



Design of an amperometric glucose oxidase biosensor with added protective and adhesion layers

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Abstract

Enzymes have demonstrated great potential in the development of advanced electroanalysis devices due to their unique recognition and catalytic properties. However, unsatisfactory stability and limited electron communication of traditional enzyme sensors seriously hinder their large-scale application. In this work, a simple and effective method is proposed to improve the stability of enzyme sensors by using sodium hyaluronate (SH) as a protective film, MXene-Ti₃C₂/Glucose oxidase (GOD) as the reaction layer, and chitosan (CS)/reduced graphene oxide (rGO) as the adhesion layer. Results demonstrate that the repeatability of the designed sensor increased by 73.3% after improving the adhesion between the reaction layer and the current collector and that its response ability was greatly enhanced. Moreover, the long-term stability of the electrode surface with SH protective film proved to be superior than that without protective film, which suggests that this design can effectively improve the overall performance of the enzyme biosensor. This work proposed a multi-tier synergistic approach for improving the reliability of enzyme sensors.

Keywords Enzyme sensor · Glucose determination · Nanomaterials · Electrochemistry · Protective film · Adhesion layer

Introduction

Electrochemical enzyme sensors have attracted tremendous attention due to their incomparable properties, such as specific selectivity, fast response, low cost, and easy miniaturization [1, 2]. Over the last decades, various electrochemical enzyme sensors have been reported, from simple test strips to wearable devices and implantable systems [3, 4]. Yet, only a few electrochemical enzyme sensors have practical application due to the instability and easy inactivation of enzyme [5]. It is well known that immobilized enzymes display higher activities and stabilities compared to free enzymes; thus, numerous

works have focused on enzyme immobilization [6–10]. Specifically, a total of 8398 documents were retrieved from the Web of Science when searching the keyword “Enzyme immobilization” over the past 5 years. Although many enzyme sensors have been reported in the literature, only a few have been applied in various industries, such as blood glucose meters and pregnancy tests [11]. In addition to the effective immobilization of enzymes, other factors may restrict the practical application of enzyme sensors and, thus, require further investigation [9, 12].

Generally, enzyme sensors require a period of storage between preparation and use, which can affect their stability [13]. Enzyme contamination denaturation and loss of activity can also cause sensor failure. Since the test system is inseparable from the liquid for both intrusive and non-invasive sensors, poor enzyme immobilization can cause the enzyme to leach from the immobilized layer or the entire modified layer to peel off the electrode into the test solution, resulting in detection failure [3, 14]. On the other hand, the electrochemical sensing process generally includes enzymatic reactions and heterogeneous electron transfer reactions [15]. The key aims of this process are to achieve effective contact and accelerate the reaction kinetics between enzymes and detection molecules [16]. Thus, it is pertinent to maintain the enzyme

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activity during the storage period, so that the active layer does not separate from the electrode surface under liquid operating conditions. The rapid realization and effective collection of the response signal of the enzyme toward target molecular are also highly important.

