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Synthesis, characterization, and nanoencapsulation of tetrathiatriarylmethyl and tetrachlorotriarylmethyl (trityl) radical derivatives – a study to advance their applicability as *in vivo* EPR oxygen sensors

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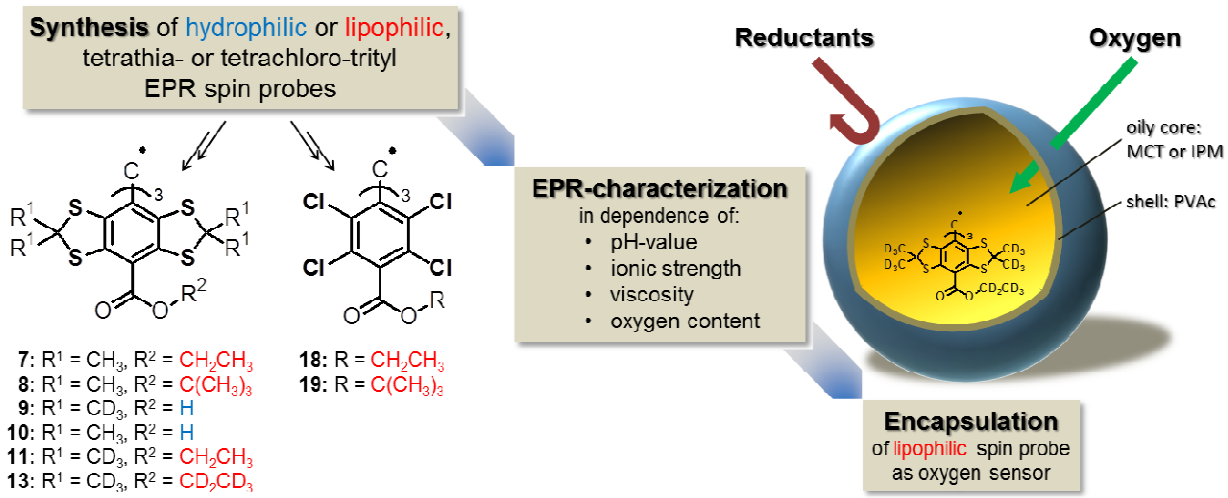
ABSTRACT GRAPHIC



KEYWORDS

Trityl radials, TAM radicals, Synthesis, EPR oximetry, ESR Oximetry, Oxygen sensor, Encapsulation, Biocompatibility, Sensitivity, Specificity

ABSTRACT

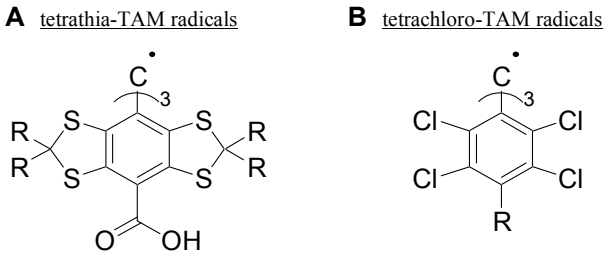
Tissue oxygenation plays an important role in the pathophysiology of various diseases and is often a marker of prognosis and therapeutic response. EPR (ESR) is a suitable non-invasive oximetry technique. However, to reliably deploy soluble EPR probes as oxygen sensors in complex biological systems, there is still a need to investigate and improve their specificity, sensitivity, and stability. We reproducibly synthesized various derivatives of tetrathiatriarylmethyl and tetrachlorotriarylmethyl (trityl) radicals. Hydrophilic radicals were investigated in aqueous solution mimicking physiological conditions by, *e.g.*, variation of viscosity and ionic strength. Their specificity was satisfactory; but, the oxygen sensitivity was low. To enhance the capability of trityl radicals as oxygen sensors, encapsulation into oily-core nanocapsules was performed. Thus, different lipophilic tri-esters were prepared and characterized in oily solution employing oils typically used in drug formulations, *i.e.*, middle-chain triglycerides and isopropyl myristate. Our screening identified the deuterated ethyl ester of D-TAM (radical **13**) to be suitable. It had an extremely narrow single EPR line under anoxic conditions and excellent oxygen sensitivity. After encapsulation, it retained its oxygen-responsiveness and was protected against reduction by ascorbic acid. These biocompatible and highly sensitive nanosensors offer great potential for future EPR oximetry applications in preclinical research.

INTRODUCTION

The quantification of oxygen levels *in vitro* and *in vivo* is crucial not only for the understanding of physiological processes but also in the assessment and therapy of numerous pathological conditions, such as cancer, peripheral vascular disease, and wounds.[1-3] Various oxygen measurement techniques have been developed, but especially *in vivo* oximetry is still challenging. EPR (ESR) oximetry offers several advantages as it enables direct, non-invasive, and repeatable oxygen measurements.[4,5] Spin-spin interactions with the paramagnetic oxygen molecule decrease the relaxation times of EPR spin probe radicals and, therefore, result in a quantifiable broadening of their spectral line width.[6] Two classes of oxygen-sensitive EPR spin probes have been developed. Both have certain advantages and drawbacks. Particulate materials (*e.g.*, carbon-based probes and lithium salts) attracted much attention as they are very promising oxygen sensors, but they measure oxygen contents only at the implantation site and are often deficient in terms of the reproducibility of their preparation and properties.[7] In contrast, soluble spin probes, *e.g.*, nitroxides and triarylmethyl (trityl, TAM) radicals, are chemically well defined and can distribute evenly within samples.[7] Especially deuterated trityl radicals and D-,^{15}N-substituted nitroxides exhibit favorably narrow single EPR lines.[8,9] However, their oxygen sensitivities are dependent on the solvent and their signal characteristics are also affected by changes of viscosity and pH value.[10,11] Additionally, when EPR measurements are conducted in biological systems, the spin probes might lose their signal intensity and their oxygen responsiveness due to interactions with tissues, such as chemical reactions (*e.g.*, reduction or oxidation), protein binding, or fibrous capsule formation.[12,13] These aspects in mind, we intend to shed more light on EPR oximetry using soluble spin probes, in particular trityl radicals. Their main limitations might be overcome by appropriate formulations: By encapsulation, their oxygen sensitivities can be improved,[14-17] a

defined microenvironment is created, which ensures specificity of the sensors to oxygen, and the capsule shell might provide protection against oxidoreductants,[17-19] and prevent biocompatibility concerns.

The first triarylmethyl radical was prepared by Gomberg in 1900.[20] To eliminate hyperfine coupling with hydrogen nuclei and achieve sharp single EPR lines, the phenyl rings were substituted with alkylthio moieties by Nycomed Innovation AB in the 1990s leading to the family of tetrathia-TAM radicals (see Figure 1A).[21,22] Salts of these trityl radicals showed good water solubility as well as stability in the presence of reducing reagents such as ascorbate and glutathione.[18,23] Another family of trityl radicals, the tetrachloro-TAM radicals, was first introduced in 1967 (see Figure 1B).[24] Upon substitution of the six *ortho* positions with chlorine atoms, the central methyl carbon was sterically shielded providing high chemical and thermal stability.[25,26] Tetrachloro-TAM radicals show broader EPR lines due to coupling with the chlorine nuclei in close vicinity, but are distinguished by better synthetic accessibility than tetrathiatrityl radicals. Trityl radicals have not only been employed in EPR oximetry,[14,27,28] but also in many other applications, *e.g.*, specific detection of superoxide radical anions,[29-31] pH measurements,[32,33] as well as analysis of redox status.[34] Trityl-based spin labels were used for distance measurements, *e.g.*, in nucleic acids.[35] Their long relaxation times made trityl radicals also attractive for (pulsed) EPR imaging[36] and dynamic nuclear polarization (DNP).[37] To achieve intracellular permeability, lipophilic tetrathia-TAM ester derivatives were developed.[38]



C-TAM: R = CH_3 (radical **10**)
D-TAM: R = CD_3 (radical **9**)
Ox063: R = $(CH_2)_2OH$
Ox031: R = $CH_2O(CH_2)_2OH$

PTMTE: R = $COOCH_2CH_3$ (radical **18**)
PTMTC: R = COOH
PTMTS$^-$-3K$^+$: R = SO_3^- K^+

Figure 1. Chemical structures and common abbreviations of different derivatives of trityl radicals: (**A**) tetrathia-TAM and (**B**) tetrachloro-TAM radicals.

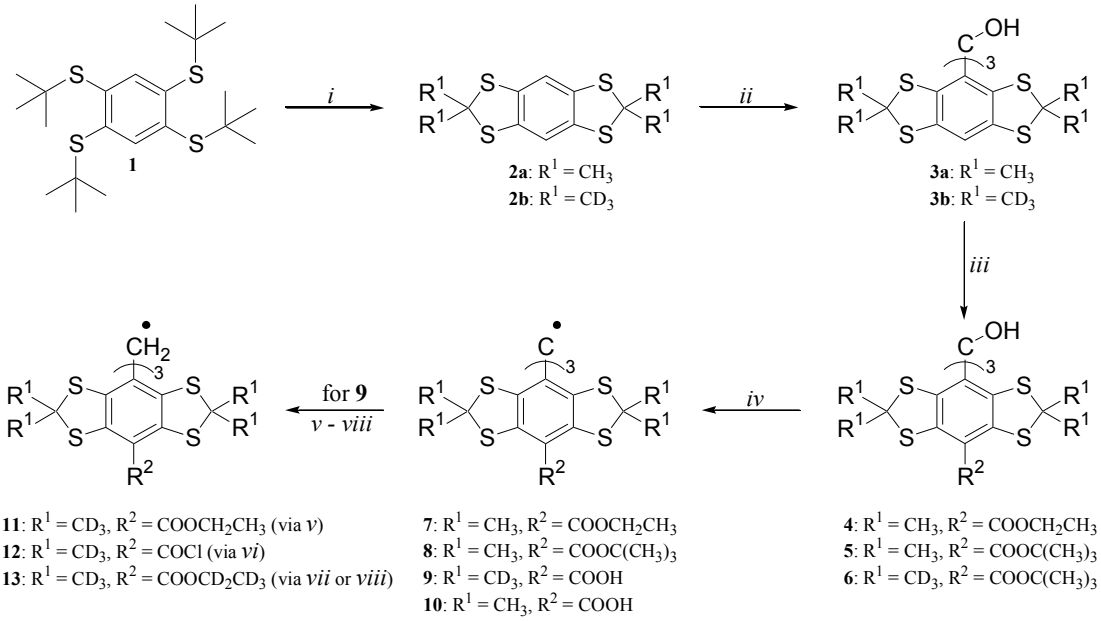
In the current work, trityl radicals are studied in order to promote their applicability as EPR oxygen sensors. The study starts with their accessibility, describing reproducible syntheses to obtain various chemically well-defined radicals. Hydrophilic trityls, which can be directly used as molecular oxygen reporters, were investigated in aqueous media mimicking physiological conditions. Lipophilic trityls and pharmaceutical relevant oils were selected for encapsulation to develop biocompatible nanosensors with high oxygen sensitivity, specificity, and stability for *in vitro* and *in vivo* EPR oximetry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Synthesis of tetrathia-TAM radicals, their deuterated analogs, and tetrachloro-TAM esters

The criteria for trityl radicals that will be useful in pharmaceutical analysis and medical diagnosis are stringent, as detailed in the Introduction. We chose to evaluate the preparation of tetrathia- and tetrachloro-TAM radicals. Both classes and some individual compounds that were of interest

to us were known. This is indicated in the Experimental section. However, trityl radicals are known to be difficult to prepare, and we present herein protocols that worked reproducibly in our hands for known and new derivatives. The synthesis of tetrathia-TAM radicals is shown in Scheme 1.



