

Research Article

Preparation of 4-[¹¹C]methylmetaraminol, a potential PET tracer for assessment of myocardial sympathetic innervation

Oliver Langer^{1,5,*}, Tobias Forngren², Johan Sandell¹, Frédéric Dollé³, Bengt Långström², Kjell Någren⁴ and Christer Halldin¹

¹ *Department of Clinical Neuroscience, Psychiatry Section, Karolinska Institutet, Karolinska Hospital, S-17176 Stockholm, Sweden*

² *PET Centre, Uppsala University, S-751 85 Uppsala, Sweden*

³ *Service Hospitalier Frédéric Joliot, CEA/DSV, 4 Place du Général Leclerc, F-91406 Orsay, France*

⁴ *Radiopharmaceutical Chemistry Laboratory, Turku PET Center, Porthaninkatu 3, FIN-20500 Turku, Finland*

⁵ *Department of Clinical Pharmacology, Vienna University Medical School, Währingergürtel 18-20, 1090 Vienna, Austria*

Summary

The false adrenergic neurotransmitter [¹¹C]*meta*-hydroxyephedrine ([¹¹C]HED) is currently the PET tracer of choice for assessment of myocardial sympathetic innervation. The molecule is metabolised in the 4-position of the aromatic ring. The resulting radiolabelled metabolites need to be measured in order to obtain an arterial input function. Our aim was the development of a PET tracer with an increased metabolic stability relative to [¹¹C]HED. We selected 4-methylmetaraminol as a candidate molecule for radiolabelling with ¹¹C (*t*_{1/2} 20.4 min). Our radiosynthetic approach towards 4-[¹¹C]methylmetaraminol involved a palladium-catalyzed cross-coupling reaction of a protected 4-trimethylstannyl derivative of metaraminol with [¹¹C]methyl iodide followed by removal of the protective groups. 4-[¹¹C]methylmetaraminol was obtained in a final decay-corrected radiochemical yield of 20–25% within a synthesis

*Correspondence to: O. Langer, Department of Clinical Pharmacology, Vienna University Medical School, Währingergürtel 18-20, 1090 Vienna, Austria. E-mail: Claus.Oliver.Langer@univie.ac.at

time of 60–80 min. The specific radioactivity at the end of the synthesis ranged from 18–37 to GBq/ μ mol. The unlabelled reference molecule, 4-methylmetaraminol, was prepared in a 5-step synthesis starting from metaraminol. A biological evaluation of 4-[11 C]methylmetaraminol is in progress and the results will be reported elsewhere. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key Words: 4-[11 C]methylmetaraminol; sympathetic nervous system; heart; positron emission tomography; stille coupling

Introduction

Metaraminol ((1*R*,2*S*)-2-amino-1-(3-hydroxyphenyl)-1-propanol, **1**, Figure 1) is a structural analogue of norepinephrine, the endogenous neurotransmitter of the sympathetic nervous system. Due to a high affinity towards presynaptic uptake mechanisms (Michaelis–Menten constant, K_m , for uptake into rabbit heart slices: $1.0 \mu\text{M}^{-1}$) and its metabolic stability **1** has served as a lead structure for developing PET tracers to assess cardiac sympathetic innervation.^{2,3} The molecule was initially labelled with ^{18}F in an electrophilic radiolabelling approach.^{4,5} However, this approach suffered from low specific radioactivity of the radiotracer (0.04 – $0.56 \text{ GBq}/\mu\text{mol}^4$), which consequently did not permit a safe use in human applications. More recently, labelling approaches with ^{11}C or no-carrier-added ^{18}F have been elaborated^{6–9}; however, these approaches are rather complex as they involve multi-step reactions and enantiomeric resolution. The *N*-methyl analogue of **1**, [^{11}C]meta-hydroxyephedrine ([^{11}C]HED, Figure 1), can be synthesized by simple methylation of **1** with [^{11}C]methyl iodide and has therefore become the PET tracer of choice for cardiac neuronal imaging.^{10,11}

The lack of the catechol function and the presence of an α -methyl group render both **1** and [^{11}C]HED resistant against metabolism by