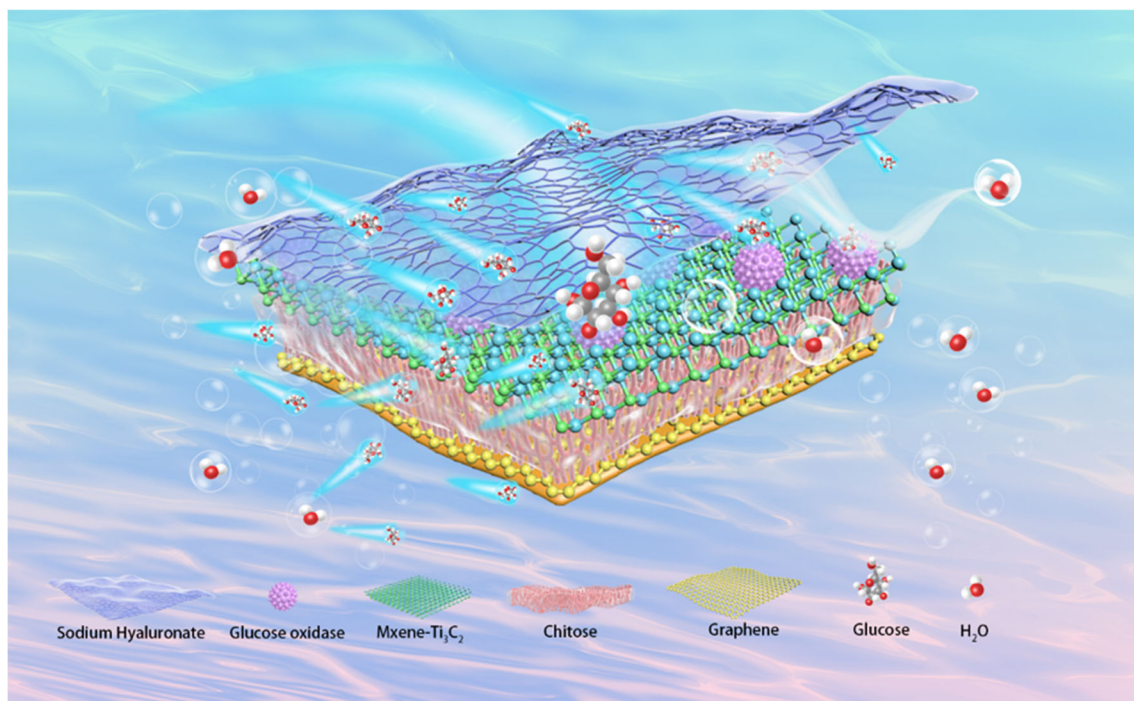
Herein, we propose an effective synergistic strategy to improve the stability and sensitivity of the enzyme sensor by combining the surface protective layer, intermediate reaction layer, and basic adhesion layer. As shown in Scheme 1, sodium hyaluronate (SH) is employed as the permeable protective film to protect enzymes from pollution and water loss, which is also beneficial to the diffusion of glucose toward the sensor's interface [17]. The reaction layer is constructed with MXene- $\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2/\text{GOD}$, in which MXene- Ti_3C_2 can ensure the highly dispersed loading of GOD [18, 19]. The adhesion layer consists of CS/rGO, whereby the large specific area of rGO strengthens the bond between the modification layer and current collector, preventing the sensing surface from peeling off the collector during the test [20–23]. CS not only helps to bind MXene- Ti_3C_2 with rGO organically but also ensures high biocompatibility of the sensor. During the reaction, glucose passes quickly through the protective film (SH) into the reaction layer (MXene- $\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2/\text{GOD}$) and reacts on the surface of GOD. Then, electrons are quickly released and effectively collected by the rGO-modified current collector. This method provides a new perspective for designing credible and stable enzymatic biosensor and expands its possible applications.

Experimental

All the chemical reagents were purchased and used without any further purification. Ti_3AlC_2 powders were purchased from Jilin 11 Technology Company Limited. Graphene oxide was purchased from Suzhou Tanfeng Graphene Technology Company Limited. And glucose oxidase (145,200 unit/g) was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich Company Limited. Chitosan powders (analytical reagent (AR) grade), LiF (AR grade), and NaH_2PO_4 (AR grade) were purchased from Aladdin Industrial Corporation. Sodium hyaluronate (≥ 95 wt.% in H_2O) was purchased from Meilun Biotech Company Limited.

Synthesis $\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2\text{Tx}$ -MXene was obtained by etching layer A in MAX phase with LiF and HCl, which is reported by our previous work [30]. Graphene oxide (GO) was ultrasonically dispersed (1 mg/mL) in 0.1M NaH_2PO_4 . Chitosan solution was obtained by adding 0.15g chitosan to 0.5 wt% HAc solution.

Preparation of biochip Firstly, a layer of graphene oxide was electrodeposited on the electrode surface by cyclic voltammetry with a potential of $-1.5 \sim 0.7$ V. The scan was performed continuously for 15 cycles at a scan rate of 25 mV S^{-1} . The entire process was stirred and accompanied by Ar infusion. Secondly, one layer of chitosan was assembled on the surface of graphene by potentiostatic deposition with -2.5 V deposition for 180 s, rinsing the electrode twice to remove dirt.



Scheme 1 Schematic illustration of the structure of the proposed glucose oxidase biosensor with added protective and adhesion layer

Finally, the glucose oxidase fixed MXene-Ti₃C₂ suspension was drip-coated on the electrode, and the modified material was fixed with 0.5% SH solution, and air-dried in a clean and closed environment. The prepared modified electrode should be stored in a refrigerator at 4 °C to maintain its biological activity. The enzyme activity units of our biosensor are 15.446 units/cm².

Electrochemical measurements The electrochemical workstation (CHI 660e, Shanghai, China) was used to evaluate the electrochemical performance of the biochip, in which a three-electrode system with the modified GCE, a platinum wire and a saturated Ag/AgCl electrode as the working electrode, the auxiliary electrode, and the reference electrode, respectively, was used. The PBS was deoxygenated by bubbling highly pure N₂ for at least 20 min and a N₂ atmosphere environment was kept in whole electrochemical measurements. For all electrochemical measurements, 0.01 mol L⁻¹ PBS with pH 7.0 as electrolyte was used, and temperature was at 25 °C.

Serum samples preparation Human serum samples were obtained from three volunteers (about 5 µL), and dilute it 10 times by DI water. Then, mix tenfold dilution human serum samples (2.5 µL) into the air-saturated 0.01 mol L⁻¹ pH 7.0 PBS (100 µL) solution as detection solution.