Scheme 1. Synthesis of tetrathia-TAM radicals **7**-**13**. Reagents and conditions: (*i*) HBF_4, acetone or acetone-d_6; (*ii*) *n*-BuLi, methyl chloroformate; (*iii*) *n*-BuLi, TMEDA, and diethyl carbonate or DiBoc; (*iv*) $BF_3{\times}Et_2O/SnCl_2$, TFA; (*v*) **9**, TEA, acetonitrile, ethyl chloroformate, DMAP; (*vi*) **9**, $SOCl_2$, TEA; (*vii*) **12**, ethanol-d_6, reflux; (*viii*) **9**, TEA, acetonitrile, ethyl chloroformate-d_5, DMAP.

The main hurdle to obtain tetrathia-TAM radicals lies right at the beginning of the synthesis, *i.e.*, the preparation of molar amounts of tetrakis(*tert*-butylthio)benzene (**1**) because of the necessity to use the very odoriferous *tert*-butyl thiol that is added to city gas to detect leakages. We previously published a manageable technique to obtain **1**.[39] The subsequent steps towards the preparation of the tetrathia-TAM radicals shown in Scheme 1 mainly followed published proce-

dures.[9,10,21-23,37,40-42] Modifications regarding the synthetic procedures are detailed in the Experimental Section. Compound **1** was converted into the cyclized arene (**2a**, **b**) by tetrafluoroboric acid (HBF_4) 54 % in Et_2O, toluene, and acetone or acetone-d_6. The triarylmethanols (**3a**, **b**) were prepared by treatment of **2a** or **2b** with *n*-BuLi and the subsequent addition of methyl chloroformate. Reaction of **3a** or **3b** with ten equivalents of *n*-BuLi and tetramethylethylenediamine (TMEDA) resulted in the formation of the corresponding trianion. Different derivatives (compounds **4-6**) were prepared through reaction of the appropriate anion with diethyl carbonate (**4**) or di-*tert*-butyldicarbonate (DiBoc) (**5**,**6**). Esters **5** and **6** were subsequently hydrolyzed with trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) overnight at room temperature (RT) to give the tricarboxylic acid (hydrophilic) radicals **9** and **10**. Thin layer chromatography (TLC) of radical **9** revealed the presence of two products: A green spot identified as the target radical **9** and a violet side product identified by MS to be the quinone methide (**20**, see Figure 2) that was recently reported.[41] In contrast to the report and according to MPLC isolation, only 3 % of compound **20** had formed. This low amount showed no effect on the line shape of the EPR signal of the trityl radical in the solution. Other reports on the preparation of **9** do not mention the formation of **20**. It seems to be formed invariably, its amount increasing on exposure of **9** to light and air.

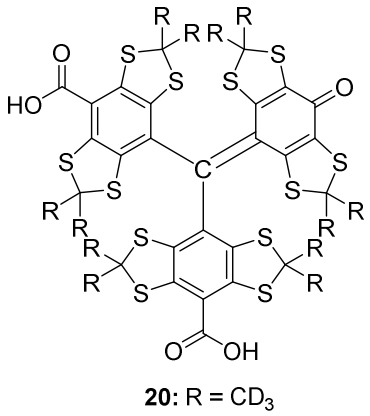
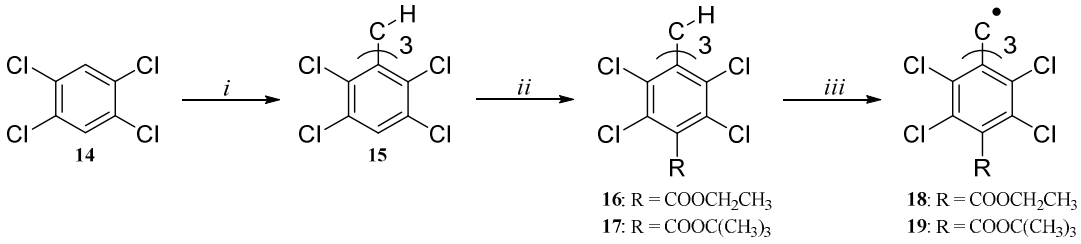


Figure 2. Chemical structure of the quinone methide (**20**) – the product of oxidative decarboxylation reaction of radical **9**.

The conversion of compounds **4** and **5** by boron trifluoride diethyl etherate into the carbocation followed by reduction with stannous chloride gave the lipophilic trityl radicals **7** and **8**. A mixture of radical **9** and triethylamine (TEA) in acetonitrile was kept at 0 °C. Ethyl chloroformate was added followed by the addition of 4-dimethylaminopyridine (DMAP) to afford the ethyl ester (**11**) in 80 % yield. Formation of the fully deuterated ethyl ester analogue **13** was achieved through two methods. Method A involved the esterification of **9** through a two-step reaction: The formation of the corresponding acid chloride **12** with the help of thionyl chloride and TEA followed by reflux with ethanol-d_6 to give radical **13** with 73 % yield. Method B included the synthesis of ethyl chloroformate-d_5 and its reaction with a mixture of **9** and TEA followed by addition of DMAP as described before.

The synthesis of tetrachloro-TAM radicals is shown in Scheme 2. Compound **15** was synthesized by Friedel-Crafts alkylation of 1,2,4,5-tetrachlorobenzene (**14**) with $CHCl_3$ in the presence of $AlCl_3$.[43] Reaction of **15** with ten equivalents of *n*-BuLi and TMEDA at low temperature gave the corresponding trianion. Again, a tenfold excess of the reagent, in this case ethyl chloroformate, had to be used to form compound **16** in 81 % yield.[29] Most likely due to the bulkiness of

the *tert*-butyl group, not less than 50 equivalents of DiBoc were necessary to form compound **17** in an acceptable yield of 49 %. Finally, the radicals **18** and **19** were achieved from the corresponding methane derivatives **16** and **17** through reaction with tetrabutylammonium hydroxide and *p*-chloranil in tetrahydrofuran (THF).[44]



Scheme 2. Synthesis of tetrachloro-TAM radicals **18,19**. Reagents and conditions: (*i*) $CHCl_3/AlCl_3$; (*ii*) *n*-BuLi, TMEDA, and ethyl chloroformate or DiBoc; (*iii*) Bu_4NOH/*p*-chloranil, THF.

Characterization of hydrophilic trityl radicals in aqueous solution by EPR spectroscopy

The line width of soluble EPR spin probes, such as trityl radicals, is directly proportional to the concentration of dissolved oxygen, rendering them suitable for EPR oximetry.[29,45] In this section, we investigate the specificity of hydrophilic trityl radicals for oxygen in aqueous solution which is related with the impact of other environmental parameters, *e.g.*, the viscosity and pH value on the EPR signal of radical **9**.

Influence of ionic strength, osmolarity, and pH value:

The hydrophilic radicals were studied under several conditions to mimic environments in drug formulations or *in vivo*. Solutions of the radical **9** (c = 50 μM) in phosphate buffer (PB; pH 6.2

and 7.4) as well as phosphate buffered saline (PBS; pH 6.2 and 7.4) were used to investigate the impact of ionic strength and pH value on EPR line widths under aerated (20.9 % O_2) and deoxygenated (~ 0 % O_2) conditions. PBS has ionic strengths and osmolarities which are similar to physiological values, whereas PB has lower ionic strengths/osmolarities. The pH values were chosen to cover the pertinent range occurring in human tissues, namely 7.0 to 7.4 in normal tissues and 6.2 to 7.4 in tumors, respectively.[46]

Aerated solutions of compound **9** in the different buffer systems showed similar line widths (ΔB_{PP} = (13.7 ± 0.2) μT) as well as similar EPR line width narrowing (ΔB_{PP} = (3.1 ± 0.1) μT) after deoxygenation of the samples (Figure 3). The oxygen solubility of aqueous solutions decreases with increasing salt content.[47] PBS buffers have a higher ionic strength than PB buffers. This difference was not reflected in a change of line width. The pK_a of the undeuterated derivative (radical **10**) was determined to be approx. 4.[10] Thus, at both pH values investigated, the radical should mainly exist in its deprotonated form, without any impact on its EPR properties. In summary, Figure 3 shows that within physiologically relevant limits of ionic strength/osmolarity and pH value, there was negligible effect of these parameters on the EPR line width of radical **9**.

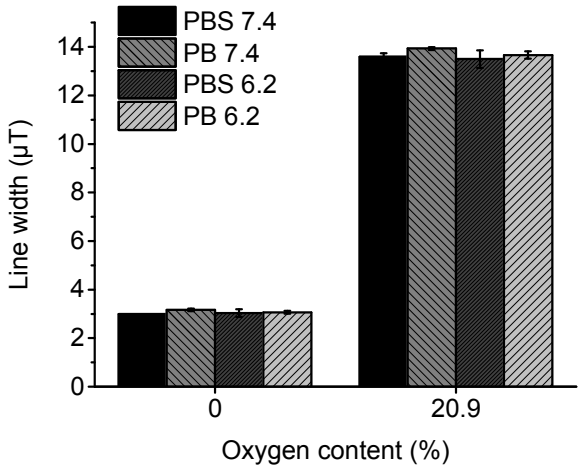


Figure 3. EPR line widths of radical **9** (c = 50 μM) in PB (pH 6.2 and 7.4) and PBS (pH 6.2 and 7.4) under aerated (20.9 % O_2) and deoxygenated (~ 0 % O_2) conditions (mean ± SD, n = 3).

Impact of viscosity:

To investigate the effect of viscosity on the apparent EPR line width of hydrophilic trityl radicals, radical **9** was dissolved (c = 50 μM) in different glycerol-water mixtures (0 % – 90 % glycerol in water, m/m). In absolute glycerol, radical **9** was insoluble. With increasing percentage of glycerol, oxygen solubility and, hence, concentration of dissolved oxygen are decreased.[48] Accordingly, under aerobic conditions, between 0 % and 60 % (m/m) glycerol content, a decrease in the EPR line width was detected. It was followed by a sharp increase caused by the strong increase of viscosity of the glycerol-water-mixtures above 50 % (m/m) glycerol content (Figure 4). To support this assumption, the measurements were repeated under deoxygenated conditions. It was found that up to 40 % (m/m) of glycerol, the impact of viscosity on the EPR line width was negligible if compared to the effect of oxygen (see section Oxygen calibration). A sharp increase in the EPR line width followed, similar to the aerated samples. Our findings are in agreement

with the literature.[11] These results are important with regard to biomedical applications as blood has a dynamic viscosity of η = 3-4 mPa·s at 37 °C,[49] which is only reached at 40 % (m/m) of glycerol in water at 20 °C.[50] So provided that there is no specific interaction with biological structures, viscosity by itself should have hardly any effect on EPR line width when using the radicals dissolved in plasma or blood.

