Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0032-3861(14)00369-3

DOI: 10.1016/j.polymer.2014.05.003

Reference: JPOL 16956

To appear in: *Polymer*

Received Date: 11 February 2014

Revised Date: 8 April 2014

Accepted Date: 2 May 2014

Please cite this article as: Zhao W, Glavas L, Odelius K, Edlund U, Albertsson A-C, A Robust Pathway to Electrically Conductive Hemicellulose Hydrogels with High and Controllable Swelling Behavior, *Polymer* (2014), doi: 10.1016/j.polymer.2014.05.003.

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1	A Robust Pathway to Electrically Conductive Hemicellulose Hydrogels with
2	High and Controllable Swelling Behavior
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10	Abstract: A robust pathway to synthesize electrically conductive hemicellulose hydrogels (ECHHs)
11	based on O-acetyl-galactoglucomannan (AcGGM) and conductive aniline tetramer (AT) is presented.
12	These ECHHs were obtained by functionalizing carboxylated AcGGM with glycidyl methacrylate
13	(GMA) and subsequently covalently immobilizing AT onto GMA. Hydrogel swelling ratios (SRs)
14	were regulated by the degree of substitution (DS) of the carboxylated AcGGM, the maximum varied
15	as follows: $SR_{DS=1.14}$ < $SR_{DS=0.60}$ < $SR_{DS=0.24}$. The SR can also be tuned from 548 % to 228 % by
16	changing the AT contents from 10 % (w/w) to 40 % (w/w) while simultaneously altering
17	conductivities from 2.93×10^{-8} to 1.12×10^{-6} . Free-standing ECHHs with tunable conductivity and
18	degree of swelling, as presented herein, have a broad potential for biomedical applications.
19	Keywords: Hydrogels; Hemicellulose; Electrically Conductive; Swelling Behavior; Robust

20 **1. Introduction**

Polymeric hydrogels have defined a remarkable research area, mainly due to their wide range of applications, such as matrix chemistry and biology [1], the removal of endocrine disruptors [2], media for the delivery of substances in biomedicine [3], and scaffolds [4]. Hydrogels have potential in biomedical applications due to their good biocompatibility and ability to selectively mimic human

tissues [1, 5]. Natural polymer-based hydrogels, such as those made from proteins and polysaccharides, are widely used in injectable engineering [6], controlled drug release [7, 8], biosensors [9], and articular cartilage tissue engineering [10] because they are commonly biocompatible, degradable, capable of promoting cell adhesion and proliferation, and immunologically inert. Hemicellulose-based hydrogels are currently being acknowledged for their non-toxic and renewable properties in addition to the advantages of natural polymers mentioned above [11-15].

7 The family of hemicelluloses is the second most abundant group of polysaccharides in the vegetal 8 world after cellulose, representing 15-35 % (w/w) of higher plants and wood [16]. The pendant 9 hydroxyl groups of the polysaccharide backbone offer a number of possibilities for the chemical 10 modification of hemicelluloses and for the preparation of materials with new profiles that can increase 11 the utility of these biopolymers. The preparation of biomedical hemicellulose materials, such as bio-12 sorbents and hydrogels, may be useful in key applications, such as heavy metal removal [17], drug 13 release systems, and tissue engineering [18, 19]. For gymnosperms, glucomannan is the major type of 14 hemicellulose in the secondary cell wall, where it is also believed to serve a structural function [20]. 15 Due to the abundance, the relatively high degree of acetylation and the low molecular weight of O-16 acetyl-galactoglucomannan (AcGGM), in addition to its solubility in water and in dimethyl sulfoxide 17 (DMSO) and dimethylformamide (DMF), it serves as an attractive renewable material candidate for 18 the design of hydrogels [13, 19]. AcGGM-derived hydrogels have recently been prepared by a 19 carbonyldiimidazole (CDI)-assisted coupling reaction between AcGGM and hydroxyethyl 20 methacrylate (HEMA) followed by cross-linking of the vinyl functional groups. Microspheres 21 prepared from AcGGM-based hydrogels and loaded with either a small hydrophilic substance 22 (caffeine) or a macromolecular model protein (bovine serum albumin) showed controlled release in 23 vitro [14]. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that both the pendant group composition and the enzyme 24 action are valuable tools in the tailoring of hydrogel release profiles for drug delivery [19]. A series of 25 crosslinking chemistries for AcGGM-based hydrogels was also developed, and the resulting properties 26 of the AcGGM gels could be custom-built for a specific performance [13, 21]. However, electrical 27 conductivity is rarely investigated in hemicellulose-derived materials, although conductivity features