Material characterization Scanning electron microscope (FESEM, JSM-7800F) was used to observe the surface morphology of samples at 15 kv. EDS (INCA X-Max 250) data were collected to investigate the element distribution of samples. XRD diffraction pattern of samples was recorded by XRD-7000 (Shimadzu XRD-7000) powder X-ray diffraction. Nitrogen adsorption/desorption experiments were carried out at 77.3 K by means of quadrasorb evo 2QDS-MP-30 (Quantachrome Instruments) analyzer. The structure of materials was examined by Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR, Tensor 207). The amount of GOD adsorption was determined by ultraviolet visible (UV-vis, UH4150, Hitachi High-Technologies Corporation) spectroscopy at 280 nm.

Results and discussion

Physical characterization of materials

MXene-Ti₃C₂ possesses the highest electromagnetic interference (EMI) shielding capability of all synthetic materials with similar thickness, good flexibility, easy processing, and high conductivity with minimal thickness. Meanwhile, MXene-Ti₃C₂ is also promising as antibacterial agents with higher efficiency than graphene oxide in diminishing bacterial cell viability [24–29]. Herein, the as-prepared MXene-Ti₃C₂ was explored as a new matrix to immobilize GOD in the fabricated

biosensor for the ultrasensitive and rapid detection of glucose [30], which is illustrated in Fig. 1. XRD pattern in Fig. S1 confirms the perfect synthesis of MXene-Ti₃C₂, because the diffraction peak at around 6° is in accordance with the (002) lattice plane of MXene-Ti₃C₂. Figure S2 is the Raman spectrum of the MXene-Ti₃C₂, further verifying the successful synthesized. The FESEM images in Fig. 1a and b indicate that MXene-Ti₃C₂ possesses a graphene-like 2D nanostructure and has abundant folds and ultra-thin thickness. After loading GOD, energy-dispersive spectrometry (EDS) revealed that GOD was evenly dispersed on the surface of MXene-Ti₃C₂, as shown in Fig. 1c. The Barrett–Joyner–Halenda (BJH) pore-size distributions of the material before and after loading GOD are displayed in Fig. 1d; after loading GOD, the shape of the hysteresis loop changes and the specific area of the material decreases significantly, which due to lots of pores and folds of MXene-Ti₃C₂ were blocked by GOD absorbed on it. Furthermore, after loading GOD, the pore volume decreases (Table S1), which illustrates that GOD molecules have entered the inner pores of the MXene-Ti₃C₂. UV–vis spectroscopy was further performed to monitor the structural changes of GOD. Figure 1e (curve a) reveals the Soret absorption band of GOD immobilized in MXene-Ti₃C₂ at 450 nm, which is very close to that of native GOD (curve c). This indicates that GOD retained the essential features of its conformational integrity. IR spectroscopy can further examine the effectiveness of enzyme immobilization [31] (Fig. 1f). The peaks appeared at 683 and 643 cm⁻¹ (Fig. 1f, curve c) for pure MXene-Ti₃C₂ correspond to the out-of-plane bending vibration of its O-H group, while the peaks centered at 1650 and 1544 cm⁻¹ for pure GOD molecules ascribed to its typical amide I and amide II adsorption bands. After being adsorbed on porous MXene-Ti₃C₂, no obvious shift was observed for the characterized peaks of GOD, suggested that the activity of GOD was remained well (Fig. 1e, curve a). All the above results confirm that GOD was effectively immobilized on the surface of MXene-Ti₃C₂.

Electrochemical measurements

Cyclic voltammetry (CV) was employed to study the electrochemical activity of GOD on MXene-Ti₃C₂. CV of the porous MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD-modified GCEs show a strong dependence on solution pH, as shown in Fig. S3. Stable and well-defined cyclic voltammograms can always be obtained in the pH range 5.18–9.06; the peak current increases with the increased pH until pH of 7.24, at which the current reaches the highest. Hence, further studies were focused on pH 7.24 PBS solutions. As shown in Fig. 2a, no obvious redox current can be seen in the CV curve of GOD/GCE, owing to the fact that redox centers of GOD are deeply packaged in the proteins. In contrast, well-defined redox peaks appeared at -348 mV and -393 mV in the CV curve of MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/GCE,