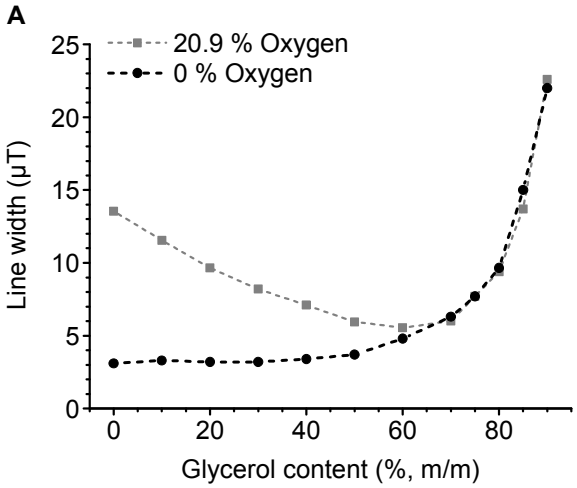


Figure 4. Change in the apparent EPR line width of radical **9** (c = 50 μM) on different glycerol-water mixtures.

EPR spectroscopic characterization of lipophilic trityl radicals in oily solution

The tri-esters of the trityl radicals investigated in this work (**7**, **8**, **11**, **13**, **18**, and **19**; see Scheme 1 and Scheme 2) proved to be very lipophilic. When these radicals were distributed between octanol and water or middle-chain triglycerides (MCT) and PBS (pH = 7.4) for 2 h at 37 °C, the EPR signal resided in the lipophilic solvent (octanol or MCT) exclusively.

Hence, these trityl radicals were analyzed in oily solution. MCT was chosen because it is generally considered to be biologically inert and it already has a long tradition as an ingredient in medicinal products, such as parenteral nutrition nanoemulsions.[51] However, for our purposes, it

has a relatively high viscosity of about η = 25-33 mPa·s at 20 °C. As a consequence, the EPR lines are broadened. This may affect the resolution of the EPR spectra and complicate EPR studies. In addition, signal-to-noise ratios are generally lower in highly viscous media since the EPR amplitude is inversely proportional to the square of the line width.[52] As an alternative, the less viscous isopropyl myristate (IPM; η = 5-6 mPa·s at 20 °C) was tested. It is also non-toxic and commonly used, *e.g.*, in topical pharmaceutical formulations.[53]

Solutions of the lipophilic radicals **7**, **8**, **11**, **13**, **18**, and **19** in MCT and IPM (c = 1 mM) were investigated in air (20.9 % O_2) and after flushing with nitrogen (~ 0 % O_2). Figure 5 shows the EPR spectra of several trityl radicals in IPM under anoxic conditions. The estimated line widths are listed in

. As predicted from the higher viscosity, the EPR lines under anoxic conditions were broader in MCT. In air, however, the lines were broader in IPM. This is attributed to the higher oxygen solubility and correspondingly higher oxygen content, overruling the effect of viscosity (see next section).

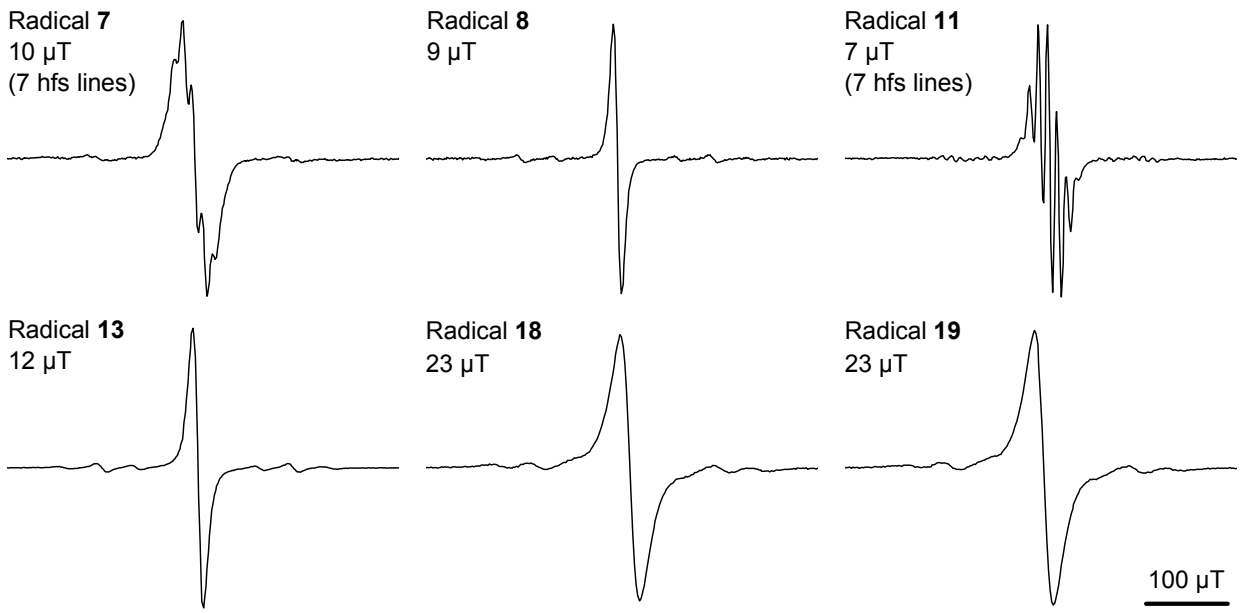


Figure 5. EPR signals of radicals **7**, **8**, **11**, **13**, **18**, and **19** and line widths under anaerobic conditions (~ 0 % O_2) in IPM (c = 1 mM) (hfs = hyperfine splitting). The small side bands caused by hyperfine couplings with ^{13}C were not used in this analysis.

Under anaerobic conditions, the signal of radical **11** displayed superhyperfine coupling with the six equivalent protons of the three methylene groups of the ethyl ester moieties resulting in seven equidistant lines with relative intensities of 1 : 6 : 15 : 20 : 15 : 6 : 1, a coupling constant of a = 11.3 µT. The coupling pattern was much better resolved in the less viscous IPM. The same ester, but with protonated instead of deuterated methyl groups in the ketal moiety (radical **7**), resonated with slightly broader EPR line widths compared to radical **11**. The additional superhyperfine coupling with the protons of the methyl groups affected the signal pattern in deoxygenated solutions (Figure 5). In MCT, only the envelope of the coupling pattern was visible. Deuterium with a nuclear spin of 1 of course also couples with the electron, but the coupling constant is much smaller compared to the coupling constant of hydrogen.

The *tert*-butyl ester of the non-deuterated trityl (radical **8**) displayed the narrowest single EPR line we observed for the lipophilic esters investigated. As expected, due to the small unresolved hfs with the protons of the *tert*-butyl moieties, the line width in anoxic IPM was slightly broader when compared to the hfs lines of radical **11**. Fully deuterated ethyl ester and methyl ketal groups (radical **13**) also led to exceptionally narrow single lines. Compared to radicals **8** and **11**, the lines were slightly broader in anoxic solutions caused by the unresolved coupling with deuterium nuclei. However, because radical **13** had a better synthetic accessibility than **8**, it was chosen for the following oxygen calibration measurements and encapsulation investigations.

Due to the chlorine splitting, the tetrachloro-TAM tri-esters generally had broader EPR lines than the tetrathia-TAM derivatives. The *tert*-butyl ester (radical **19**) displayed the same line width as the tri-ethyl ester (radical **18**) in IPM, while in MCT, the line widths were slightly broader. The extremely narrow anoxic line width of **18** and **19** in IPM is remarkable. To our knowledge, only in deoxygenated DMSO (viscosity: 2 mPa·s at 20 °C), a line width < 30 μT (namely approx. 28 μT) was reported for tetrachloro-TAM radicals in the literature.[29] Even when dissolved in deoxygenated hexafluorobenzene, the line width of radical **18** was approx. 38 μT, although the viscosity is only 1.2 mPa·s (at 20 °C).

Oxygen calibration

In this section, the applicability of the selected trityl radicals as oxygen-sensitive spin probes was evaluated. For atmospheric pressure and *in vivo* applications, only the data between approx. 0 and 20.9 % (0–156 mmHg) oxygen are of interest. Solutions of the hydrophilic radicals **9** and **10** (c = 50 μM) in PBS (pH = 7.4) showed a linear relationship between the EPR line width and oxygen concentration with similar oxygen sensitivities as reported[23,45] (Figure 6A). As expected, radical **9** had a narrower line width (ΔB_{PP} = (13.6 ± 0.2) μT at 20.9 % O_2) than its undeuterated

analogue **10** (ΔB_{PP} = (16.5 ± 0.1) µT at 20.9 % O_2). The slope of the curves, *i.e.*, the oxygen sensitivity, was with about 0.5 µT/% O_2 (0.07 µT/mmHg) quite small. As mentioned before, the EPR lines of soluble spin probes are broadened by Heisenberg exchange between the probes and molecular oxygen in solution. According to the Smoluchowski equation, the higher the concentration of dissolved oxygen, the higher is the bimolecular collision rate. Due to the low solubility of oxygen in water (the oxygen content in water is only approx. 0.6 % (v/v) at 22 °C and 0.213 bar oxygen),[47] the concentration of dissolved oxygen increases only slightly with increasing oxygen partial pressure. Hence, there is only small line broadening, a physicochemical fact affecting any oxygen determination by soluble EPR spin probes in water that is rarely stated.

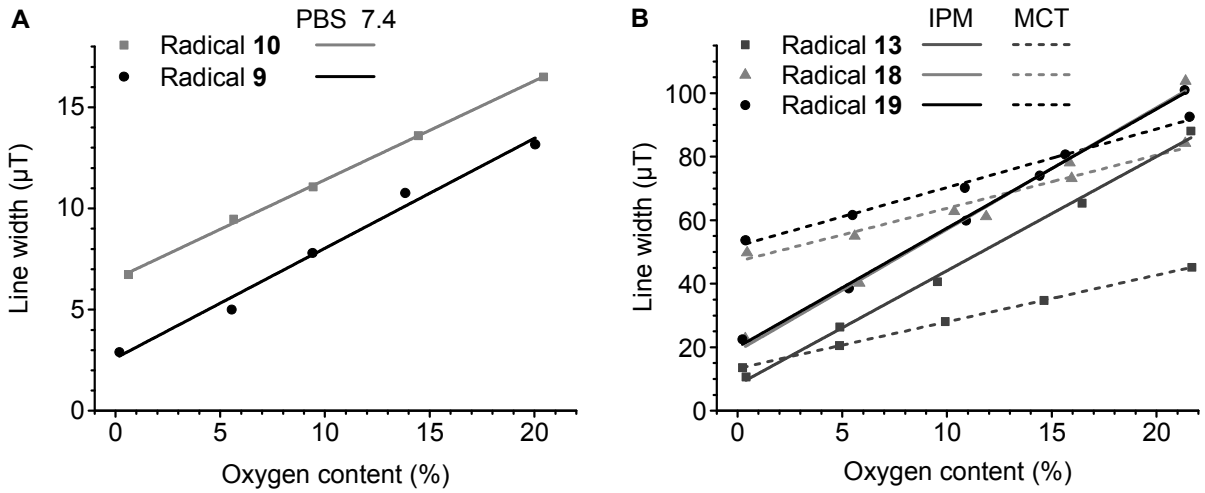


Figure 6. Oxygen calibration curves of (**A**) hydrophilic trityl radicals in aqueous solution (c = 50 µM) and (**B**) lipophilic tri-esters dissolved in MCT and IPM (c = 1 mM) (n=3).

