorvos and physostigmine sulfate were used in this experiment as an OP and carbamate, respectively, to induce seizure in mice, and the possible effect of potassium channel openers on convulsion was examined using cromakalim.

## Materials and Methods

### Animals

In total, 120 male Naval Medical Research Institute (NMRI) mice weighing 20-26 g were used in the experiments. Animals were housed in a room with controlled temperature (21-22° C), light (12-h light/dark cycle), and humidity (50±10%). Animals were allowed free access to standard laboratory, food and water. Assignment of subjects to experimental groups (n=10 in each group) was randomized. The tests were performed between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. The experimental procedures used throughout this study were in compliance with the guidelines for the Care and Use of Animals and were approved by the Local Ethics Committee on Animal Experimentation of Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

### Drugs

The following drugs were used in the experiments: dichlorvos (50 mg/kg) as an OP, physostigmine sulfate (2 mg/kg) as a carbamate, cromakalim (0.1, 10, and 30 µg/kg) as a potassium channel opener, and glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) as a potassium channel blocker. As previously reported, this dose of glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) and its vehicle (dimethyl sulfoxide [DMSO]), did not alter the plasma glucose levels, significantly (9). Dichlorvos (2, 2-chlorovinyl dimethyl phosphate) was prepared from the Institute of

Organic Chemistry (Waster green, Iran). Physostigmine sulfate, cromakalim, and glibenclamide were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (USA). Dichlorvos was mixed with powdered acacia and distilled water in a dry mortar, as described previously (16). Glibenclamide was dissolved in DMSO. Physostigmine and cromakalim were dissolved in saline. Dosages of all drugs were based on the weight of their salt forms.

### Experimental design

Dichlorvos and physostigmine were administered intraperitoneally (*i.p.*) to animals to induce seizure. Two experimental groups (dichlorvos-treated and physostigmine-treated) were divided into three categories:

To investigate the possible role of potassium channels in the seizure induced by OP and carbamate, we used cromakalim and glibenclamide:

(a) Cromakalim (0.1, 10, and 30 µg/kg) was administered intraperitoneally 30 minutes before OP/carbamate administration.

(b) Glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) was administered intraperitoneally 30 minutes before OP/carbamate injection.

(c) Further, to determine the effect of cromakalim in seizure induced by OP/carbamate, cromakalim at dose 30 µg/kg (as an effective dose) was administered 5 minutes before glibenclamide (10).

### Behavioral assessments

Animals were monitored for 120 minutes after drug injections. Seizures were evaluated and scored based on the staging system defined by McLean *et al.*, (5,17). It will define stage 0 if there is no abnormal behavior; In stage 1 some abnormal behaviors including salivation, chewing, and pawing of mouth were observed; Stage 2, dazed appearance, intermittent motionlessness, tremor, and/or bobbing of the head was observed; Stage 3, like Stage 2, random and/or generalized jerks are seen; Stage 4, intermittent rearing on hind legs with forepaws extended without falling; Stage 5 is same as the stage 4, with falling to the side or rear; Stage 6, status epilepticus was observed. Stages 1-3 and 4-6 were considered as sub-convulsive and convulsive behaviors, respectively. The latency of seizures after injection of drugs (in seconds), the latency to onset of death within one hour (in seconds), mortality after injection (percentage) within one hour, and stages of seizures induced by injection of drugs (percentage) were recorded.

**Data analysis**

Data were analyzed using GraphPad Prism software, version 5 (USA). Comparisons between experimental and control groups were performed by one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's *post-hoc* when appropriate. A value of  $P < 0.05$  was considered to be significant.