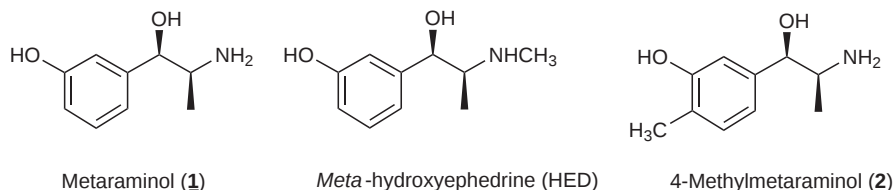


Figure 1. Chemical structures of metaraminol (**1**), meta-hydroxyephedrine (HED) and 4-methylmetaraminol (**2**)

catechol-*O*-methyl transferase and monoamine oxidase, the two main enzymes responsible for metabolic degradation of catecholamines.¹² Nevertheless, a considerable number of radiolabelled metabolites occur in human plasma following intravenous administration of [¹¹C]HED (about 48% of total radioactivity in human plasma at 20 min after injection of [¹¹C]HED represents radiolabelled metabolites¹¹), thus making the routine determination of plasma metabolites necessary.¹⁰ The metabolic degradation of [¹¹C]HED is assumed to occur by hydroxylation in the 4-position of the aromatic ring.^{12–14} From this perspective we considered the introduction of a substituent in the 4-position of compound **1** as a promising strategy for obtaining a PET tracer with improved metabolic stability. We selected the 4-methyl derivative of **1**, 4-methylmetaraminol (**2**, Figure 1), as a candidate molecule for labelling with carbon-11 (*t*_{1/2} 20.4 min).

In this work, we report the carbon-11 radiolabelling of **2** *via* a palladium-catalyzed cross-coupling reaction of a stannylated derivative of **1** with [¹¹C]methyl iodide.

Results and discussion

Compound **2** was synthesized as shown in Figure 2. Commercially available **1** was first iodinated with I₂ in NH₄OH/EtOH/H₂O according to a literature procedure to obtain 4-iodometaraminol (**3**) in an yield of 85% (5). Compound **3** was then treated with benzyl chloride to afford tribenzyl derivative **4** in 18% non-optimized yield. The benzyl protective group was chosen because of its stability and fast and easy removal by catalytic hydrogenation.¹⁵ In order to determine the position of the benzyl protective groups, nuclear overhauser effect spectroscopy experiments were run in CDCl₃. These experiments showed a correlation peak between the region for the methylene protons (δ = 4.7–4.9 ppm) and the proton in the 2-position of the aromatic ring (δ = 6.67 ppm), thus indicating the benzyl protective group to be located on the phenolic hydroxyl group and not on the benzyl alcohol. The proton attached to the benzyl alcohol (δ = 4.66 ppm) showed correlation between protons in both the 2- and 6-positions (δ = 6.67 and 6.58 ppm, respectively) of the aromatic ring. Derivative **4** was converted into the trimethylstannyl compound **5** by reaction with hexamethyldistannane (Sn₂Me₆) and tetrakis(triphenylphosphine)palladium(0) [(Ph₃P)₄Pd] in 61% yield (9). Compound **5** was