The oxygen sensitivities of the lipophilic radicals **13**, **18**, and **19** (c = 1 mM) were about 1.7 µT/% O_2 (0.2 µT/mmHg) in MCT and 3.7 µT/% O_2 (0.5 µT/mmHg) in IPM (Figure 6B and

).

Table 1. EPR line widths of different lipophilic TAM tri-esters dissolved in MCT and IPM (c = 1 mM) in air (20.9 % O_2) as well as after flushing with nitrogen (~ 0 % O_2) and their corresponding oxygen sensitivities reported as mean ± SD (n = 3; n.m. = not measured).

Radical	***MCT***				***IPM***			
	EPR line width (µT)		*Oxygen sensitivity*		*EPR line width (µT)*		*Oxygen sensitivity*	
	~ 0 % O_2	*20.9 % O_2*	*µT/% O_2*	*µT/mmHg*	*~ 0 % O_2*	*20.9 % O_2*	*µT/% O_2*	*µT/mmHg*
7	15 (7 hfs lines)	57	n.m.		10 (7 hfs lines)	94	n.m.	
8	n.m.	n.m.	n.m.		9	88	n.m.	
11	10 (7 hfs lines)	53	n.m.		7 (7 hfs lines)	91	n.m.	
13	15	44	1.47 ± 0.01	0.20 ± 0.01	12	83	3.59 ± 0.13	0.48 ± 0.02
18	51	82	1.67 ± 0.12	0.23 ± 0.02	23	98	3.83 ± 0.19	0.52 ± 0.03
19	53	90	1.84 ± 0.08	0.25 ± 0.02	23	98	3.75 ± 0.10	0.51 ± 0.02

Oxygen solubility in oils is generally higher than in water at a given temperature and pressure,[54] such that the concentration of dissolved oxygen rises noticeably with increasing oxygen partial pressure. Accordingly, the slopes were steeper than in water. By gas chromatography, we determined oxygen contents of 2.2 % (v/v) in MCT and 2.9 % (v/v) in IPM at 22 °C and 0.213 bar oxygen, both markedly above the oxygen content of water. The different slopes in MCT and IPM were probably caused by the different polarity and especially viscosity of the oils. Remarkably, chemically different radicals, *e.g.*, radicals **13** and **18**, had similar oxygen sensitivities when dissolved in the same solvent. Smaller deviations might be attributed to resolved or unresolved hfs. So obviously, the oxygen sensitivity was rather affected by the nature of the solvent than the

properties of the radical. However, the *y*-intercepts, *i.e.*, line widths under anoxic conditions, were quite unlike for different radicals as discussed in the previous section.

Of all investigated spin probes and solvents, a solution of radical **13** in IPM was considered best for oxygen measurements: It had the steepest slope with the smallest *y*-intercept. Hence, it combined both excellent oxygen sensitivity and good signal-to-noise-ratio. The high oxygen sensitivity in IPM is comparable with particulate oxygen-sensitive spin probes, such as Lithium phthalocyanine (LiPc)[55] or Lithium octabutoxynaphthalocyanine (LiNc-BuO)[56] and, thus, very promising for future applications in the field of EPR oximetry as an alternative to particulate materials. For instance, trityl radicals can be employed in lipophilic formulations as it was reported in the literature, *e.g.*, with microspheres,[17] hexafluorobenzene nanoemulsions or solutions,[14,15] or polydimethyl siloxane chips.[16] The present work shows the incorporation into nanocapsules (see next section).

Encapsulation of trityl esters and properties of the resulting nanocapsules (NCs)

Our studies had shown that to some extent the EPR properties of different water soluble trityl radicals were independent of their environment, excepting the parameter of interest, *viz.* oxygen. However, during *in vitro* or *in vivo* experiments, conditions can change drastically. Therefore, it was assumed that formulations such as NCs might be a helpful approach. If dissolved in the oily core of NCs, the spin probes are located in a constant microenvironment without being affected by changes of the outer pH value or viscosity. Thereby, NCs can also be used in acidic conditions where hydrophilic trityl radicals would precipitate. Moreover, oxygen molecules can penetrate the capsule shell, turning NCs into oxygen sensors. Since the oxygen solubility in oils is higher than in water, the oxygen sensitivity of the spin probes would be improved by encapsulation (see

section above). Highly lipophilic encapsulated probes would stay inside the NCs without being partitioned to the outer aqueous phase, shielding them from oxidoreductants. It is known that suitable formulations are needed to prevent spin probe-tissue interactions in long-term *in vivo* studies.[12] So not only the oxygen-responsiveness of the spin probes would be preserved but also their bio-compatibility improved.

Preparation of the NCs:

The non-biodegradable polymer poly(vinyl acetate) (PVAc), which already had been successfully used as a polymer matrix for particulate spin probes,[57] was chosen for encapsulation of the oily spin probe solutions. NCs with different concentrations (varying from 0.1 to 2 %) of PVAc (m/m) and MCT (v/m) in the organic phase were prepared. As a hydrophilic stabilizer, poloxamer 188 (0.25 % (m/m) in the aqueous phase) was used, and acetone as the organic solvent. In order to obtain the best signal-to-noise ratio of the EPR spectra, the amount of oil inside the NCs needed to be high. On the other hand, the polymer shell surrounding the oily core should be as thin as possible since oxygen has to permeate through the shell. Therefore, NCs should have lowest possible PVAc and highest possible oil contents. It was found that a concentration of 0.2 % (m/m) PVAc and 1.4 % (v/m) MCT was optimal. In contrast to MCT, it was not possible to obtain stable NCs containing IPM using poloxamer 188. Therefore, other stabilizers were tested and polysorbate 80 proved to be suitable. The best formulation contained 0.2 % (m/m) PVAc and 1.2 % IPM (v/m) in the organic phase and 0.2 % (m/m) polysorbate 80 in the aqueous phase.

Particle size, zeta potential (ZP), morphology and stability of the NCs:

The size of the NCs was determined by photon correlation spectroscopy (PCS). The hydrodynamic diameter (Z-average) typically was about 160 nm for IPM NCs and about 150 nm for MCT NCs. The particle size distributions were monomodal and monodisperse, indicated by a very low polydispersity index (PdI) < 0.1. Figure 7A shows typical particle size distributions of MCT and IPM NCs. The morphology and shell thickness of the NCs were investigated using cryo- and freeze-fracture transmission electron microscopy (TEM). The capsules were spherical in shape, their size varied between approx. 50 and 180 nm (Figure 7B). The deviation from the PCS data might be explained by a particle selection, which usually occurs during sample preparation for cryoTEM. Therefore, the PCS data are considered to represent particle size better. Further, the PVAc shell thickness was determined. Fractured NCs clearly showed a structure with core and shell (Figure 7C). The shell thickness was with about 8 nm very thin, which is in accordance to the literature, where a shell thickness of 10 nm had been found for poly(lactic-*co*-glycoliv acid) (PLGA) NCs.[58] The ZP, as measured in double distilled water by laser Doppler electrophoresis, was found to be about 19–22 mV, providing relatively good colloidal stability. However, it must be stated that due to the stabilizers used, the main stabilization mechanism probably was static repulsion. The pH value of the dispersions was about 8, which was in a physiologically well tolerated range.

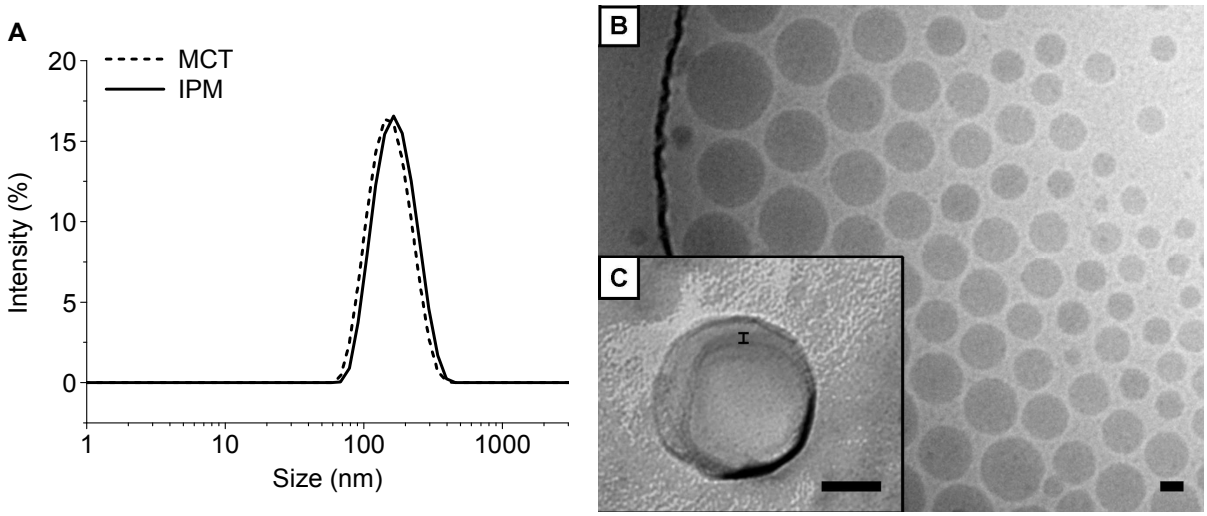


Figure 7. (**A**) Typical particle size distributions of MCT and IPM NCs. (**B**) Cryo-TEM image of MCT NCs and (**C**) Freeze-fracture TEM image of an IPM NC with an estimated shell thickness of about 8 nm (bar size: 50 nm).

In order to examine the stability of the NCs, their size and ZP as well as the pH value of the dispersion were not only measured on the day of preparation but also up to three months of storage at 2–8 °C (see Figure 8A,B).