**Results**

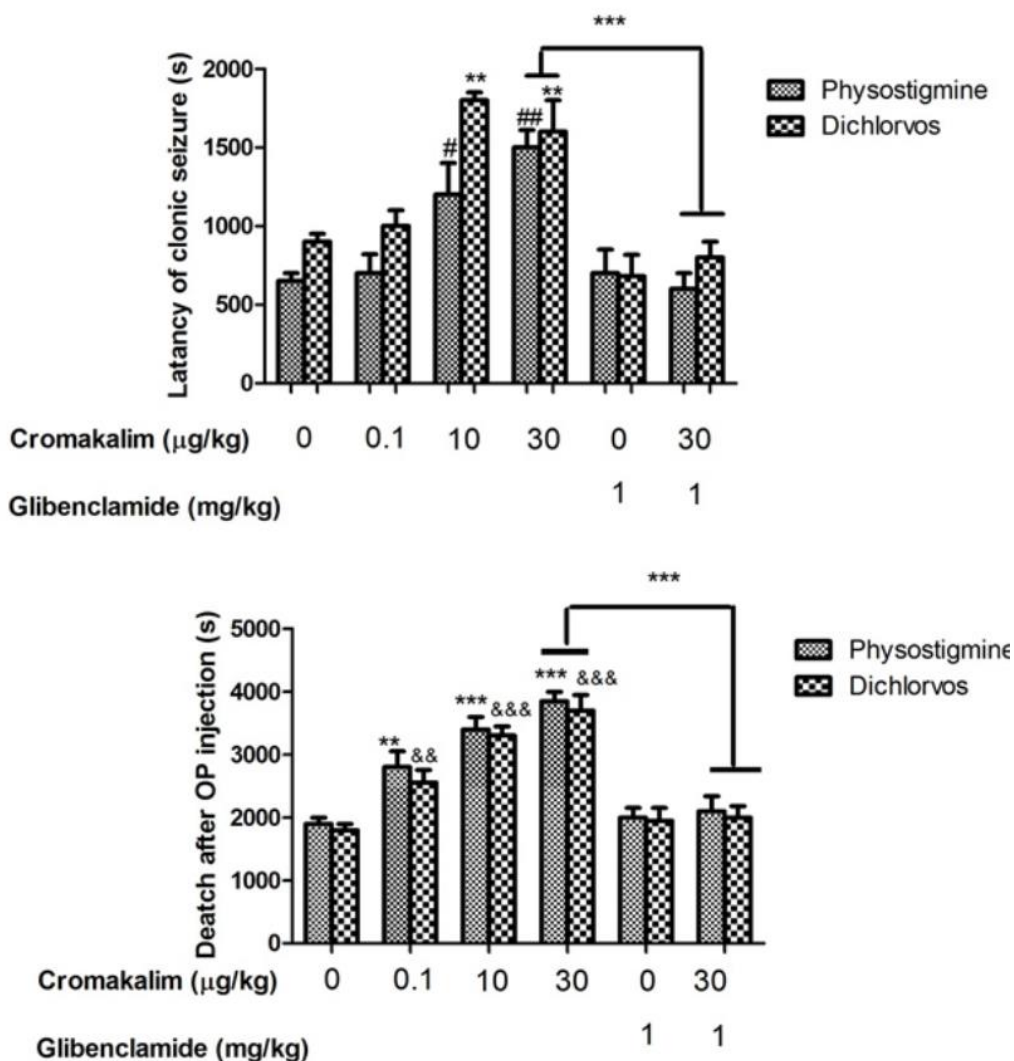
**Dichlorvos and physostigmine administration cause convulsion and death in mice**

Both dichlorvos (50 mg/kg, *i.p.*) and physostigmine

(2 mg/kg, *i.p.*) result in seizure activity in mice (Table 1). In these groups, convulsion and death (Table 1) occurred in 100% of the animals.

**Effect of cromakalim on the onset of seizure/death induced by dichlorvos and physostigmine**

Pretreatment with cromakalim at doses of 10 µg/kg ( $P < 0.05$  for physostigmine,  $P < 0.01$  for dichlorvos) and 30 µg/kg ( $P < 0.01$  for dichlorvos and physostigmine) increased the latency time of clonic seizure (Figure 1) and also prevented the dichlorvos- or physostigmine-induced seizures in mice (Table 1).



**Figure 1.** Effect of different doses of cromakalim (0.1, 10, and 30 µg/kg) and glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) on the starting time of seizure after dichlorvos (50 mg/kg) and physostigmine (2 mg/kg) injection