1 could promote polymer-cell interactions that would be useful in a wide range of applications in the 2 biomedical field. For instance, conductive properties have been shown to support the attachment and 3 differentiation of neural-like cells with improved interactions [22], and biomaterials with electrical 4 conductivity have the potential to be used in nerve regeneration [23].

5 The term *conductive polymers* (CPs) denotes organic polymers that exhibit similar properties to those 6 of metals and inorganic semiconductors and are considered as the fourth generation of polymeric 7 materials [23, 24]. The explosive growth of research on CPs is due to their interesting physical and 8 chemical properties, such as electrical conductivity, electroluminescence, and electrochromism, which 9 are useful in a number of practical applications, e.g., photovoltaic devices, light-emitting diodes, 10 electrochromic displays and biomedical devices [23, 25]. Polyaniline (PANi) and its derivatives are 11 the most commonly investigated CPs in biomedical engineering. For example, porous tubular 12 scaffolds fabricated from blends of polycaprolactone (PCL) and a hyperbranched conducting 13 copolymer show non-cytotoxicity with HaCaT keratinocytes [26]. Guarino et al. demonstrated that 14 conductive PANi/PEGDA macroporous hydrogels improve the biological response of PC12 and 15 hMSC cells [23]. One drawback associated with these conductive composites is that the scaffold-16 forming components (e.g., PCL and PEGDA) are non-renewable materials. In addition, PANi has poor 17 solubility in most solvents [27]. One approach to overcoming this predicament is to design aniline 18 oligomers with biodegradable and renewable resources [25]. Chen et al. developed new biodegradable 19 electroactive hydrogels with aniline pentamer grafted onto gelatin [28], and aniline pentamer for cross-20 linking chitosan [29]. The preliminary study demonstrated that these hydrogels have the potential to 21 be utilized in drug delivery and tissue engineering. We anticipate that electrically conductive 22 hemicellulose hydrogels (ECHHs) could be obtained by combining a conductive aniline tetramer with 23 biodegradable and nontoxic hemicellulose. Therefore, ECHHs provide a potential means to electrically 24 simulate cells and regulate specific cellular activities to widely extend the applications of CPs in 25 biomedical fields, such as controlled drug release and nerve regeneration.

Our aim is to develop a robust synthetic route for ECHHs by covalently attaching conductive aniline
 tetramers to AcGGM-derived hydrogels. The introduction of maleic anhydride, glycidyl methacrylate

and conductive aniline tetramer into the polysaccharide scaffold will alter the swelling ratio and enable
 control over the hydrogel properties. Our aim is further to regulate the conductivity by altering the
 aniline tetramer content.