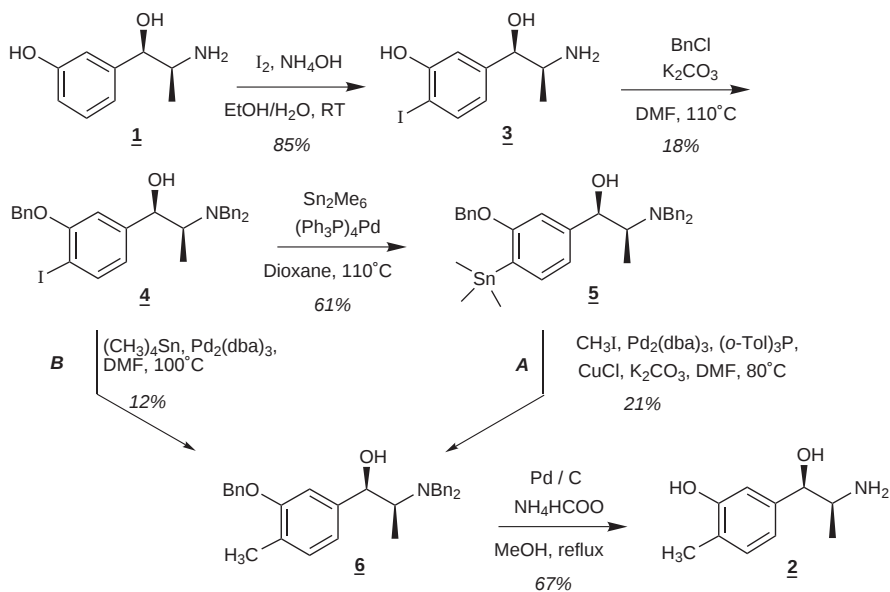


Figure 2. Synthesis of labelling precursor **5** and unlabelled reference molecule 4-methylmetaraminol (**2**)

then reacted with methyl iodide catalyzed by tris(dibenzylideneacetone)-dipalladium(0) [$Pd_2(dba)_3$] and tri(*o*-tolyl)phosphine [$(o-Tol)_3P$] together with copper(I) chloride ($CuCl$) and potassium carbonate (K_2CO_3) in DMF , which afforded the 4-methyl-substituted compound **6** in 21% yield.¹⁶ Alternatively, **4** was reacted with tetramethyltin [$(CH_3)_4Sn$] and $Pd_2(dba)_3$ to give **6** in a yield of 12% (Figure 2). The removal of the benzyl protective groups was accomplished by refluxing **6** in CH_3OH with ammonium formate and palladium on charcoal to give **2** in a yield of 67%.

For the radiolabelling, a pathway was pursued that involves a palladium-catalyzed reaction between an organic stannane and a halide resulting in $^{11}C-C$ bond formation (Stille coupling, Figure 3).¹⁶ This pathway has previously been used for the synthesis of various other PET radiotracers.^{17–20} Derivative **5** was reacted for 10 min at $110^\circ C$ with $[^{11}C]CH_3I$ in DMF containing a mixture of $Pd_2(dba)_3$, $(o-Tol)_3P$, $CuCl$ and K_2CO_3 , which corresponds to the optimized radiolabelling conditions described by Björkman *et al.*,¹⁸ to afford intermediate $[^{11}C]-\mathbf{6}$ in an incorporation yield of 30–40%. After purification by solid-phase extraction $[^{11}C]-\mathbf{6}$ was deprotected with $NH_4HCOO/Pd(0)$ in CH_3OH (>90% conversion yield) to give, after semipreparative high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) purification, radiochemically

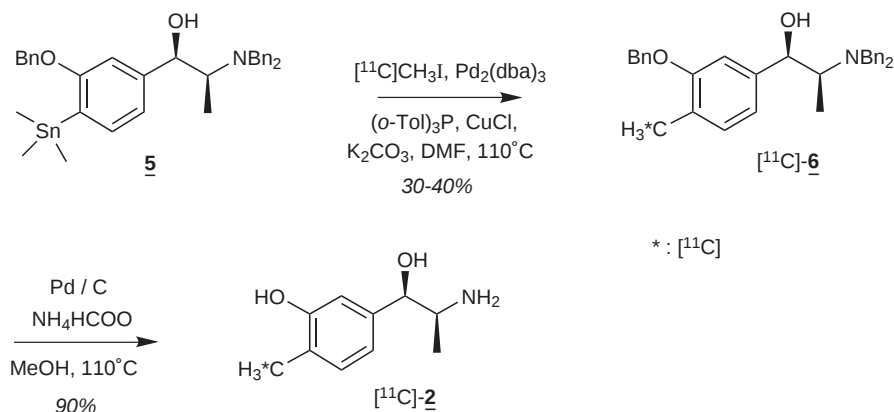


Figure 3. Radiosynthesis of 4-[¹¹C]methylmetaraminol ([¹¹C]-2)

and chemically pure (>95%) [¹¹C]-2. Compound [¹¹C]-6 as well as [¹¹C]-2 coeluted with authentic samples of unlabelled 6 and 2, respectively. The final decay-corrected radiochemical yield of [¹¹C]-2 was 20–25% and the total synthesis time including HPLC purification ranged from 60 to 80 min. The specific radioactivity at the end of the synthesis was 18–37 GBq/μmol.