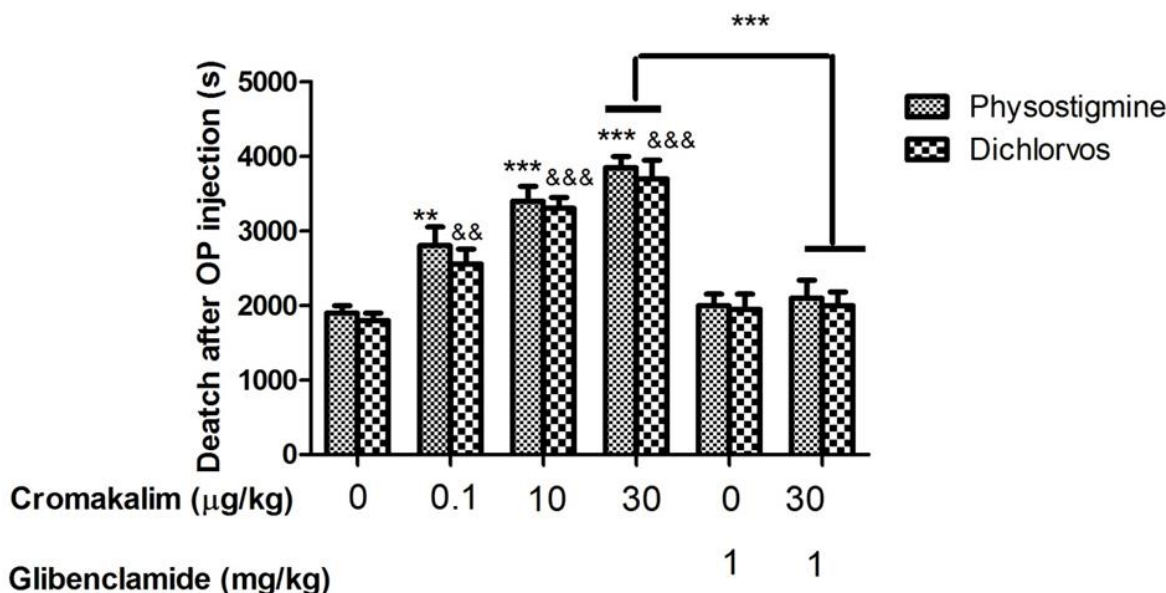
Effect of cromakalim (30 µg/kg) and glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) co-administration on the onset of seizure in mice. Values are shown as mean+S.E.M. of 10 animals. # $P < 0.05$ , ## $P < 0.01$  compared physostigmine-injected group (control). \*\* $P < 0.01$  compared dichlorvos-injected group (control). \*\*\* $P < 0.001$  compared to cromakalim (30 µg/kg) + glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) -administrated group.

**Table 1. Effect of different doses of cromakalim and glibenclamide on the stages of seizure induced by dichlorvos (50 mg/kg) and physostigmine (2 mg/kg). Data are shown as percentage of mice, (n=10). Each stage's definition is described in section 2.4.**

Treatment		Stage of seizures		
Treatment	Organophosphate	Stage 0	Stage 1-3	Stage 4-6
Cromakalim 0	Dichlorvos	0	0	100
	Physostigmine	0	0	100
Cromakalim 0.1	Dichlorvos	10	10	80
	Physostigmine	10	20	70
Cromakalim 10	Dichlorvos	40	20	40
	Physostigmine	50	20	30
Cromakalim 30	Dichlorvos	80	10	10
	Physostigmine	80	10	10
Glibenclamide 1	Dichlorvos	0	0	100
	Physostigmine	0	0	100
Cromakalim 30 + Glibenclamide 1	Dichlorvos	0	10	90
	Physostigmine	10	10	80

Also, cromakalim at doses of 0.1  $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$  ( $P<0.01$ ), 10  $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$  ( $P<0.001$ ), and 30  $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$  ( $P<0.001$ ) significantly

increased the onset of death after both OP and carbamate administration (Figure 2).