4 **2. Experimental Section**

5 2.1. Materials

6 Glycidyl methacrylate (GMA), triethylamine (TEA), maleic anhydride (MA), N-phenyl-p-7 phenylenediamine. ammonium persulfate $((NH_4)_2S_2O_8)$, ammonium hydroxide (NH_4OH) , 8 hydrochloric acid (HCl), dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), N,N-dimethylacetamide (DMAc) and 9 tetrahydrofuran (THF) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich and were used as received, unless 10 otherwise stated. O-acetyl-galactoglucomannan (AcGGM) originating from spruce (Picea abies) was 11 extracted from thermo-mechanical pulping (TMP) processed water, purified and concentrated by 12 ultrafiltration (membrane cutoff 1 kDa), and lyophilized using a Lyolab 300 lyophilizer. The 13 carbohydrate composition of the AcGGM isolate was 17 mol % glucose, 65 mol % mannose, and 15 14 mol % galactose. AcGGM had a number average molecular weight (M_n) of approximately 7,500 g mol⁻¹ (DP ~ 40), a dispersity index (Đ) of 1.3 and a degree of acetylation (DS_{Ac}) of 30 %, as 15 16 determined by size exclusion chromatography (SEC) calibrated with MALDI-TOF according to a 17 published protocol [30].

18 2.2. Synthesis of Aniline Tetramer

19 Aniline tetramer (AT) was synthesized according to a previously described procedure [31]. Briefly, N-20 phenyl-p-phenylenediamine (3.68 g, 0.02 mol) was dissolved in a 150 mL mixture of acetone with 1 21 mol/L HCl (v/v 150:100) at 0 °C. Ammonium persulfate (9.12 g, 0.04 mol) in 100 mL of acetone/HCl 22 solution was then added dropwise to the solution over 30 min. A color change from green to dark blue 23 was observed, and the reaction was allowed to proceed for another 2 h at 0 °C. The mixture was 24 subsequently filtered, and the filter cake was washed with 1 M HCl and deionized water. The crude 25 AT was dedoped in 1 M NH₄OH for 2 h and then filtered and washed with deionized water until the 26 filtrate was neutral. Finally, the AT (dark powder, yield 68.5 %) was lyophilized for 3 days.

1 2.3. Synthesis of Carboxylated AcGGM (C-AcGGM)

2 C-AcGGM was prepared as previously reported [32] with some small modifications (Scheme 1). In 3 brief, 1 g of AcGGM (~ 5.7 mmol sugar units) was dissolved in 30 mL of pre-dried DMSO at 50 °C. 4 TEA (0.1 mL) and 0.14-0.58 g of MA (1.4-5.7 mmol, 0.25-1 eq) were added. The reaction mixture 5 was kept at 50 °C for 1 h. The reaction was quenched by pouring the reaction mixture into 200 mL of 6 THF, and the solid residue was collected by centrifugation. The product was washed with 300 mL of 7 THF and dried under reduced pressure. To investigate the effect of the degree of substitution of MA 8 on the swelling ratio (SR) of the hemicellulose hydrogels, the precursor C-AcGGM polymers were 9 prepared with 0.25, 0.5 and 1.0 eq of MA and denoted as C0.25-AcGGM, C0.5-AcGGM and C1.0-10 AcGGM, respectively. The degree of substitution (DS) was determined by ¹H NMR spectroscopy. 11 Yield: 90-99 %.

12 Scheme 1. Proposed synthesis route of electrically conductive hemicellulose hydrogels (ECHHs).



14 2.4. Preparation of ECHHs

13

ECHHs were prepared by a two-step reaction (Scheme 1) with varying feed compositions (Table 1). In brief, 200 mg of C1.0-AcGGM was dissolved in 0.8 mL of DMSO followed by the addition of 60 mg of APS and 100 mg of GMA. The mixture was degassed prior to the reaction. The cross-linking reaction was conducted at 70 °C for 40 min. Subsequently, the formed gel was purified in DMSO to remove the unreacted residues. The gel was immersed in a DMSO solution with different

concentrations of AT and kept at 70 °C for 12 h followed by washing in DMSO for 48 h. DMSO was
 changed frequently (every 2 h in the beginning) to ensure complete removal of unreacted AT. Then, a
 H₂O/THF mixture (v/v 1:1) was used to remove DMSO. Finally, the ECHHs were dried under vacuum
 for 3 days.