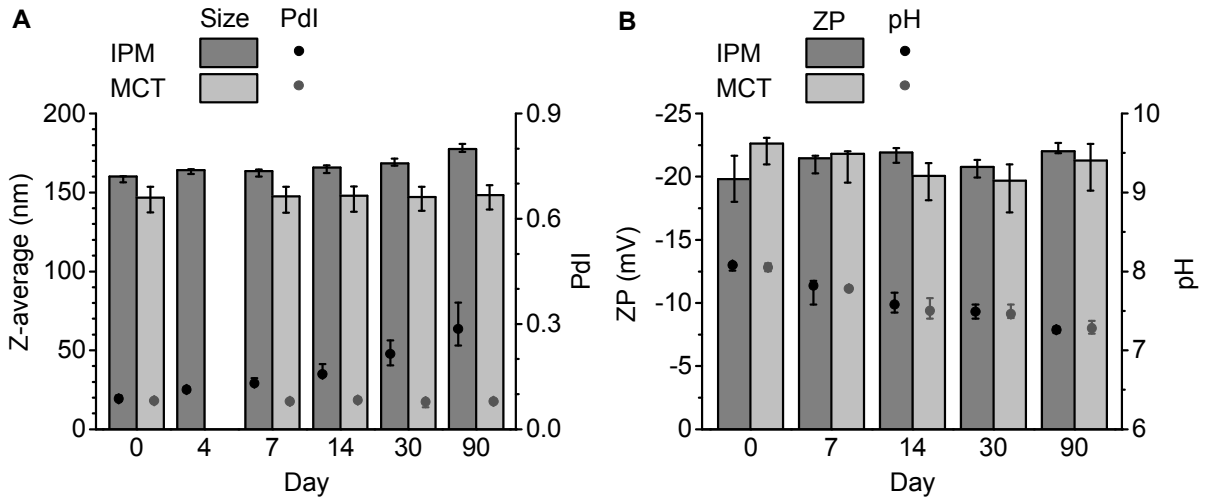


Figure 8. Change in (**A**) Z-average and PdI of the NCs as well as (**B**) ZP of the NCs and the pH value of the dispersion on duration of storage at 2–8 °C (n = 3; median and range are shown).

Whereas MCT NCs were stable over the whole measurement period, IPM NCs showed instabilities. The Z-average as well as the PdI changed over time of storage. Especially the increased PdI (from < 0.1 to > 0.2 after 30 days of storage) indicates aggregation. After one week of storage, creaming was observed for the IPM NCs, but not for MCT NCs. The reason might be the lower density of IPM with about 850 kg/m^3 compared to MCT with a density of about 950 kg/m^3. The NCs were redispersable by gentle shaking. However, it is assumed that creaming is the reason why IPM NCs tend to aggregate more because of the spatial proximity of the particles. Hence, IPM is less suitable for the preparation of long-term stable NCs. These findings are consistent with the literature.[59] For both oils used, the ZP was stable, whereas the pH value slightly decreased over time, which may have been due to a partial hydrolysis of PVAc and, therefore, release of acetic acid.

Oxygen calibration of the NCs:

The NCs prepared had similar oxygen sensitivities as the unencapsulated solutions (Figure 9). Thus, the encapsulation of the spin probes did not alter their oxygen sensitive properties. Oxygen obviously diffuses through the polymer shell without any hindrance. The process was reversible (data not shown), meaning that no oxygen was accumulated inside the NCs.

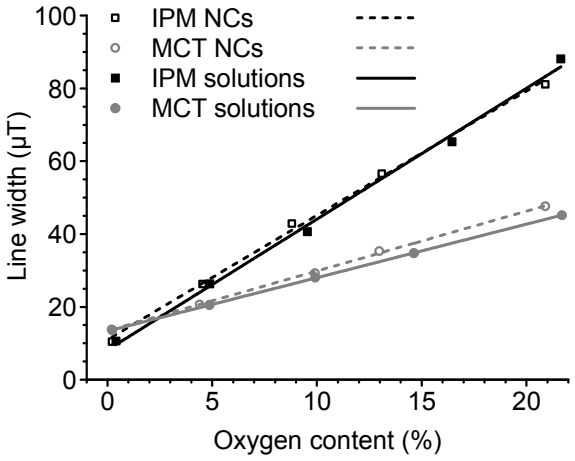


Figure 9. Oxygen calibration curves of oily solutions of radical **13** both incorporated into NCs and unencapsulated. The calculated oxygen sensitivities were (0.46 ± 0.02) µT/mmHg (IPM) and (0.22 ± 0.01) µT/mmHg (MCT) for the NCs compared to (0.48 ± 0.02) µT/mmHg (IPM) and (0.20 ± 0.01) µT/mmHg (MCT) for the unencapsulated solutions (n = 3).

Ascorbic acid reduction assay:

Since the lipophilic tri-esters (*e.g.*, radical **13**) are uncharged, they may be less protected from reduction by negatively charged reductants since there is no electric repulsion.[18,23] To investigate the stability of encapsulated radicals against reduction, an ascorbic acid reduction assay was carried out. For this, NCs containing solutions of either tempol benzoate (TB) or radical **13** in MCT (c = 1 mM) were prepared. TB is a nitroxide with a log P of approx. 2.[60] It was chosen for comparison because even though it is lipophilic enough for encapsulation, TB is still soluble in water. It is able to partly diffuse through the polymer shell and partition between the two phases. Once outside the NC, it can be reduced by ascorbic acid. Hence, it serves as a positive control.

As can be seen in Figure 10, TB was reduced by ascorbic acid. The EPR signal intensity decreased to about 11 % of the start value within 240 min. Comparable results had also been found for PLGA NCc.[61] In contrast, radical **13** seemed to stay shielded inside the NCs as it was not reduced by ascorbic acid after 240 min. The result proves that the capsule shell is capable to

sterically shield the incorporated radical from reductants. Moreover, it shows that a very high lipophilicity and correspondingly low water solubility is crucial for effective protection of encapsulated radicals.

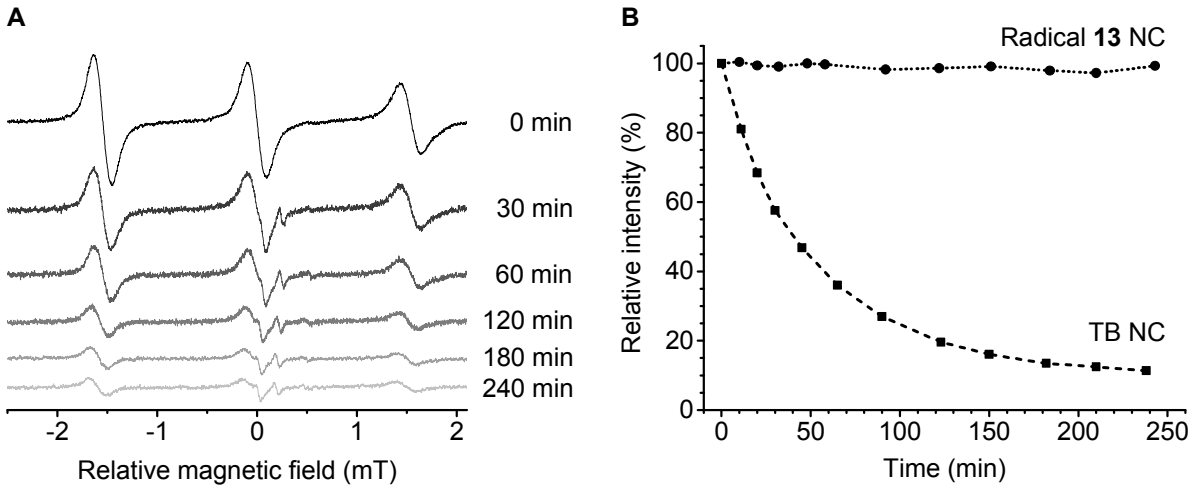


Figure 10. (**A**) EPR spectra of NCs containing TB during reduction by ascorbic acid. Note that the dublett in central position arises from ascorbic acid. (**B**) Change of the EPR signal intensity of NCs with incorporated TB compared to NCs with radical **13**.

CONCLUSION

Reproducible protocols for the synthesis of different derivatives of tetrathia- and tetrachloro-TAM radicals are described. A new readily accessible trityl derivative (radical **13**) with deuterated core and deuterated ethyl ester groups was devised. The EPR properties of the synthesized radicals were investigated in either aqueous media (hydrophilic radicals) or MCT and IPM (lipophilic tri-esters). It was shown that within physiological limits of osmolarity, viscosity, and pH value, there was, for practical purposes, no impact on the EPR line widths of the hydrophilic radicals. The non-deuterated lipophilic tri-ethyl esters of C-TAM or D-TAM (radicals **7** and **11**)

showed hyperfine splitting in deoxygenated solutions. Other tri-esters exhibited single EPR lines with line widths directly proportional to the oxygen concentration, rendering them candidates for oxygen measurements. The fully deuterated tri-ethyl ester of D-TAM (radical **13**) had the most promising EPR properties, especially when dissolved in IPM. It had a very narrow EPR line under anoxic conditions and high oxygen sensitivity (~ 0.5 μT/mmHg). Therefore, solutions of radical **13** in MCT and IPM were encapsulated into NCs. The oxygen responsiveness of the incorporated radical was retained. Using IPM for encapsulation, a high oxygen sensitivity of the NCs could be ensured, especially suitable for measuring low oxygen contents. MCT provided stable NCs for long-term measurements. In addition, despite being uncharged, encapsulated lipophilic trityl radicals were protected against reducing agents such as ascorbic acid. Hydrophilic trityl radicals were shown to be useful EPR oximetry probes, but since the concentration of dissolved oxygen in water does not change much with oxygen partial pressure, lipophilic radicals in oily core NCs led to higher oxygen sensitivity than any water soluble probe can provide. Encapsulation of lipophilic trityl radicals offers potential for nanosensors with high oxygen sensitivity, specificity, and stability, particularly suitable for EPR oximetry in complex biological systems.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

Materials.

All chemicals used for synthesis were purchased and used without further purification. Medium-chain triglycerides (Pionier® MCT) and isopropyl myristate (Pionier® IPM) were purchased from

Hansen & Rosenthal KG (Hamburg, Germany), Poloxamer 188 (Lutrol® F 68) from BASF SE (Ludwigshafen, Germany), and Polysorbate 80 from Caesar & Loretz GmbH (Hilden, Germany). BASF SE kindly provided Poly(vinyl acetate) (PVAc) dispersion 30 % (Kollicoat® SR 30 D). Water was used in doubly distilled quality.

General Methods for Synthesis.

All organic solvents were purified and dried before use and stored over molecular sieves (3 Å). Glassware for reactions under argon atmosphere was oven-dried at 100 °C for 2 h prior to use, evacuated, and flushed with argon immediately. The purity of all compounds and the progress of reactions were monitored by thin layer chromatography (TLC) using silica gel 60 F_{254} plates (Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany). Visualizations were accomplished with an UV lamp (254 nm) or iodine staining and the R_f values given are uncorrected. Purification of the compounds was achieved either by crystallization from appropriate solvents or by flash chromatography. Chemical shifts (δ) are reported in parts per million (ppm) relative to the residual non-deuterated solvent peak in the corresponding spectra (chloroform δ = 7.26, methanol δ = 3.31, DMSO δ = 2.49). The splitting pattern was assigned as follows: s = singlet, bs = broad singlet, d = doublet, t = triplet, q = quartet, m = multiplet and coupling constants (J) are given in Hertz (Hz). ^{13}C NMR chemical shifts were reported as δ values (ppm) relative to the residual non-deuterated solvent peak in the corresponding spectra (chloroform δ = 77.2, methanol δ = 49.0, DMSO δ = 39.5). The samples were analyzed on an orbitrap XL mass spectrometer with a resolving power of 100000 at m/z 400, samples were introduced to the MS by static nano-electrospray ionization.