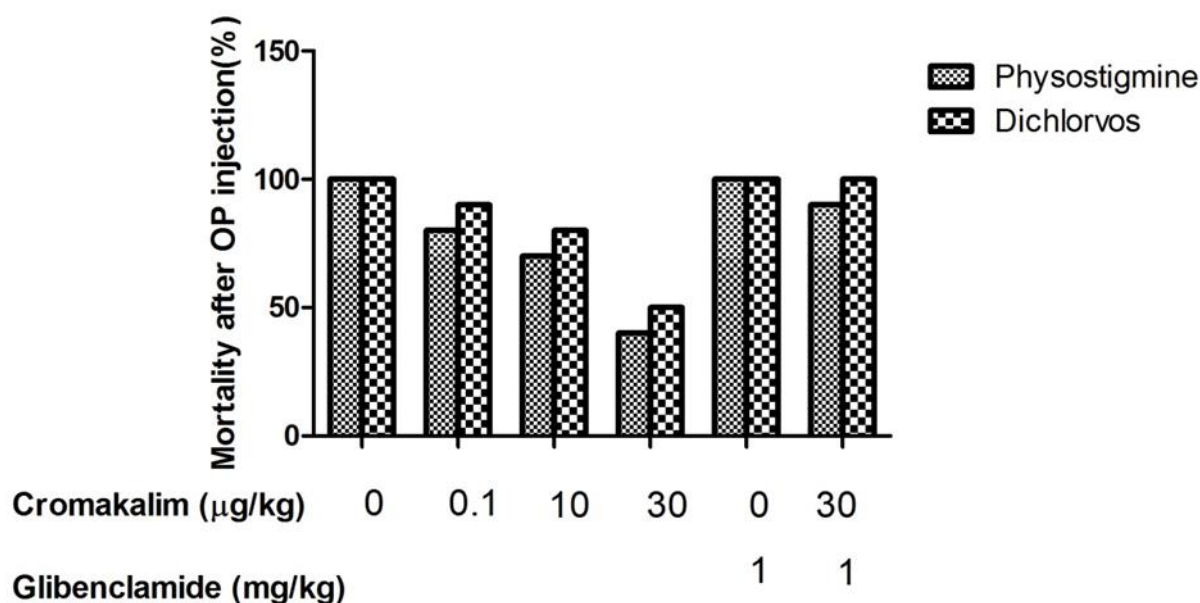
**Figure 2.** Effect of different doses of cromakalim (0.1, 10, and 30  $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$ ) and glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) on the latency of death after dichlorvos (50 mg/kg) and physostigmine (2 mg/kg) injection

Effect of cromakalim (30  $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$ ) and glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) co-administration on the onset of seizure in mice. Values are shown as mean+S.E.M. of 10 animals. &&P<0.01, &&&P<0.001 compared to dichlorvos-injected group (control). \*\*P<0.01 and \*\*\*P<0.001 compared to physostigmine-injected group (control). \*\*\*P<0.001 compared to cromakalim (30  $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$ ) + glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) -administrated group.

#### Effect of cromakalim on the mortality induced by dichlorvos and physostigmine

Figure 3 shows that cromakalim administration reduces the percentage of mortality induced by

dichlorvos and physostigmine. Cromakalim at doses of 0.1, 10, and 30  $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$  decreased the mortality percentage compared to control group, which received dichlorvos and physostigmine.



**Figure 3.** Effect of different doses of cromakalim (0.1, 10, and 30 µg/kg) and glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) on the mortality rate after dichlorvos (50 mg/kg) and physostigmine (2 mg/kg) injection  
Effect of cromakalim (30 µg/kg) and glibenclamide (1 mg/kg) co-administration on the mortality rate in mice. Data are shown as percentage of mice (n = 10).

**Effect of cromakalim on the seizure stages after dichlorvos and physostigmine administration**

Demonstrating in Table 1, cromakalim at doses of 0.1, 10, and 30 µg/kg reversed the proconvulsant effect of both dichlorvos and physostigmine in mice. This anticonvulsant effect of the potassium channel opener, cromakalim shows a dose-dependent pattern, since by increasing the dose of this agent the percentage of stage 0 and stage 1-3 raised compared to the control group (Table 1).

**Effect of glibenclamide on the anticonvulsant effect of cromakalim**

Administration of glibenclamide (1 mg/kg, i.p.) 5 minutes before cromakalim injection (30 µg/kg) inhibited the anticonvulsant effect of cromakalim on OP- and carbamate-induced seizure (Table 1). It also decreased the latency time of clonic seizure ( $P < 0.001$ ) (Figure 1) as well as death time after injection ( $P < 0.001$ ) (Figure 2). Furthermore, glibenclamide increased the mortality rate (Figure 3).

**Discussion**

Dichlorvos and physostigmine cause colonic and tonic seizure and ultimately death in 100% of animals. After intraperitoneal injection of dichlorvos or physostigmine, some degree of tremor and excessive

activity appear and then the symptoms become more severe and cause death over the time. Seizure is one of the toxic effects that happens following being poisoned with OPs and carbamates such as dichlorvos and physostigmine (18,19). These substances induce their effects by inhibiting the AChE in the nervous system. Depending on the level of AChE inhibition, cholinergic activation may cause hyperactivity of excitable tissues, fasciculations, seizures, convulsions, coma, and death (20). It has been suggested that systemic application of sub-lethal doses of AChE inhibitors (AChEIs) may result in seizures, convulsions, and central nervous system (CNS) lesions (21). These findings corroborate our results, which showed that dichlorvos at dose of 50 mg/kg as well as physostigmine at dose of 2 mg/kg cause convulsion and death in all animals.