5 The ECHHs with 10, 20, 30 and 40 % (w/w) AT were annotated according to their equivalent of MA, 6 the addition of GMA and the % (w/w) of AT. As an example, C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT contained 7 200 mg of C1.0-AcGGM, 100 mg of GMA and 10 % (w/w) AT. A gel without AT was synthesized as 8 a reference sample and denoted C1.0-AcGGM/GMA. The gels prepared from C0.25-AcGGM, C0.5-9 AcGGM and C1.0-AcGGM polymers were used to investigate the effect of the degree of substitution 10 of MA on the swelling ratio (SR) of the hemicellulose hydrogels.

11 **Table 1.** Feed compositions of ECHHs.

Sample codes	mol% of MA	C-AcGGM (mg)	GMA (mg)	DMSO (mL)	$AT^{*}(mg)$
C1.0-AcGGM	<mark>100</mark>	200		0.8	
C0.5-AcGGM	<mark>50</mark>	200		0.8	
C0.25-AcGGM	25	200		0.8	
C1.0-AcGGM/GMA	100	200	100	0.8	
C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT	100	200	100	0.8	33
C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/20%AT	100	200	100	0.8	75
C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/30%AT	<mark>100</mark>	200	100	0.8	130
C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/40%AT	<mark>100</mark>	200	100	0.8	200

12 * The amount of AT in 4 mL of DMSO.

13 2.5. Characterization

¹ ¹H NMR (400 MHz) spectra of AT, AcGGM and C-AcGGM polymers and ¹³C NMR (400 MHz) ² spectra of AcGGM and C-AcGGM polymers were obtained using a Bruker Avance 400 MHz NMR ³ instrument at room temperature with DMSO- d_6 as the solvent and the residual DMSO as the internal ⁴ standard (δ =2.50).

5 Matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization time of flight (MALDI-TOF) was used to verify the 6 successful synthesis of AT. MALDI-TOF analyses were performed on a Bruker Ultraflex MALDI-7 TOF mass spectrometer with a SCOUT-MTP Ion Source (Bruker Daltonics, Bremen) equipped with a 8 N_2 laser (337 nm), a grid-less ion source, and a reflector design. The positive ion spectra depicted are 9 representations of the sums of 1000 laser shots. The instrument operated at an acceleration voltage of 10 25 kV and a reflector voltage of 26.3 kV, and the detector mass range was set to 60-1000 Da. Samples 11 were prepared by dropping 1-3 µL of samples (1 mg/mL DMSO solution) onto a steel coordinate 12 plate. MALDI data were collected and analyzed with FlexAnalysis software (Bruker Daltonics).

FTIR spectra were recorded using a Perkin Elmer Spectrum 2000 spectrometer (Perkin-Elmer Instrument, Inc.) equipped with a single reflection attenuated total reflectance (ATR) accessory (golden gate) from Graseby Specac (Kent, UK). FTIR was used to verify the molecular structures of AT, the AcGGM and C-AcGGM polymers. FTIR was also utilized to verify the successful coupling of AT to the hemicellulose hydrogels. Each spectrum was recorded as the average of 16 scans at a resolution of 4 cm⁻¹ in the range between 4000 and 600 cm⁻¹.

19 The water contact angle measurements of C1.0-AcGGM, C1.0-AcGGM/GMA and C1.0-20 AcGGM/GMA/10%AT hydrogels films were measured using a contact angle and surface tension 21 meter (KSV instruments Ltd.). A drop of Milli-Q water (5 μ L) was placed on the surface of the sample 22 and images of the water menisci were recorded by a digital camera. The contact angle of each sample 23 was taken as the average of four measurements at different points.