Experimental

General

Radiochemistry. [¹¹C]CO₂ was produced at the Karolinska Hospital/Institute with a Scanditronix MC-16 cyclotron and at the Uppsala University PET Centre with a Scanditronix MC-17 cyclotron using the ¹⁴N(p,α)¹¹C reaction. [¹¹C]CH₃I was prepared from [¹¹C]CO₂ either (A) via [¹¹C]CH₄ by catalytic gas-phase iodination in a GEMS MeI PETtrace MicroLab (Karolinska)²¹ or (B) via [¹¹C]CH₃OH using a semiautomated system for production of radiopharmaceuticals (Uppsala).^{22,23}

HPLC was performed using a Beckman 126 pump and a Beckman 166 UV detector in series with a β⁺-flow detector. Data collections were performed using a Beckman System Gold Chromatography Software Package for semipreparative HPLC and a Beckman System Nouveau Chromatography Software Package for analytical HPLC. A C-18 Beckman Ultrasphere ODS 5 μm (250 × 10 mm) column was used for semipreparative HPLC and a Beckman Ultrasphere ODS 5 μm

(250 × 4.6 mm) column was used for analytical HPLC. Mobile phases were 50 mM aqueous NaH₂PO₄ (A), methanol (B) and acetonitrile (C). The HPLC was performed at room temperature and the wavelength for UV-detection was 280 nm. The semipreparative HPLC purification of the crude reaction mixture was performed at a flow rate of 4 ml/min with the following gradient time program: 0–3 min, (A:B, v:v) 90:10 isocratic; 3–8 min, (A:B) 90:10–55:45; 8–14 min, (A:B) 55:45 isocratic; 14–16 min, (A:B) 55:45–5:95; 16–20 min, (A:B) 5:95 isocratic. Analytical HPLC was performed at a flow rate of 1.5 ml/min employing the following gradient time programs. Method A: 0–5 min, (A:C, v:v) 40:60 isocratic; 5–6 min, (A:C) 40:60–30:70; 6–10 min, (A:C) 30:70 isocratic. Method B: 0–4 min, (A:C, v:v) 95:5 isocratic; 4–10 min, (A:C) 95:5–80:20; 10–12 min, (A:C) 80:20–5:95; 12–15 min, (A:C) 5:95 isocratic.

Chemistry. (-)-Metaraminol (**1**) bitartrate was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich, Sweden AB. Other chemicals were obtained from standard commercial sources and were of analytical grade. Analytical TLC was run on pre-coated plates of silica gel 60 F₂₅₄ (Merck). The compounds were localized using an UV-lamp at 254 nm and/or by dipping the TLC plates into an aqueous KMnO₄ solution (1%) and heating on a hot plate. Flash chromatography was conducted on silicagel of 63–200 µm (Merck). ¹H NMR spectra were recorded on Bruker DRX500 or DRX600 spectrometers using the hydrogenated residue of the deuteriated solvents (CDCl₃, δ = 7.24 ppm; DMSO-d₆, δ = 2.49 ppm) and/or TMS as internal standards. The chemical shifts (δ) are reported in ppm, downfield from TMS (s, d, dd, bd, t, m, bm for singlet, doublet, doublet of doublet, broad doublet, triplet, multiplet and broad multiplet, respectively). Electro spray time of flight mass spectra (TOF MS ES+) were recorded on an AutoSpec-OATOFFPD (Micromass, Manchester, UK) double focusing high resolution tandem mass spectrometer.

Chemistry

(1*R*,2*S*)-2-amino-1-(3-hydroxy-4-iodophenyl)-1-propanol (4-iodometaraminol, **3**). To a solution of metaraminol (**1**) bitartrate (2 g, 6.3 mmol) in NH₄OH (10 M, 200 ml), iodine (1.6 g, 6.5 mmol) dissolved in absolute ethanol (120 ml) was added dropwise over a period of 45 min. The reaction mixture was stirred in the dark at room temperature for 12 h.