Based on intervention with cholinergic system by these chemicals, past studies suggested using atropine, oximes, and benzodiazepines to control this kind of seizure. However, drugs typically used against epilepsy in the hospital are ineffective against OP/carbamates intoxication (6). For example, atropine improves only a few toxicity symptoms and shows severe adverse effects (22). Oximes permeate weakly through the blood-brain barrier (23), and they cannot treat the CNS toxicity, effectively. Benzodiazepines are likely to depress brainstem respiratory and circulatory centers (7). In this regard, conducting research to discover new anti-

epileptic drugs, which can inhibit the seizure induced by OPs and carbamates with favorable pharmacologic properties and side effect profile is unquestionable.

In our study, cromakalim, a potassium channel opener, reduced the rate of both seizure and mortality. The onset of seizure and death after OP/carbamate administration was diminished by cromakalim pretreatment and this is in agreement with previous data, which showed that diazoxide as an ATP-sensitive potassium channels opener exerted anticonvulsant activity against dichlorvos-induced seizure (5). Also, in the present study, glibenclamide as an ATP-sensitive potassium channels blocker, reversed the anticonvulsant effect of cromakalim.

Potassium ( $K^+$ ) channels are a large family of ion channels. Among the different kinds of  $K^+$  channels, ATP-sensitive  $K^+$  ( $K_{ATP}$ ) channels are involved in numerous physiological functions (8).  $K_{ATP}$  channels are located pre- and post-synaptically in many brain areas and their function is controlled by the metabolic condition of the neuron. They open and close in reply to the alterations in intracellular ATP/ADP relations. Low ATP degree opens these channels, leading to  $K^+$  efflux and cell hyperpolarization (24). The hyperpolarization induced by  $K_{ATP}$  channels opening inhibits the action potential firing and prevents hyper-synchronous neuronal discharges which occur during seizure. In this regard, it has been shown that  $K_{ATP}$  channels play a significant role in regulation of seizure threshold in several *in vitro* and *in vivo* models (13,14,25). Also,  $K_{ATP}$  channel openers have been reported to decrease excitability in CA3 hippocampal cells (26), and show antiepileptic effects in a model of drug-induced epilepsy (27). Molecular studies have shown that functional  $K_{ATP}$  channels are octameric complexes consisting of four inward rectifier  $K^+$  channel sub-units (Kir 6.1 or Kir 6.2) and four sulfonylurea receptor sub-units (SUR1, SUR2A or SUR2B) (11). Mice which lack expression of either the SUR1 gene or the Kir 6.1 gene are susceptible to seizures (28). Moreover, it has been shown that mice with deficiencies in a subunit of  $K_{ATP}$  channels (Kir 6.2<sup>-/-</sup> mice) are vulnerable to generalized seizure (14). Also, it has been recently reported that  $K_{ATP}$  channel openers such as cromakalim and diazoxide increase the clonic seizures induced by pentylenetetrazol (PTZ) in mice (9,29).

Altogether, the role of potassium channel openers in the seizure has been shown in several clinical and animal studies. Nevertheless, the effect of these agents on the seizure induced by OPs and carbamates has not been reported yet. Therefore, we studied this matter, and

our results revealed that cromakalim ( $K_{ATP}$  channel opener) at doses of 0.1, 10, and 30  $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$  could reverse the convulsion and death following OPs/carbamates administration. Moreover, our data revealed that anti-epileptic effect of cromakalim could be reversed by glibenclamide (a  $K^+$  channel blocker). These data confirm the role of potassium channels in mediating the proconvulsant effect of OPs and carbamates. These findings make it possible to introduce new aspect with specific targets to manage patients who suffer from OPs or carbamates toxicity.

In summary, this study shows for the first time that cromakalim ( $K_{ATP}$  channel opener) diminished the seizure induced by dichlorvos and physostigmine in mice. We also suggest using new aspect with specific targets to manage seizures from OPs/carbamates toxicity, although further investigation is needed to elucidate the efficacy of these agents in AChE inhibition-induced seizure.

## Acknowledgment

This work was supported by a grant (96002757) from Iran National Science Foundation (INSF). The authors would be thankful to Dr. S. Ejtemaei-Mehr for his helpful comments on this manuscript.

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