*2,2,6,6-Tetramethylbenzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis[1,3]dithiole (**2a**).*[10,40,42]

HBF_4 (54 % in Et_2O, 10 mL, 37.0 mmol) was added to a solution of 1,2,4,5-tetra(*tert*-butylthio)benzene (**1**) (16.0 g, 37.2 mmol) in toluene (500 mL). The mixture was stirred for 30 min at RT. Acetone (10 mL, 136 mmol) was added and the reaction mixture was stirred for 4 h at RT, and then heated to reflux overnight. After cooling, a saturated $NaHCO_3$ solution (100 mL) was added carefully, the organic layer was separated and the aqueous layer extracted three times with ethyl acetate (EA). The combined organic layers were dried over $MgSO_4$ and concentrated in vacuum. Ethanol (50 mL) was added to the brown solution. The pure product was precipitated and collected by filtration, washed several times with EtOH and dried to give 7.2 g (68 % yield) of white crystals, *mp* 145–147 °C, R_f = 0.32 (heptane). ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 7.02 (s, 2H), 1.88 (s, 12H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 135.7, 116.8, 65.7, 31.3. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{12}H_{14}S_4$ $[M]^+$ 285.998; found 285.997.

*2,2,6,6-Tetra($^2H_3$-methyl)benzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis[1,3]dithiole (**2b**).*[9,21,22] The rocedure used for **2a** was applied for the synthesis of **2b** using HBF_4 (54 % in Et_2O, 10 mL, 37.0 mmol), compound **1** (16.0 g, 37.2 mmol) in toluene (500 mL) and acetone-d_6 (10 mL, 148 mmol) to afford compound **2b** 7.8 g (70 % yield) as white solid, *mp* 143–145 °C, R_f = 0.35 (heptane). ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 7.02 (s, 2H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 135.7, 116.8, 65.7, 31.3. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{12}H_2D_{12}S_4$ $[M]^+$ 298.073; found 298.073.

*Tris[2,2,6,6-tetramethylbenzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methanol (**3a**).*[10,40,42] Compound **2a** (3.5 g, 12.2 mmol) was dissolved in dry diethyl ether (Et_2O) (150 mL) under argon atmosphere. A solution of 2.5 M *n*-BuLi in hexanes (4.88 mL, 12.2 mmol) was added dropwise, and the reaction mixture was stirred for 2 h at RT. Methyl chloroformate (0.32 mL, 4.0 mmol) was mixed with Et_2O (40 mL) and the mixture was added slowly with a perfusion pump (flow

rate 1 mL/h). Saturated $NaHCO_3$ solution (100 mL) was added and the reaction mixture was allowed to stir till the formed precipitate completely dissolved. The organic layer was separated and the aqueous layer extracted with EA. The combined organic layers were dried over $MgSO_4$ and solvent was evaporated to dryness in a vacuum. The resulting solid was heated at reflux in a mixture of CCl_4 and hexane (1/1, v/v) for 15 min. After cooling, the yellow solid was collected, washed with CCl_4/hexane (1/1, v/v), and dried in a vacuum to give 1.7 g (47 % yield) of yellowish solid, *mp* 250–255 °C, R_f = 0.32 (heptane). ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 7.17 (s, 3H), 6.20 (s, 1H), 1.82 (s, 9H), 1.80 (s, 9H), 1.72 (s, 9H), 1.68 (s, 9H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 139.2, 138.3, 137.8, 137.2, 131.8, 118.1, 83.6, 64.0, 63.3, 34.8, 32.2, 29.1, 27.6. IR (KBr): ν = 3364, 2954, 2921, 1451, 1147, 756 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{37}H_{40}OS_{12}$ $[M]^+$ 883.973; found 883.973.

Tris[2,2,6,6-($^2H_3$-tetramethyl)benzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methanol ***(3b)***.[9,21,22] The procedure for the synthesis of **3a** was applied for the synthesis of **3b**. Compound **2b** (3.49 g, 11.7 mmol), *n*-BuLi (4.7 mL, 11.7 mmol) and methyl chloroformate (0.3 mL, 3.9 mmol) in dry Et_2O (150 mL) were used to give **3b** 1.62 g (45 % yield) as white to yellow solid, *mp* 250–255 °C, R_f = 0.35 (heptane). ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 7.17 (s, 3H), 6.21 (s, 1H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 139.5, 138.6, 138.1, 137.6, 132.2, 118.5, 83.9, 63.9, 63.6, 63.2. IR (KBr): ν = 3360, 2953, 2922, 2217, 1374, 1247, 1182, 1003, 861, 754 cm^{-1}. MS (ESI): *m/z* 943.12 $[M + Na]^+$.

Tris[8-ethoxycarbonyl-2,2,6,6-tetramethylbenzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methanol ***(4)***.[23,40] Compound **3a** (500 mg, 0.57 mmol) and TMEDA (0.85 mL, 5.7 mmol) were mixed in dry *n*-hexane (5 mL) under argon atmosphere and cooled to 0 °C. A solution of 2.5 M *n*-BuLi in hexane (2.3 mL, 5.7 mmol) was added dropwise over 30 min and the mixture was stirred at RT

for 3.5 h. Anhydrous toluene (10 mL) was added and the reaction mixture was allowed to stir for an additional 1 h, then added slowly via syringe to cold (–25 °C, cooling bath temperature) diethyl carbonate (3.42 mL, 28.3 mmol) diluted with toluene (5 mL). The reaction mixture was allowed to reach RT and stirred overnight. Saturated NaH_2PO_4 solution (10 mL) was added, the organic layer was separated and the aqueous layer was extracted three times with Et_2O (10 mL). The combined organic layer was washed with water, dried over $MgSO_4$ and the filtrate was passed through short silica plug. The residue was purified with silica gel eluting with (heptane/EA, 9/1) to give 301.4 mg (48 % yield) of yellow solid, *mp* 280 °C, R_f = 0.4 (heptane/EA, 7/3). ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 6.77 (s, 1H), 4.50 – 4.36 (m, 6H), 1.77 (s, 9H), 1.75 (s, 9H), 1.66 (s, 18H), 1.46 (t, J = 7.1 Hz, 9H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 166.2, 141.8, 141.4, 140.3, 139.2, 134.0, 121.3, 84.4, 62.3, 60.9, 60.9, 33.8, 31.9, 29.2, 28.7, 14.3. IR (KBr): ν = 3339, 2975, 1705, 1244, 1221, 1022, 754 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{46}H_{52}O_7S_{12}$ $[M]^+$ 1100.035; found 1100.036.

*Tris[8-tert-butoxycarbonyl-2,2,6,6-tetramethylbenzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methanol (**5**).*[10,38] Compound **3a** (1.0 g, 1.13 mmol) and TMEDA (1.7 mL, 11.3 mmol) were mixed in dry *n*-hexane (10 mL) under argon atmosphere and cooled to 0 °C. A solution of 2.5 M *n*-BuLi in hexane (4.52 mL, 11.3 mmol) was added dropwise over 30 min and the mixture was stirred at RT for 3.5 h. Anhydrous toluene (20 mL) was added and the reaction mixture was allowed to stir for an additional 1 h, then added slowly via syringe to cold (–10 °C, cooling bath temperature) DiBoc (24.66 g, 113 mmol) soaked with toluene (10 mL). The reaction mixture was allowed to reach RT and stirred for 2 days. The reaction was quenched with MeOH (20 mL) added portionwise until no more gas release was observed. The resulting mixture was evaporated and the thick residue obtained partitioned between aqueous HCl (2 M) and EA. The organic

phase was separated, washed with water and dried over Na_2SO_4. The solvent was evaporated and the residue purified with silica gel eluting with heptane/EA (9/1) to give 522 mg (39 % yield) of yellow solid, *mp* 200–210 °C, R_f = 0.5 (heptane/EA, 7/3). ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 6.72 (s, 1H), 1.77 (s, 9H), 1.74 (s, 9H), 1.65 (s, 45H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 165.3, 141.2, 140.8, 140.2, 139.1, 133.8, 122.8, 84.2, 60.90, 34.0, 31.9, 29.3, 28.6, 28.4. IR (KBr): ν = 3347, 2977, 2923, 2863, 1698, 1506, 1453, 1365, 1315, 1253, 1220, 1160, 1103, 1011, 845, 755 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{52}H_{64}O_7S_{12}$ $[M]^+$ 1184.129; found 1184.131.

*Tris[8-tert-butoxycarbonyl-2,2,6,6-($^2H_3$-tetramethyl)benzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methanol (**6**).*[9] The procedure for the synthesis of **5** was applied for the synthesis of **6**. Compound **3b** (1.0 g, 1.08 mmol), TMEDA (1.64 mL, 10.85 mmol), *n*-BuLi (4.34 mL, 10.85 mmol) and DiBoc (23.68 g, 108.5 mmol) were used to give 528 mg (40 % yield) of **6** as yellow solid, *mp* 200–210 °C, R_f = 0.3 (heptane/EA, 5/1). ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 6.72 (s, 1H), 1.65 (s, 27H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 165.7, 141.5, 141.2, 140.6, 139.4, 134.1, 123.2, 84.5, 60.8, 28.7. IR (KBr): ν = 3351, 2978, 2927, 1701, 1506, 1476, 1455, 1393, 1368, 1314, 1253, 1221, 1161, 1124, 1023, 987, 896, 845 cm^{-1}. MS (ESI): *m/z* 1243.00 $[M + Na]^+$.

*Tris[8-ethoxycarbonyl-2,2,6,6-tetramethylbenzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methyl radical (**7**).*[23,42] $BF_3{\times}Et_2O$ (73 µL, 0.58 mmol) was added dropwise to a solution of compound **4** (80 mg, 0.073 mmol) in DCM (10 mL) at RT. The mixture was stirred in the dark for 1 h. A solution of $SnCl_2$ (234 mg, 1.23 mmol) dissolved in THF was added to the dark green-blue reaction mixture. The mixture was stirred for 10 min. Saturated KH_2PO_4 solution was added. The organic layer was separated, dried over Na_2SO_4, and concentrated in a vacuum to give 73 mg (92 % yield) of the titled radical as green-brown solid, *mp* 280 °C, R_f = 0.4 (heptane/EA, 7/3). IR

(KBr): ν = 2957, 2922, 2861, 1703, 1490, 1452, 1365, 1233, 1109, 1043, 792 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{46}H_{51}O_6S_{12}$ $[M]^+$ 1083.033; found 1083.034.

*Tris[8-tert-butoxycarbonyl-2,2,6,6-tetramethylbenzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methyl radical (**8**).*[38] The procedure used for the release of radical **7** was applied to release radical **8**. $BF_3{\times}Et_2O$ (85 µL, 0.67 mmol), compound **5** (100 mg, 0.084 mmol) in DCM (10 mL) and a solution of $SnCl_2$ (271.81 mg, 1.43 mmol) in THF were used to give 72 mg (73 % yield) of the radical **8** as green solid, *mp* 200–210 °C, R_f = 0.5 (heptane/EA, 7/3). IR (KBr): ν = 2957, 2923, 1696, 1489, 1454, 1366, 1306, 1280, 1240, 1163, 1135, 1111, 1034, 845 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd. for $C_{52}H_{63}O_6S_{12}$ $[M]^+$ 1167.127; found 1167.126.