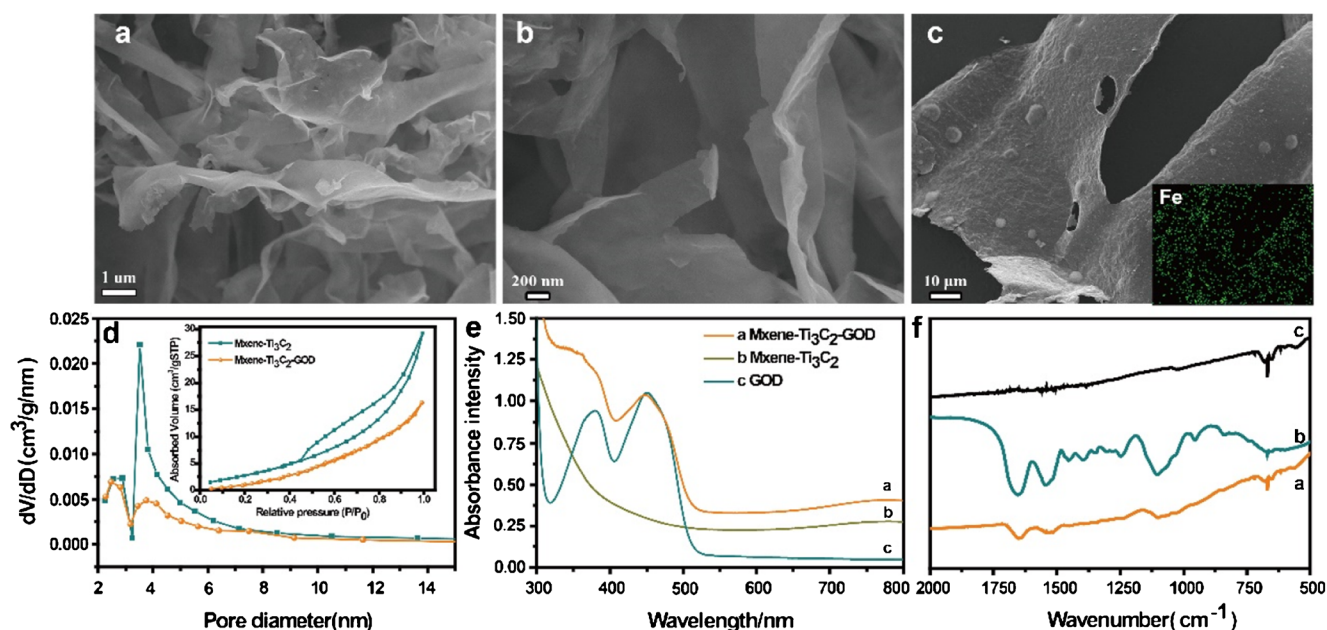


Fig. 1 **a** and **b** FESEM images of MXene-Ti₃C₂. **c** FESEM and EDS mapping (inset) of GOD-loaded MXene-Ti₃C₂. **d** BJH pore-size distributions of MXene-Ti₃C₂ before and after loading GOD and their

corresponding nitrogen adsorption–desorption isotherms (inset). **e** UV-vis spectra of different samples. **f** FTIR of (a) GOD-loaded MXene-Ti₃C₂, (b) pure GOD, and (c) MXene-Ti₃C₂

which are consistent with the reported values for FAD/FADH₂ at pH 7.24. This finding suggests that MXene-Ti₃C₂ can effectively immobilize GOD to further realize direct electron transfer (DET). Furthermore, the effect of scan rate on the current response of MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/GCE is displayed in Fig. 2b. In 0.01M PBS, a pair of obvious reversible redox peaks can be observed, suggesting that the enzyme activity of GOD was remained well after embedding on the surface of MXene-Ti₃C₂. And both cathodic and anodic peak currents showed good linear relation with the increasing of scan rate from 20 to 200 mV s⁻¹ (Fig. 2c), and correlation coefficients were determined to be 0.999 and 0.997, respectively, which suggested that the redox reaction of glucose on MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/GCE is a surface-controlled process [32,33]. Not only that, compared with rGO, MXene-Ti₃C₂ has a smaller specific surface area, so it has a smaller capacitance, which is conducive to improving the sensitivity of the sensor [32] (Fig. S4).

According to the results, the slack MXene-Ti₃C₂ sheets can effectively immobilize enzymes and help GOD achieve DET and respond well toward glucose. However, the repeatability of the performed experiment is disappointing (Fig. 3c). For instance, only 4 of the 15 MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/GCE electrodes we prepared under same conditions delivered clear and reversible redox peaks of GOD. This suggests that the effective fixation of nanomaterials does not guarantee that the natural enzyme maintains good electrochemical activity. A thorough literature review further revealed that CS is the most common biomaterial to improve the biocompatibility of composites [33–36]. Therefore, considering its good swelling property and viscosity, we used CS to modify electrode surface and then loaded MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD. The subsequent results are promising, as displayed in Fig. 3f, whereby almost all electrodes delivered obvious redox peaks. This can be contributed to the appropriate biological microenvironment for