The ethanol was then removed under vacuum and the aqueous residue extracted with ethyl acetate. After washing of the combined organic layers with brine and drying (Na₂SO₄) concentration to dryness afforded the title compound (1.6 g, 85% yield) in the form of a yellowish solid. Compound **3** was used in the following step without further purification: *R*_f 0.15–0.20 (CHCl₃/CH₃OH/28% NH₄OH, 80/20/1); ¹H NMR (DMSO-*d*₆) δ 0.93 (d, *J* 7.6 Hz, 3 H), 2.93 (m, 1 H), 4.31 (d, *J* 6.1 Hz, 1 H), 6.62 (d, *J* 7.1 Hz, 1 H), 6.98 (s, 1 H), 7.65 (d, *J* 7.1 Hz, 1 H); TOF MS ES⁺ (C₉H₁₂INO₂):294.0 [M + H⁺].

(1*R*,2*S*)-2-*N,N*-dibenzylamino-1-(3-benzyloxy-4-iodophenyl)-1-propanol (**4**). To a solution of compound **3** (1.6 g, 5.5 mmol) in DMF (20 ml) K₂CO₃ (1.3 g, 10 mmol) and benzyl chloride (3.5 g, 27.5 mmol) were added and the reaction mixture was heated at 100°C for 2 h. The reaction mixture was cooled and diluted with H₂O (100 ml). Extraction with CH₂Cl₂, washing of the combined organic layers with brine, drying (Na₂SO₄) and concentration to dryness yielded a dark oil. Silica gel flash chromatography purification (heptane/ethyl acetate, 95/5–90/10) afforded the title compound (0.57 g, 18% yield) in the form of fluffy white crystals: *R*_f 0.40–0.45 (heptane/ethyl acetate, 80/20); ¹H NMR (CDCl₃) δ 1.11 (d, *J* 6.9 Hz, 3 H), 3.06 (m, *J* 6.5 Hz), 3.47 (d, *J* 14.1 Hz, 2 H), 3.71 (d, *J* 14.1 Hz, 2 H), 4.66 (d, *J* 6.5 Hz, 1 H), 4.77 (d, *J* 11.7 Hz, 1 H), 4.89 (d, *J* 11.7 Hz, 1 H), 6.58 (dd, *J* 8.1 Hz & 1.6 Hz, 1 H), 6.67 (d, *J* 1.6 Hz, 1 H), 7.15–7.50 (m, 15 H), 7.68 (d, *J* 8.1 Hz, 1 H); TOF MS ES⁺ (C₃₀H₃₀INO₂) : 564.0 [M + H⁺].

(1*R*,2*S*)-2-*N,N*-dibenzylamino-1-(3-benzyloxy-4-trimethylstannylphenyl)-1-propanol (**5**). To a solution of **4** (0.45 g, 0.8 mmol) in dioxane (20 ml) tetrakis(triphenylphosphine)palladium (49 mg, 0.043 mmol) and hexamethyldistannane (0.34 g, 1.0 mmol) were added. The reaction mixture was refluxed under nitrogen overnight, cooled and filtered. The filtrate was diluted with ethyl acetate (100 ml), washed with H₂O and brine, dried (Na₂SO₄) and concentrated to dryness to afford a yellow oil that was purified by silica gel flash chromatography (heptane/EtOAc, 100/0–90/10) to give the title compound (293 mg, 61% yield) in the form of white crystals: *R*_f 0.50–0.55 (heptane/ethyl acetate, 80/20); ¹H NMR (CDCl₃) δ 0.21 (s, with tin satellites: ²*J*[¹¹⁹Sn–H] 56.2 Hz & ²*J*[¹¹⁷Sn–H] 53.5 Hz, 9 H), 1.15 (d, *J* 6.7 Hz, 3 H), 3.08 (m, *J* 6.8 Hz, 1 H), 3.51 (d, *J* 14.0 Hz, 2 H), 3.75 (d, *J* 14.0 Hz, 2 H), 4.70 (d, *J* 11.0 Hz, 1 H), 4.75 (d, *J* 6.0 Hz, 1 H), 4.79 (d, *J* 11.0 Hz, 1 H), 6.69 (s, with tin satellites: ²*J*[Sn–H]

18.2 Hz, 1 H), 6.85 (dd, J 7.8 and 1.3 Hz, 1 H), 7.10–7.75 (m, 16 H); TOF MS ES⁺ (C₃₃H₃₉NO₂Sn) : 606.1, 604.1, 602.1, 601.1, 600.1, 599.1, 598.1 [M + H⁺] for Sn isotopes of 124, 122, 120, 119, 118, 117 and 116, respectively.