*Tris[8-carboxy-2,2,6,6-($^2H_3$-tetramethyl)benzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methyl radical (**9**).*[9] Compound **6** (100 mg, 82 µmol) was treated with TFA (3 mL) and stirred at RT overnight. The reaction mixture was concentrated and dried to give 82.2 mg (97 % yield) as green-brown solid, *mp* 280 °C, R_f = 0.20 ($CHCl_3$/MeOH, 7/3). IR (KBr): ν = 3541–2730, 1666, 1576, 1401, 1345, 1239, 1050 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{40}H_3D_{36}O_6S_{12}$ $[M + H]^+$ 1036.173; found 1036.172; calcd for $C_{40}H_3D_{36}O_6S_{12}Na$ $[M + Na]^+$ 1058.155; found 1058.153.

*Tris[8-carboxy-2,2,6,6-tetramethylbenzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methyl radical (**10**).*[10,40] The procedure used for the synthesis of radical **9** was applied to synthesize radical **10**. Compound **5** (100 mg, 84 µmol) and TFA (3 mL) were reacted to give 79.7 mg (95 % yield) as green-brown solid, *mp* 280 °C, R_f = 0.20 ($CHCl_3$/MeOH, 7/3). IR (KBr): ν = 2956, 2921, 1674, 1485, 1451, 1385, 1365, 1226, 1167, 1148, 1111, 866, 725 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{40}H_{39}O_6S_{12}$ $[M]^+$ 998.939; found 998.940.

*Tris[8-ethoxy-2,2,6,6-($^2H_3$-tetramethyl)benzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methyl radical (**11**).*[21,22] Compound **9** (50 mg, 48.3 µmol, 1 eq.) and TEA (7 µL, 48.3 µmol, 1 eq.) were

dissolved in acetonitrile (5 mL) under argon atmosphere and cooled to 0 °C. Ethyl chloroformate (0.23 mL, 2.4 mmol, 50 eq.) diluted with acetonitrile (2.5 mL) was added dropwise. The mixture was stirred for further 5 min, then a solution of DMAP (147.5 mg, 1.21 mmol, 25 eq.) dissolved in acetonitrile (2 mL) was added. The reaction mixture was allowed to reach RT and stirred overnight. The reaction mixture was concentrated in a vacuum, the residue treated with $CHCl_3$ (10 mL), and washed with saturated $NaHCO_3$ solution. The organic layer was separated, washed with HCl (0.1 M, 5 mL) and water (5 mL), dried over $MgSO_4$ and concentrated in a vacuum to give 43 mg (79.4 % yield) of the titled radical as green-brown solid, *mp* 280 °C, R_f = 0.4 (heptane/EA, 7/3). IR (KBr): ν = 3326, 2925, 2850, 1702, 1627, 1575, 1232, 979 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{46}H_{15}D_{36}O_6S_{12}$ $[M]^+$ 1119.259; found 1119.259.

*Tris[8-chloro-carbonyl-2,2,6,6-($^2H_3$-tetramethyl)benzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methyl radical (**12**).*[18,40] Compound **9** (150 mg, 0.14 mmol) and dry TEA (121 µL, 0.87 mmol) were dissolved in anhydrous $CHCl_3$ (5 mL) and the mixture was stirred for 10 min at RT. A solution of $SOCl_2$ (105 µL, 1.45 mmol) in $CHCl_3$ (2 mL) was added dropwise over 20 min. The mixture was refluxed for 2.5 h, stirred overnight at RT, and then concentrated to dryness to give a red solid, which was directly used in the next step without further purification. R_f = 0.37 (heptane/EA, 7/3). IR (KBr): ν = 2978, 2945, 2738, 2620, 2602, 2531, 2496, 1699, 1475, 1444, 1398, 1383, 1230, 1172, 1037, 921, 850, 808 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{40}D_{36}Cl_3O_3S_{12}$ $[M]^+$ 1091.0605; found 1091.0611.

*Tris[8-($^2H_3$-ethoxy)-2,2,6,6-($^2H_3$-tetramethyl)benzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis([1,3]dithiole)-4-yl]methyl radical (**13**).* Method A: Compound **12** was dissolved in $CHCl_3$ (5 mL). EtOH-d_6 (0.72 mL, 12.32 mmol) and pyridine (19 µL, 0.24 mmol) were added, the reaction mixture was stirred at 60 °C for 4 h and then at RT overnight. The solvent was evaporated; the residue dissolved in

$CHCl_3$, washed with water, HCl (0.1 M), and again water three times. The separated organic layer was dried over $MgSO_4$, filtered through a short silica plug and dried to give 120 mg (73 % yield), *mp* 280 °C, R_f = 0.40 (heptane/EA, 7/3). MS (ESI): *m/z* 1158.16 $[M + Na]^+$. IR (KBr): ν = 3337, 2956, 2923, 2717, 2220, 1699, 1489, 1364, 1309, 1280, 1238, 1190, 1139, 1093, 1057, 1022, 980, 791, 753 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd. for $C_{46}D_{51}O_6S_{12}$ $[M]^+$ 1134.353; found 1134.355.

Method B: Synthesis of ethyl chloroformate-d_5: To a 2 M solution of phosgene in toluene (5 mL, 9.97 mmol) at 0 °C, pyridine (0.83 mL, 10.31 mmol) was added dropwise and the temperature was kept at 0–5 °C. EtOH-d_6 (0.6 mL, 9.97 mmol) was added dropwise. The reaction mixture was allowed to reach RT, stirred for 2 h and filtered. The filtrate was used for the next step.[62] The procedure used for the synthesis of radical **11** was applied for the synthesis of radical **13** – method B. Compound **9** (50 mg, 48.3 µmol, 1 eq.), TEA (7 µL, 48.3 µmol, 1 eq.), ethyl chloroformate-d_5 (272.5 mg, 0.24 mL, 2.4 mmol, 50 eq.), and DMAP (147.5 mg, 1.21 mmol, 25 eq.) were used to give 31 mg (56 % yield) of the title radical as green solid. The analytical data of **13** are in accordance with data mentioned above.

*Tris(2,3,5,6-tetrachlorophenyl)methane (**15**).*[43] 1,2,4,5-Tetrachlorobenzene (**14**) (9.6 g, 44 mmol), $AlCl_3$ (0.73 g, 5.2 mol) and $CHCl_3$ (0.4 mL, 4.9 mmol) were mixed in a glass pressure vessel and heated in an oil bath at 160 °C for 45 min. The mixture was then poured onto ice and HCl (1M, 50 mL) and extracted three times with $CHCl_3$. The organic layer was washed with water, aqueous $NaHCO_3$ and dried over Na_2SO_4. After evaporation, the residue was purified on silica gel eluting with heptane, to give 1.3 g (40 %, based on $CHCl_3$) as white crystals, *mp* 280 °C, R_f = 0.67 (heptane). ^1H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 7.65 (s, 3H), 6.98 (s, 1H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 138.9, 134.7, 133.9, 133.6, 132.7, 130.7, 56.4. IR (KBr): ν = 3112, 3067, 2926, 1547, 1409, 1387, 1348, 1322, 1235, 1199, 1164, 1099, 975, 866, 844, 782, 759, 704, 690 cm^{-1}.

EI-MS: 658 ($C_{19}H_4Cl_{12}$), 621 ($C_{19}H_4Cl_{11}$), 586 ($C_{19}H_4Cl_{10}$), 551 ($C_{19}H_4Cl_9$), 516 ($C_{19}H_4Cl_8$), 479 ($C_{19}H_4Cl_7$), 444 ($C_{19}H_4Cl_6$), 409 ($C_{19}H_4Cl_5$). HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{19}H_3Cl_{12}$ $[M - H]^-$ 656.640; found 656.639.

*Tris(4-ethoxycarbonyl-2,3,5,6-tetrachlorophenyl)methane (**16**).*[29] Compound **15** (950 mg, 1.44 mmol) and TMEDA (2.18 mL, 14.44 mmol) were dissolved in dry THF (100 mL) under argon atmosphere and cooled to –78 °C. A solution of 2.5 M *n*-BuLi in hexane (5.8 mL, 14.44 mmol) was added in one portion and the mixture was stirred at this temperature for 1 h. Ethyl chloroformate (1.37 mL, 14.44 mmol) was added and the reaction mixture allowed to reach RT overnight. The solvent was evaporated and the residue dissolved in DCM. The organic layer was washed with water and dried over $MgSO_4$. The solvent was evaporated under vacuum and the residue purified on silica gel eluting with heptane/EA (12/1) to give 1.0 g (81 % yield) of colorless solid, *mp* 173–175 °C, R_f = 0.26 (heptane/EA, 10/1). ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 7.01 (s, 1H), 4.5 (q, J = 7.1 Hz, 6H), 1.42 (t, J = 7.1 Hz, 9H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 163.1, 138.4, 135.5, 135, 134, 130.5, 129.5, 63.1, 56.3, 14. IR (KBr): v = 2958, 2926, 1744, 1555, 1465, 1445, 1372, 1341, 1329, 1299, 1263, 1225, 1207, 1121, 1095, 1019, 859 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{28}H_{17}Cl_{12}O_6$ $[M + H]^+$ 874.720; found 874.719.

*Tris(4-tert-butoxycarbonyl-2,3,5,6-tetrachlorophenyl)methane (**17**).* Compound **15** (500 mg, 0.76 mmol) and TMEDA (1.15 mL, 7.6 mmol) were dissolved in dry THF (50 mL) under argon atmosphere and cooled to –78 °C. A solution of 2.5 M *n*-BuLi in hexane (3 mL, 7.6 mmol) was added in one portion and the mixture stirred at this temperature for 1 h. The reaction mixture was added slowly via syringe to DiBoc (8.3 mg, 38 mmol), previously transferred to a dry flask and placed on ice bath. After the addition was complete, the reaction mixture was allowed to reach RT and stirred for 2 days. The reaction was quenched with MeOH (20 mL) added portionwise

until no more gas release was observed. The resulting mixture was evaporated and the thick residue obtained partitioned between aqueous HCl and $CHCl_3$. The organic phase was separated, washed with water and dried over $MgSO_4$. The solvent was evaporated and the residue purified on silica gel eluting with heptane/EA (10/1) to give 356.7 mg (49 % yield) of a sticky yellow solid, R_f = 0.33 (heptane/EA, 10/1).^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 6.99 (s, 1H), 1.62 (s, 27H). ^{13}C NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$): δ 162, 138, 136.2, 134.9, 133.9, 130.2, 129.2, 85.1, 56.2, 27.8. IR (KBr): v = 2979, 2932, 1736, 1553, 1457, 1394, 1369, 1337, 1274, 1255, 1232, 1157, 1121 cm^{-1}. MS (ESI): *m/z* 958.82 $[M + H]^+$. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{29}H_{19}Cl_{12}O_4$ $[M - COOC(CH_3)_3]^-$ 856.746; found 856.743.