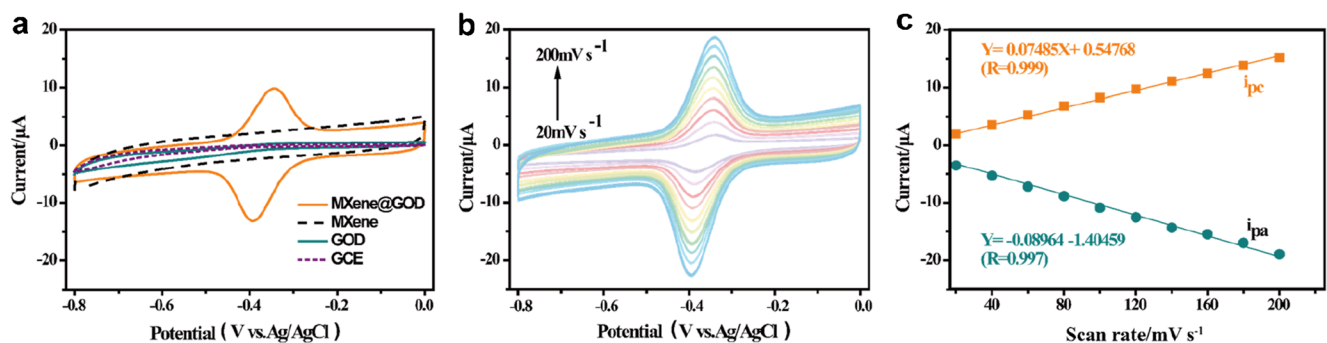


Fig. 2 **a** Cyclic voltammograms recorded at different modified GCE in 0.01 mol L⁻¹ N₂-saturated PBS at 100 mV s⁻¹. **b** Cyclic voltammograms recorded at MXene-Ti₃C₂-GOD film electrode in 0.01 mol L⁻¹ PBS at

different scan rates (from 20 to 200 mV s⁻¹, inside to outside). **c** Plots of peak currents of MXene-Ti₃C₂-GOD film electrode versus scan rate.