Size exclusion chromatography (SEC) was used to determine the molecular weight and dispersity
index (Đ) of AcGGM and C-AcGGM [33]. The samples were analyzed using a Shimidzu RID-10A
SEC equipped with a refractive index detector and three PLgel 20 µm Mixed-A (300 mm × 7.5 mm)

columns with an injection volume of 200 μL. Dimethylacetamide (DMAc) with 0.05 % (w/w) LiCl
 was used as the eluent (0.5 mL/min). The measurements were performed at 80 °C. The SEC system
 was calibrated with Pullulan standards with molecular weights ranging from 342 to 800,000 g/mol.
 The samples were dissolved in DMAc (0.05 % (w/w) LiCl) by vigorous stirring and filtered (0.45 μm,
 Millipore) before injection. LC Solution software from Shimatzu was used for data acquisition and
 calculations.

7

8 The swelling ratio (SR) of the hydrogels was determined by immersing pre-weighed dry hydrogels in 9 buffer solutions (prepared from Na₂HPO₄ and NaH₂PO₄, pH=7.4) at room temperature. The weight 10 gain of the hydrogels was monitored gravimetrically as a function of time. The weights of the samples 11 in the swollen state at different times t (m_t) were measured after gently removing excess water using 12 filter paper. The SR was calculated using Eq. (1), where m₀ denotes the weight of the samples in the 13 dry state:

14
$$SR(\%) = \frac{m_t - m_0}{m_0} \times 100$$
 (1)

For the thermal stability of the hydrogels, thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) of the samples was performed using a Mettler-Toledo TGA/SDTA 851e. Approximately 10 mg of each sample was put into a 70 μ L ceramic cup without a lid. TGA tests were conducted under a nitrogen atmosphere (flow rate of 50 mL/min) with a heating rate of 10 °C/min from 30 to 800 °C. The data were collected and analyzed by Mettler STARe software.

The cross-section morphology of the hydrogels was observed by Ultra-High Resolution FE-SEM (Hitachi S-4800). The samples were lyophilized overnight in small vials, cross-sectioned, attached to the sample supports and coated with a 3 nm gold layer.

The electrical conductivity of the 1 mol/L HCl-doped hydrogels was determined by the standard Van der Pauw four-probe method (two reference probes, one counter probe and one working probe) [31, 34]. After doping, the hydrogels were thoroughly dried in a vacuum oven for 48 h. Therefore, the conductivity of the hydrogel was not affected by water content. Hydrogel pellets, with a diameter of 2

cm and a thickness ranging from 0.035 to 0.050 cm, were made by compression molding using a
 pressure of 30 kN/m² at 70 °C for 10 min.

3 3. Results and Discussion

4 Hemicellulose-based hydrogels are being developed due to their biocompatibility, nontoxicity and 5 abundantly renewability [14, 23]. Aniline oligomers exhibit similar conductivity with improved 6 process-ability compared to metals and inorganic semiconductors [27]. Therefore, a new family of 7 electrically conductive hemicellulose hydrogels (ECHHs) was developed in this work by combining 8 O-acetyl-galactoglucomannan (AcGGM) and aniline tetramer (AT). AcGGM was carboxylated with 9 varying amounts of MA (C-AcGGM) to regulate the swelling behavior of hydrogels. The reaction 10 pathway was tuned to be robust so that it can be carried out under ambient conditions without 11 requiring inert atmospheres or dry conditions. Varying amounts of AT were immobilized into the 12 hydrogels to provide conductivity and further regulate the swelling behavior of hydrogels.

13 3.1. Synthesis of AT

The successful synthesis of AT was verified by NMR and MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry. The ¹H NMR spectrum of AT is shown in the Supporting Information (Fig. S1). There is a single peak at 5.53 ppm and no peak at 4.69 ppm, indicating that only one isomer exists in the DMSO solution [35]. AT appeared as a peak at 366.36 m/z in MALDI-TOF mass spectra, which matched its chemical structure. These results agree with previous reports [31, 35].

19 3.2. Synthesis of C-AcGGM Polymers

To achieve a facile and robust gelation, the heteropolysaccharide AcGGM was modified with MA under ambient conditions to covalently immobilize double bonds for subsequent *in situ* gelation. A series of C-AcGGM with varying degrees of substitution of MA were prepared to tune the swelling behavior.