*Tris(4-ethoxy-carbonyl-2,3,5,6-tetrachlorophenyl)methyl radical (**18**).*[29] A solution of 1 M Bu_4NOH in MeOH (0.69 mL, 0.69 mmol, 1.2 eq.) was added to a solution of compound **16** (500 mg, 0.57 mmol, 1 eq.) in freshly distilled THF (50 mL) under argon atmosphere. The mixture was stirred in the dark for 1 h. *p*-Chloranil (562.7 mg, 2.29 mmol, 4 eq.) was added as a solid. The mixture was stirred overnight. The solvent was removed,leaving a purple residue which was purified on silica gel eluting with heptane/EA (4/1) to give 432.8 mg (87 % yield) of red solid, *mp* 158–160 °C, R_f = 0.26 (heptane/EA, 10/1). IR (KBr): v = 2981, 1742, 1688, 1679, 1572, 1456, 1445, 1373, 1342, 1329, 1260, 1224, 1136, 1111, 1017, 857, 755 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{28}H_{15}Cl_{12}O_6$ $[M]^+$ 872.720; found 872.725.

*Tris(4-tert-butoxycarbonyl-2,3,5,6-tetrachlorophenyl)methyl radical (**19**).*[44] The procedure used for the synthesis of radical **18** was applied for the synthesis of radical **19**. A solution 1 M Bu_4NOH in methanol (0.3 mL, 0.25 mmol, 1.2 eq.), compound **17** (200 mg, 0.21 mmol, 1 eq.), and *p*-chloranil (205 mg, 0.84 mmol, 4 eq.) were reacted to give 160.7 mg (80 % yield) of red solid, *mp* 80–83 °C, R_f = 0.33 (heptane/EA, 10/1). IR (KBr): v = 2980, 2956, 2918, 2850, 1737,

1687, 1573, 1457, 1394, 1370, 1334, 1288, 1240, 1159, 1137, 839, 756 cm^{-1}. HRMS (ESI): calcd for $C_{34}H_{27}Cl_{12}O_6$ $[M]^-$ 956.799; found 956.795.

Sample preparation for EPR spectroscopic characterization

Radical **9** was dissolved (c = 50 µM) in four different buffer systems listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Buffer systems used to investigate the impact of different ionic strengths and pH values on the EPR line width of radical **9**.

Short name	*Long name*	*Buffer salts*	*I (mmol/L)*	c_{osm} *(mosmol/L)*	*pH*
PBS 7.4	Phosphate buffered saline pH 7.4 Ph.Eur.	Na_2HPO_4, KH_2PO_4 and NaCl	189	327	7.4
PB 7.4	Phosphate buffer 0,02 M pH 7.4	Na_2HPO_4, KH_2PO_4	49	55	7.4
PBS 6.2	Phosphate buffered saline pH 6.2	Na_2HPO_4, KH_2PO_4 and NaCl	180	349	6.2
PB 6.2	Phosphate buffer 0,04 M pH 6.2	Na_2HPO_4, KH_2PO_4	52	86	6.2

Additionally, radical **9** was dissolved (c = 50 µM) in mixtures of PBS 7.4 and absolute glycerol, the glycerol content of the mixtures ranging from 0 % to 90 % (m/m). Radical **10** was dissolved (c = 50 µM) in PBS 7.4. Radicals **13**, **18**, and **19** were dissolved (c = 1 mM) in MCT as well as IPM. All solutions were measured by EPR.

Preparation of NCs

NCs were prepared by interfacial polymer deposition following solvent displacement, a method which is also known as nanoprecipitation and was first described and patented by Fessi et al.[63] First, PVAc was isolated from Kollicoat® SR 30 D, which contained about 27 % PVAc with a relative molecular mass of about 450 000, 2 % povidone and 0.3 % sodium lauryl sulfate. The

dispersion was cast onto planar polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) coated glass plates. The dried films were washed in doubly distilled water for five days in order to remove the water soluble excipients and finally dried. The resulting PVAc was dissolved in acetone (0.2 %, w/w). An oily solution of the EPR spin probe (c = 1 mM) was added to form the organic phase. The organic phase was then injected slowly into an aqueous solution containing either poloxamer 188 or polysorbate 80 under vigorous magnetic stirring. After stirring for at least ten minutes, acetone and part of the water were removed by evaporation under reduced pressure at a maximum temperature of 30 °C. The final NCs contained 0.4 % (m/m) PVAc and either 2.8 % (v/m) MCT and 1 % (m/m) poloxamer 188 or 2.4 % (v/m) IPM and 0.8 % (m/m) polysorbate 80 and were stored at 2–8 °C for further use.

Characterization of the NCs

Particle sizes and ZP: Particle sizes and ZP were measured by PCS, also referred to as dynamic light scattering (DLS), and laser Doppler electrophoresis, respectively, using the Zetasizer Nano ZS (Malvern Instruments GmbH, Herrenberg, Germany). Each sample was diluted 1/25 (v/v) with filtered (pore size 0.22 µm) doubly distilled water, equilibrated at 25 °C and measured in quintuplicate. The size was measured with 15 runs for 10 s each in the backscattering mode at an angle of 173°, the ZP with 12 runs each and with a delay of 20 s between the runs. The viscosity was assumed to be 0.89 mPa·s. Malvern Zetasizer Software 6.30 was used to obtain Z-averages and PdI by cumulant analysis. The pH value was measured by a glass electrode (Knick Portamess® 911(X) pH combined with a pH sensor SE 103, Berlin, Germany). The size, ZP, and pH value of the nanoparticles were measured on the day of preparation as well as up to three months after storage.

TEM: TEM was used to investigate the morphology of the NCs. To obtain freeze-fracture images, the samples were freeze fixed one day after preparation using a propane jet-freeze device JFD 030 (BAL-TEC, Balzers, Lichtenstein). Thereafter, the samples were freeze-fractured at –150 °C without etching with a freeze fracture/freeze etching system BAF 060 (BAL-TEC, Balzers, Liechtenstein). The surfaces were shadowed with platinum to produce good topographic contrast (2 nm layer, shadowing angle 45°) and subsequently with carbon to stabilize the ultra-thin metal film (20 nm layer, shadowing angle 90°). The replica were floated in sodium chloride (4 %, Roth, Karlsruhe, Germany) for 30 min, rinsed in distilled water (10 min), washed in 30 % acetone (Roth, Karlsruhe, Germany) for 30 min and rinsed again in distilled water (10 min). Thereafter, the replica were mounted on copper grids, coated with formvar film and observed with a transmission electron microscope (LIBRA 120 PLUS, Carl Zeiss Microscopy GmbH, Oberkochen, Germany) operating at 120kV. Pictures were taken with a BM-2k-120 Dual-Speed on axis SSCCD-camera (TRS, Moorenweis, Germany). Vitrified specimens for cryo-TEM were prepared by a blotting procedure, performed in a chamber with controlled temperature and humidity using an EM GP grid plunger (LEICA, Wetzlar, Germany). A drop of the sample solution (c = 4 mg PVAc/ml) was placed onto an EM grid coated with a holey carbon film (C-flatTM, Protochips Inc., Raleigh, NC, USA). Excess solution was then removed with a filter paper, leaving a thin film of the solution spanning the holes of the carbon film on the EM grid. Vitrification of the thin film was achieved by rapid plunging of the grid into liquid ethane held just above its freezing point. The vitrified specimens were kept below 108 K during storage, transfers as well as investigation with the transmission electron microscope (see above). The microscope is equipped with a Gatan 626 cryotransfer system. The obtained electron microscopic images were

analyzed using the measureIT software (Olympus Soft Imaging Solutions GmbH, Münster, Germany).

Ascorbic acid reduction assay: The protective properties of the NCs shell against reduction of the incorporated trityl radical were investigated with an ascorbic acid reduction assay based on the one described by Rübe et al.[61] NCs dispersions containing a solution of radical **13** in MCT (c = 1 mM) were concentrated to half of the initial volume by evaporation under reduced pressure at a maximum temperature of 30 °C. One part of the dispersions was mixed (1/1, v/v) with PBS 7.4, the other one with a 2.5 mM solution of ascorbic acid in PBS 7.4. An aliquot of 50 µL each was measured in capillaries using an X-band EPR spectrometer. In the latter case, spectra were recorded for 4 h. Using the MagicPlot software (St. Petersburg, Russia), a first derivative Lorentzian function was fitted to the recorded line shape and its intensity was calculated as the second integral. The intensity of the spectrum measured in buffer only was defined as the 100 % value, all others were calculated relatively. For comparison, NCs containing TB dissolved in MCT (c = 1mM) were prepared and measured using the same method. In this case, a first derivative Gaussian function was fitted to the low field peak and integrated twice to obtain the signal intensity.

Measurements at defined oxygen contents

The samples were flushed with either pure nitrogen or defined mixtures of oxygen and nitrogen at a flow rate of 2 l/min for 3 min using septum vials and cannulae. An anaesthesia gas mixer with flow meter tubes (Dräger, Lübeck, Germany) provided defined gas mixtures. The partial pressure of oxygen (in mmHg) in the gas above the solution was confirmed by a needle-type optical oxygen microsensor with temperature control (Type PSt1, PreSens GmbH, Regensburg,

Germany) directly after the EPR measurements. Oxygen content (in %) in the gas above the solution was calculated assuming ambient pressure. Oxygen sensitivities were determined by plotting the EPR line widths as a function of the oxygen content and calculating the slope of the linear regression fit.

Oxygen solubilities

Gas chromatography was used to determine oxygen contents in MCT and IPM. Oils were equilibrated in air at 22 °C. After vacuum extraction, the gas mixtures were passed through a molecular sieve 5Å packed column using argon as carrier gas in a gas chromatograph with FID, methanizer, and TCD detectors (TOP TOGA GC system with gas extractor, ECH Elektrochemie, Halle, Germany). The area under the curve was determined and oxygen concentration was calculated by comparing with calibrations obtained from an external standard gas mixture.

EPR spectroscopy

If not stated otherwise, measurements were conducted in glass vials using an EPR spectrometer at 1.3 GHz (Magnettech, Berlin, Germany) equipped with a re-entrant resonator. Only for the NCs reduction assay, 50 µL of the samples were measured in capillaries using an X-band EPR spectrometer at 9.30–9.55 GHz (Miniscope MS 200, Magnettech, Berlin, Germany). Measurements were conducted under ambient conditions without temperature control. General settings were as follows: microwave power: usually < 1 mW, TB NCs: < 10 mW, modulation frequency: 100 kHz, sweep: 0.5–2 mT (depending on the line width), TB: 4.7 mT, scan time: 30–3000 s to obtain sufficient signal-to-noise ratios (scan velocity: 0.25-25 µT/s). The modulation amplitude was set, such that line distortions were avoided. The MagicPlot software (St. Petersburg, Russia)

was used for analysis. In general, a first derivative Lorentzian function was fitted to the data, and the apparent Lorentzian peak-to-peak line width, *i.e.*, the distance between the maximum and the minimum (ΔB_{PP}), was determined. Line widths < 8 μT were determined by measuring 90° phase-shifted. Thereby, the two modulation sidebands, having the same line width as the main line, were gathered without the main line. In this case, two Lorentzian functions with a distance of ± 3.6 μT from the main line were fitted to the data to extract the line width information. The maximum relative fit error was 2.5 %.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Proton and carbon NMR spectra of compound 17. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.

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