(1*R*,2*S*)-)-2-*N,N*-dibenzylamino-1-(3-benzyloxy-4-methylphenyl)-1-propanol (**6**). Approach A: Tris(dibenzylideneacetone)dipalladium(0) (3.0 mg, 3.4 μmol), tri(*o*-tolyl)phosphine (4.0 mg, 13.4 μmol), copper(I) chloride (1.4 mg, 14.1 μmol) and potassium carbonate (1.8 mg, 13.0 μmol) were dissolved in DMF (0.3 ml) and the solution was stirred and purged with N₂ for 30 min at room temperature. Then compound **5** (32 mg, 53.3 μmol) dissolved in DMF (0.2 ml) and methyl iodide (142 mg, 1.0 mmol) were added and the mixture heated at 80°C for 24 h. The reaction mixture was then cooled, diluted with H₂O (10 ml) and extracted with CH₂Cl₂. After washing of the combined organic layers with brine, drying (Na₂SO₄) and concentration to dryness, a brownish solid was obtained. The crude product was purified by semipreparative HPLC [column: Waters μBondapak C18 (300 × 7.8 mm, 10 μm); eluent: 0.01 M aqueous phosphoric acid/acetonitrile 50/50; flow rate: 6 ml/min; UV detection at λ:280 nm]. The product was collected at *R*_t 6.0–6.5 min. The combined HPLC fractions were made alkaline with aqueous ammonia, the acetonitrile removed *in vacuo* and the aqueous residue extracted with CH₂Cl₂. Washing with brine, drying (Na₂SO₄) and concentration to dryness yielded pure title compound (5 mg, 21% yield) in the form of a white solid: *R*_f 0.45–0.50 (heptane/ethyl acetate, 80/20); ¹H NMR (CDCl₃) δ 1.13 (d, J 6.7 Hz, 3 H), 2.27 (s, 3 H), 3.08 (m, J 6.4 Hz, 1 H), 3.47 (d, J 13.8 Hz, 2 H), 3.72 (d, J 13.8 Hz, 2 H), 4.70 (d, J 6.4 Hz, 1 H), 4.72 (d, J 11.3 Hz, 1 H), 4.83 (d, J 11.3 Hz, 1 H), 6.70 (d, J 0.7 Hz, 1 H), 6.73 (dd, J 7.8 and 0.7 Hz, 1 H), 7.08 (d, J 7.8 Hz, 1 H), 7.15–7.45 (m, 15 H); TOF MS ES⁺ (C₃₁H₃₃NO₂): 452.2 [M + H⁺].

Approach B: Tris(dibenzylideneacetone)dipalladium(0) (7 mg, 7.9 μmol) and tetramethyltin (78 mg, 436 μmol) were dissolved in DMF (0.3 ml). The solution was stirred and purged with N₂ for 30 min at room temperature. Then, compound **4** (41 mg, 72.8 μmol) dissolved in DMF (0.2 ml) was added and the mixture heated at 100°C for 2 days. Work up of the reaction and semipreparative HPLC purification were performed as described under approach A to yield pure compound **6** (4 mg, 12% yield).