ATR-FTIR spectra confirmed the structural composition of pure AcGGM and C-AcGGM polymers,
 Fig. 1. Pristine AcGGM displayed the anticipated C=O stretching at 1730 cm⁻¹ stemming from the

1 acetylated pendant groups, a H-O-H deformation vibration of absorbed water at approximately 1643 2 cm⁻¹, some alkane vibrations in the 1350-1480 cm⁻¹ region, and a hydroxyl band at 3000-3600 cm⁻¹, Fig. 1A. In contrast, AcGGM modified with MA (C-AcGGM) displayed an increase in band intensity 3 4 at 1721 cm⁻¹, attributed to the C=O functionality of the ester linkage. The peaks emerging at 1638, 1581 cm⁻¹ and 950 cm⁻¹ were due to the C=C stretching and deformation vibrations, verifying the 5 6 presence of vinyl groups in the modified AcGGM. The peak emerging at 1165 cm⁻¹ was attributed to 7 the vibration of the methylene group in each substituted C-6 position. All results agree with our 8 previous reports [13, 32]. The intensity of the peaks at 1721 and 1581 cm⁻¹ increased with an increase 9 in the MA content (Fig. 1B), indicating the successful coupling of MA to AcGGM. The intensity of 10 the peaks in the 966-1133 cm⁻¹ region (-C-O-C- vibrations from the sugar units) should remain 11 constant since there was almost no change for -C-O-C- bonds during the reaction. Therefore, the ratio 12 (R) of the area of the peaks in the 1674-1776 cm⁻¹ region ($A_{1674-1776}$) to the area of the peaks in the 966-1133 cm⁻¹ region ($A_{966-1133}$) reflects the grafting density (GD) of MA, which is defined in Eq. (2). The 13 14 GD increased with the increase of the mole ratio of MA, as shown in Supporting Information (Table 15 S1).



Fig. 1. ATR-FTIR spectra of pure and carboxylated AcGGM: split spectra (A) and overlay spectra (B)
of C-AcGGM normalized at 1816 cm⁻¹.

¹H and ¹³C NMR were further used to confirm the successful coupling of AcGGM with MA and to 1 2 determine the degree of substitution (DS) achieved in the reaction (Fig. 2 and Fig. S2). Upon coupling, 3 additional peaks originating from the double bonds of MA appeared at 6.07 and 6.41 ppm, and a peak 4 corresponding to the protons from the C-6 position of carboxylated AcGGM appeared at 3.10 ppm. In the ¹³C NMR, alkene signals were observed at 128.61 and 132.43 ppm, while the carbonyls originating 5 6 from the ester and carboxyl groups were observed at 165.52 and 167.05 ppm, respectively. As 7 expected, a clear relationship between the DS and the amount of MA was found. As the degree of 8 acetylation for the AcGGM used was determined to be 0.3 [30], the DS (the degree of carboxyl group 9 substitution) can be calculated by setting the relative integral of the response of the alkene protons 10 (6.41 and 6.07 ppm) in relation to the integral of the response of the acetyl protons (2.0 ppm). The DS 11 increased with increased feed ratios of MA (Table 2).

Table 2. Yield, number average molecular weight (*M_n*), dispersity index (Đ) and degree of substitution
(DS) of C-AcGGM polymers.

Sample codes	Feed ratio of MA	Yield	^a M_n	$^{\mathrm{b}}M_{n}$	^b DS	$^{\circ}M_{n}$	° Đ
	(FR)	(%)	(g/mol)	(g/mol)		(g/mol)	
AcGGM						4 400	3.07
C0.25-AcGGM	0.25	99	8 444	7 927	0.24	5 300	2.92
C0.5-AcGGM	0.5	90	8 669	8 364	0.60	6 050	2.67
C1.0-AcGGM	1.0	99	11 575	10 249	1.14	6 000	2.22
^a Calculated	from feed ratio,	taking	the yield	into consi	deratio	on, $M_{\rm n}=$	7500×

15 (1+0.57×FR×98.06)×*Yield*. ^b Determined by ¹H NMR. ^c Determined by DMAc-SEC.