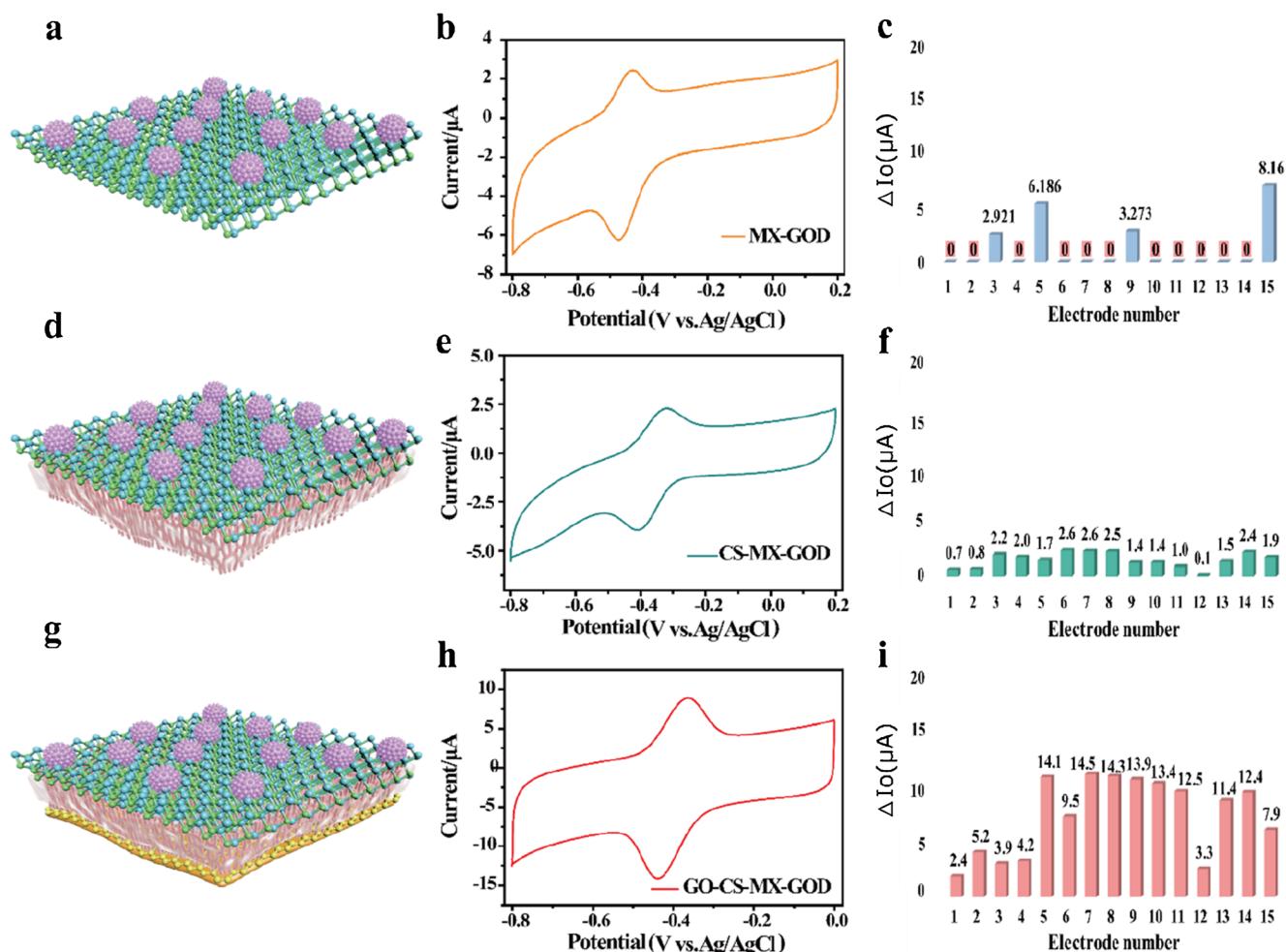


Fig. 3 Repeatability of various electrodes. **a** Schematic diagram of MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD. **b** CV of MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD in 0.01 mol L⁻¹ N₂-saturated PBS at 50 mV s⁻¹. **c** Bar chart of the CV peak current from 15 different MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/GCE. **d** Schematic diagram of CS/ MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD. **e** Cyclic voltammograms recorded of CS/ MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD in 0.01 mol L⁻¹ N₂-saturated PBS at 50 mV s⁻¹. **f** Bar chart of

the change value of the CV peak oxidation current at 15 different CS/ MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD film electrodes. **g** Schematic diagram of rGO/CS/ MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD. **h** Cyclic voltammograms recorded of rGO/CS/ MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD in 0.01 mol L⁻¹ N₂-saturated PBS at 50 mV s⁻¹. **i** Bar chart of the change value of the CV peak oxidation current at 15 different rGO/CS/ MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD film electrodes

GOD provided by CS. Although the repeatability of the electrodes steadily improved, Fig. 3e shows that the electrode performance was still not desirable. Particularly, the polarization of the electrode was more obvious due to the poor conductivity of CS, which may cause the insufficient transfer and collection of electrons.

Since the active layer fell off the electrode surface during the testing process, we then introduced the fixed rGO layer. As we all know, graphene possesses a large specific surface area and high electrical conductivity and, thus, has been widely applied in biosensor construction [37, 38]. In this work, we used rGO to modify the electrode, subsequently roughen the electrode surface, improve the adhesion of the electrode, and firmly increase bonding between the material and electrode. Meanwhile, the high electrical conductivity of rGO can enhance the electron transport performance. As shown in Fig.

3g-i, by introducing the rGO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD-modified electrode, a pair of obvious and symmetrical quasi-reversible redox peaks was observed. Under the same conditions, the peak current increased, indicating good reversible reaction characteristics. The experimental results further demonstrate that the repeatability of our designed sensor increased by 73.3% and that the response ability was also greatly improved. These enhancements may be attributed to the large surface of rGO, which can increase the roughness of the electrode surface without decreasing conductivity, so that stronger material fixation to the sensor is achieved and overall stability is improved. We also studied the electrochemical performance of the modified electrode using rGO/CS/rGO/GOD. In addition, the repeatability of different electrodes under the same conditions is shown in Table S2, and their standard deviations are less than 1.6. As shown in Fig. S5, compared to the rGO/

CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD electrode, the electrode with rGO immobilized enzyme has greater capacitance but a lower sensitivity, which is consistent with the result of comparing the capacitance of rGO and MXene-Ti₃C₂ above.

The long-term stability of the sensor is highly important for its use in practical applications [39]. In our experiment, we found that after modification with rGO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD, the stability of the fresh electrode in a single test was obviously improved. However, as the storage time increases, the sensor's performance still rapidly decayed (Fig. 4a). Obviously, the storage environment inevitably affects the sensor despite the strong fixation of GOD on MXene-Ti₃C₂. As a potential solution, we considered the introduction of a protective film to shield the sensor from the external environment and pollution without affecting the rapid penetration of the molecules to be detected. We were inspired by the sodium hyaluronate (SH) component of eye drops, which is a promising polymer material with excellent retention capacity (500 mL/g), network structure, and good biocompatibility, which is generally used to cover and protect articular cartilage and maintain the shape of cornea in eye tissues [17, 40]. Thus, a protective film composed of SH was employed to protect enzymes from pollution and water loss. As shown in Fig. 4d-f, after covering the GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/SH-modified electrode with the SH protective film, a higher peak current was achieved than that of GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD, indicating a good reversible reaction characteristic. After 10 days

of testing, the electrode remained active and achieved a desirable response current (ΔI) of 8.036 μA . This confirms that the active enzyme layer of the sensor requires a form of protection to maintain its long-term stability.