(1*R*,2*S*)-2-amino-1-(3-hydroxy-4-methylphenyl)-1-propanol (4-methylmetaraminol, **2**). To a solution of compound **6** (15 mg, 33.3 μ mol) in CH₃OH (5 ml), ammonium formate (40 mg, 0.63 mmol) and palladium on carbon (5% Pd, 10–20 mg) were added. The reaction mixture was refluxed for 2 h, and then cooled, filtered and concentrated to dryness to afford the title compound (4 mg, 67% yield) as an oily residue: ¹H NMR (CDCl₃) δ 0.97 (d, *J* 6.5 Hz, 3 H), 2.25 (s, 3 H), 3.20 (bm, *w*_{1/2} 11 Hz, 1 H), 4.48 (bd, *w*_{1/2} 12 Hz, 1 H), 6.76 (d, *J* 7.6 Hz, 1 H), 6.80 (s, 1 H), 7.08 (d, *J* 7.6 Hz, 1 H); TOF MS ES⁺ (C₁₀H₁₅NO₂): 182.2 [M + H⁺].

Radiochemistry

(1*R*,2*S*)-2-*N,N*-dibenzylamino-1-(3-benzyloxy-4-[¹¹C]methylphenyl)-1-propanol ([¹¹C]-**6**). A solution of tris(dibenzylideneacetone)dipalladium(0) (1.2 mg, 1.3 μ mol) and tri(*o*-tolyl)phosphine (1.5 mg, 4.9 μ mol) in DMF (200 μ l) was prepared in a dry 0.8 ml septum-equipped vial and purged with N₂ gas for 5 min. [¹¹C]CH₃I was passed through a Sicapent drying tower and trapped in the solution at room temperature. After trapping, the solution was transferred to a septum-equipped vial containing compound **5** (1.6 mg, 2.7 μ mol), copper(I) chloride (1.2 mg, 12.1 μ mol) and potassium carbonate (1.4 mg, 10.1 μ mol) dissolved in DMF (100 μ l). The latter mixture had been dissolved in DMF and purged with N₂ just prior to the transfer of the trapped [¹¹C]CH₃I. The reaction vial was then shaken vigorously and heated at 110°C for 10 min. The conversion of [¹¹C]CH₃I into [¹¹C]-**6** was determined by analysing an aliquot of the reaction mixture on analytical HPLC [method A: Rt ([¹¹C]-**6**) 7.5–8 min, Rt ([¹¹C]CH₃I) 2–3 min (void volume)].

(1*R*,2*S*)-2-amino-1-(3-hydroxy-4-[¹¹C]methylphenyl)-1-propanol (4-[¹¹C]methylmetaraminol, [¹¹C]-**2**). The reaction mixture from the Stille coupling was diluted with H₂O (3.5 ml) and passed through a Supelco LC-18 cartridge that had been washed with methanol (10 ml) and H₂O (20 ml) prior to use. The cartridge was washed with H₂O (1.5 ml) and eluted with methanol (2 ml) into a vial containing ammonium formate (40 mg, 0.63 mmol) and palladium on carbon (5% Pd, 10–20 mg). The vial was sealed and heated for 10 min at 110°C. The conversion of [¹¹C]-**6** into [¹¹C]-**2** was determined on analytical HPLC [method A: Rt ([¹¹C]-**6**) 7.5–8.0 min, Rt ([¹¹C]-**2**) 2–3 min (void volume); method B: Rt ([¹¹C]-**2**) 9.5–10.0 min]. The reaction mixture was filtered

over a Supelco LC-18 cartridge that was then washed with methanol (3 ml). The filtrate was concentrated to dryness under vacuum, dissolved in 50 mM aqueous NaH_2PO_4 /methanol (90/10, 4 ml) and injected on the semipreparative HPLC system. Derivative $[^{11}\text{C}]\text{-}\underline{\text{2}}$ was collected at R_t 10–12 min. The methanol from the HPLC fraction was removed *in vacuo* and the aqueous residue passed through a Millipore filter (0.22 μm). The radiochemical purity and specific radioactivity of $[^{11}\text{C}]\text{-}\underline{\text{2}}$ were determined by HPLC (method B: R_t ($[^{11}\text{C}]\text{-}\underline{\text{2}}$) 9.5–10.0 min).

Conclusion

With the aim to develop a metabolically stable PET tracer to assess myocardial sympathetic innervation 4- $[^{11}\text{C}]$ methylmetaraminol ($[^{11}\text{C}]\text{-}\underline{\text{2}}$) was prepared by a 2-step radiochemical pathway.

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