2 Fig. 2. ¹H NMR (A) and ¹³C NMR (B) spectra of pristine AcGGM and C-AcGGM in DMSO-*d*₆.

3 3.3. Preparation of ECHHs

1

4 AT is a free radical inhibitor [36]; therefore, using free radical chemistry to incorporate AT into 5 polymers is not a viable option unless the NH-groups in AT are protected [37]. There is also a need to 6 deprotect the tert-butoxycarbonyl group in the polymer by heating or by acidic hydrolysis, methods 7 that may cause an onset of the degradation of polysaccharides. To address this, we developed an 8 alternative route involving the introduction of GMA into the hydrogel network. This was followed by 9 chemical coupling of the AT segments to the network to form ECHHs by reacting the amino group in 10 AT and the epoxy group in GMA. The hydrogels were prepared in two steps: (1) using ammonium 11 persulfate to initiate polymerization of a mixture of C1.0-AcGGM and GMA, and (2) immersing the 12 formed hydrogels in a DMSO solution containing varying amounts of AT. Compared to the 13 functionalization of polymers with aniline oligomers using N,N'-dicyclohexyl carbodiimide/4-14 dimethylaminopyridine (DCC/DMAP) [38] or 1-ethyl-3-(3-dimethylaminopropyl)carbodiimide 15 (EDC)/DMAP [39], the pathway presented here is more robust as there is no need to run the reactions 16 under an inert atmosphere or to perform tedious and chemical-consuming purification procedures.

17 The hydrogel color changed from yellow to opaque after adding GMA and then to black after the 18 reaction with AT due to the color of AT (Fig. 3). Interestingly, the volume of hydrogels decreased in

each step as a consequence of the hydrophobic nature of GMA and AT. The hydrophilicity of the
hydrogels was systematically investigated and is discussed in the next section. The formed ECHHs
were free-standing, indicating sufficient mechanical integrity for soft tissue scaffold applications (Fig.
3D).



Fig. 3. Hydrogels based on C1.0-AcGGM (A), C1.0-AcGGM/GMA (B), and C1.0AcGGM/GMA/10%AT (C), and free-standing C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10% AT hydrogel (D).

8 ATR-FTIR was used to follow the formation of these ECHHs. The ATR-FTIR spectra of AT, C1.0-9 AcGGM, C1.0-AcGGM hydrogel, C1.0-AcGGM/GMA hydrogel and C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT hydrogel are shown in Fig. 4. The disappearance of the peak at 950 cm⁻¹ corresponding to the double 10 11 bonds (C=C) in the C-AcGGM polymer correlated with the crosslinking via radical polymerization. A 12 new peak at 903 cm⁻¹ assigned to the epoxy group in GMA is evident in curve C. The epoxy peak 13 significantly diminished in curve D, while new peaks at 1580 cm⁻¹ and 1500 cm⁻¹ corresponding to the 14 benzene and quinoid rings in AT, appeared. All of these results demonstrated that the C-15 AcGGM/GMA/AT hydrogels were successfully synthesized.



1

Fig. 4. ATR-FTIR spectra of C1.0-AcGGM (A), cross-linked C1.0-AcGGM hydrogel (B), C1.0AcGGM/GMA hydrogel (C), C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT hydrogel (D), and AT (E).

4 To verify that AT was covalently attached throughout the bulk of the hydrogels, the composition of 5 C1.0-AcGGM/10%AT was assessed at different positions. The ATR-FTIR spectra of the cross-section 6 of C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT hydrogels indicated that the covalently attached AT-containing 7 hydrogel, C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT, had equivalent AT intensities (characteristic peaks at 8 approximately 1580 and 1500 cm⁻¹) from the surface to the center and is therefore homogeneously 9 modified (Fig. 5).