Biological samples detection

In order to investigate the practical application value of our designed sensor, it was employed to detect glucose concentrations in a simulation system and serum samples. As observed in Fig. 5a, due to the presence of the adhesion layer, the prepared GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/SH-modified film can tightly adhere to the electrode surface, which effectively solve the problem of material separation in the liquid environment to a certain extent. Figure 5b shows the typical current-time plot of the GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/SH electrode measured at -0.45 V by successive injections of glucose into the air-saturated and stirred 0.01 mol L^{-1} pH 7.0 PBS solution. The calibration plot (Fig. 5b inset) reveals the linear relationship between glucose concentration and sensor detection, where $Y = -0.93069 + 0.06868X$ and $R^2 = 0.999$, demonstrating a sensitivity of $98.1\text{ }\mu\text{A mmol L}^{-1}\text{ cm}^{-2}$ and a linear response range of $39.8\text{ }\mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ to 1.319 mmol L^{-1} and the limit of detection is $1.96\text{ }\mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$. This represents a typical behavior of an enzymatic kinetic reaction [41]. Besides, it is observed that a fast response time of 4.0 s and each successive addition resulted in a decrease of the steady state current (Fig. 5c). To further verify feasibility, the GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/SH sensor was used to

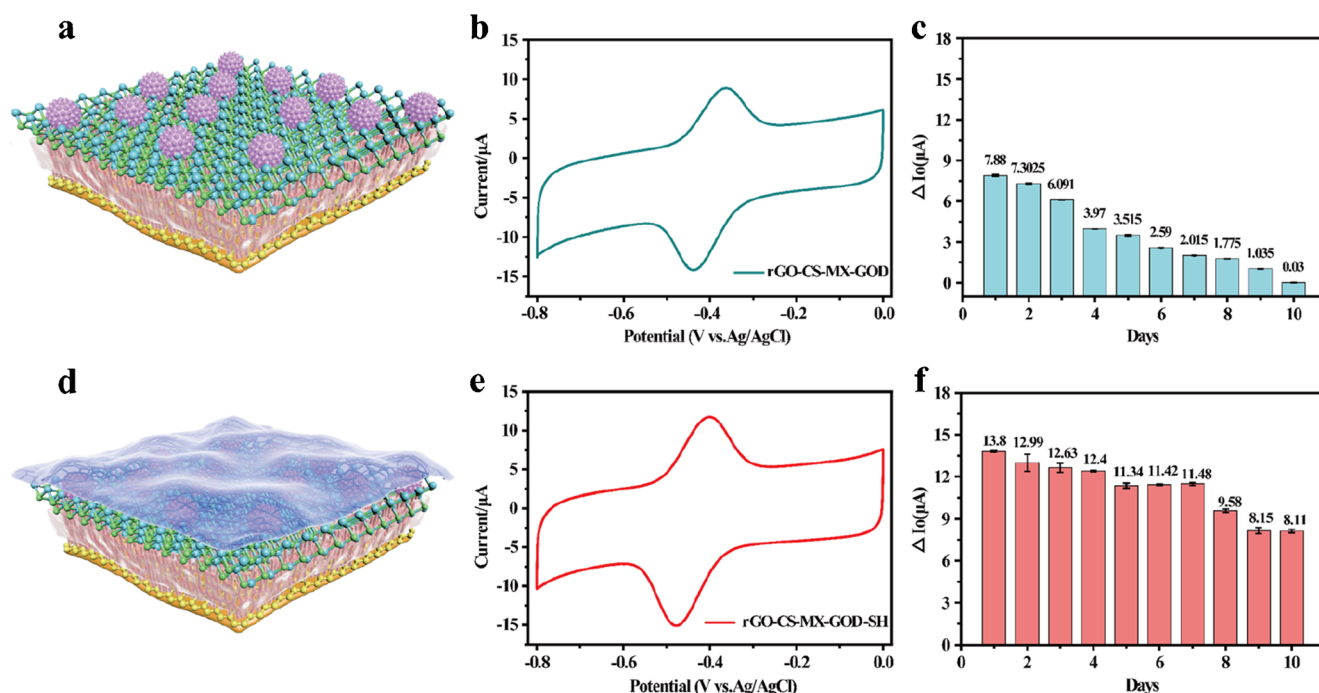


Fig. 4 Stability of various systems. **a** Schematic diagram of GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD. **b** Cyclic voltammograms recorded of GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD in 0.01 mol L^{-1} N₂-saturated PBS at 50 mV s^{-1} . **c** Ten-day stability of assembled GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD chip. **d**

Schematic diagram of GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/SH. **e** Cyclic voltammograms recorded of GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/SH in 0.01 mol L^{-1} N₂-saturated PBS at 50 mV s^{-1} . **f** Ten-day stability of assembled GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/SH chip

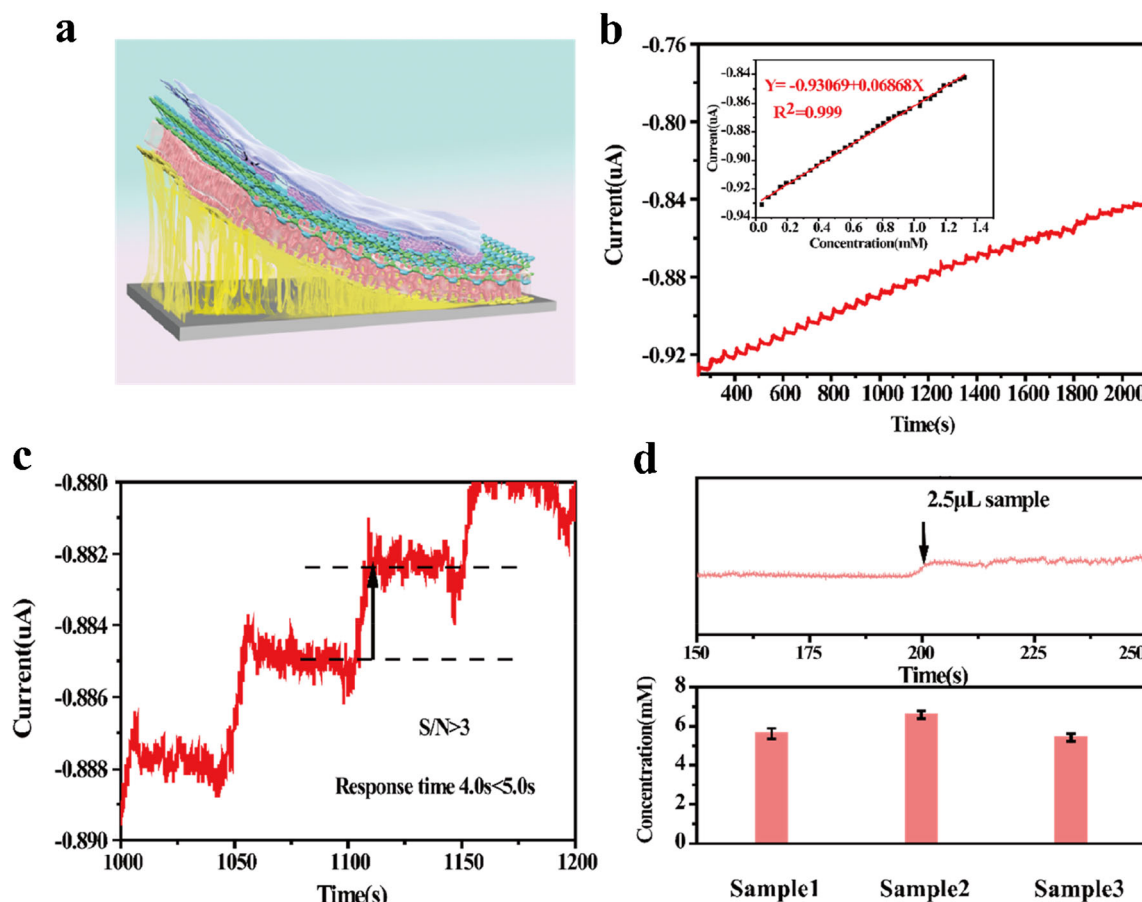


Fig. 5 **a** Schematic illustration of GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/SH hybrid film modified electrode. **b** Typical amperometric i-t curve for successive addition of different glucose concentrations of the sensor at -0.45 V.

detect glucose concentrations in serum samples, as shown in Fig. 5d. The results are summarized in Table S3, which demonstrate that the results are in good agreement with a commercial blood glucose test strip. Furthermore, the reported enzyme-based glucose sensors and their sensitivity, detection limit, and detection range are listed in Table S4; among of these results, the GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/SH sensor shows the highest sensitivity, lower detection limit, and good linear range. Figure S6 further reveals its good selectivity for glucose in the present of various interferences (0.5 mmol L^{-1} AA, DA, UA, H₂O₂, KO₂, NaHCO₃, NaCl, and KCl). Overall, this method organically combines a protective layer, reaction layer, and adhesion layer to construct a highly active enzyme sensing interface by considering the excellent properties of the different layer materials. The results collectively demonstrate that the GO/CS/MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD/SH sensor has huge potential in realizing practical applications of enzyme sensing.

Conclusion

In brief, this work proposes an effective method to improve the stability of enzyme sensors. The experimental results

Insert of (b) shows the linearly relationship between current and glucose concentration and the response time after adding glucose. c Response time of the sensor. d The real sample testing.

demonstrate that the stability of the developed enzyme sensor can be improved by combining multiple layers, including SH protective film, MXene-Ti₃C₂/GOD as the reaction layer, and CS/rGO as the adhesion layer. The practical and simple SH protective layer offers high biocompatibility and, thus, extends the potential applications of the enzymatic sensor. The nano-binding layer with graphene as the substrate, chitosan as the binder, and MXene-Ti₃C₂ immobilized enzyme as the active layer can effectively enhance the fixation between the active layer and electrode, improving electron transfer and collection. Conclusively, the proposed method provides a novel platform for designing other biosensors with excellent long-term stability and rapid detection, further expanding the practical applications of enzyme sensing.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00604-021-04977-w>.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no competing of interests. This article does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants include in the study.

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