10

- Fig. 5. ATR-FTIR spectra for the hydrogel with AT covalently attached, C1.0 AcGGM/GMA/10%AT, at different positions through the hydrogels.
- 3 3.4. Thermal Properties of ECHHs

4 As the thermal properties of AcGGM and AT are different, their thermal behavior yields information 5 about the composition of ECHHs. Therefore, thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) was utilized to 6 characterize thermal behavior (Fig. 6). For the conductive hydrogels, the degradation was a two-step 7 process. The largest weight losses for these hydrogels occurred between 210 °C and 400 °C and was 8 dependent on the AT contents. This was attributed to the decomposition of AcGGM and GMA. The 9 weight loss in the temperature range from 30 to 210 °C was due to desorption of incorporated water 10 and other low molecular weight species [40]. Although all samples were freeze-dried in the same 11 manner before the measurement, the water content was found to be between 2 % and 10 % for all 12 hydrogels. The second mass loss occurred from 400 to 600 °C and is assigned to the degradation of the 13 AT segments linked to the hydrogel network, after which the weight loss of the C1.0-14 AcGGM/GMA/AT hydrogels leveled off at temperatures of approximately 600 °C. As expected, the 15 thermal stability of the hydrogels increased with increasing AT content in the hydrogel, which is most likely due to the greater thermal stability of the AT segments [40, 41]. According to the TGA curve, 16 17 the weight loss percentages of the C1.0-AcGGM/GMA hydrogel and ECHHs in the range of 210 to 18 600 °C are W_R and W_H , respectively. The grafting amount of AT segments (W %) is defined by Eq. 19 (3), where W_{AT} is the weight loss percentage of pure AT in the range of 210 to 600 °C, and W % 20 represents the weight percentage of the AT segment connected to the hydrogel:

21

$$W\% = \frac{W_R - W_H}{W_H} \times 100$$
 (3)

The theoretical and measured grafting amounts of AT for each hydrogel are listed in Table 3. As anticipated, the AT contents calculated from TGA were slightly lower than the theoretical calculations due to the incomplete reaction of AT with the epoxy groups in the hydrogel networks in the DMSO solution.



- 2 **Fig. 6.** TGA thermograms of AT and ECHHs.
- **3 Table 3.** Conductivity and composition of ECHHs.

Sample codes	Conductivity (S/cm)	AT content from TGA (theoretical)		
C1.0-AcGGM/GMA	< 10 ⁻¹⁰	(0%)		
C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT	(2.93±0.32)×10 ⁻⁸	5.2 % (10 %)		
C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/20%AT	(8.49±0.45)×10 ⁻⁸	9.4 % (20 %)		
C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/30%AT	(1.30±0.21)×10 ⁻⁷	18.7 % (30 %)		

4

1

5 3.5. Conductivity of ECHHs

6 The electrical conductivities of the ECHHs with different contents of covalently attached AT were 7 determined after doping with an equal amount of 1 mol/L HCl via a four-probe method. The 8 conductivity of the hydrogel without AT was below the detector limit of the instrument ($< 10^{-10}$ 9 S/cm),which indicated the hydrogel without AT had extremely low or no conductivity. The 10 conductivities of the hydrogels with AT contents from 10 % (w/w) to 40 % (w/w) range from

 $(2.93\pm0.32)\times10^{-8}$ to $(1.12\pm0.14)\times10^{-6}$, respectively (Table 3). These conductivities are in the range of 1 2 what has previously been achieved [35, 42] and are adequate for the transfer of bioelectrical signals in 3 vivo due to the low micro-current in the body [35, 43]. It is clear that the conductivities of the hydrogels increased with an increase in AT content, and therefore, the conductivities could be adjusted 4 by changing the amount of AT when formulating the hydrogels. Conventional high molecular weight 5 6 conductive polymers have many practical problems in tissue engineering applications, such as poor 7 polymer-cell interactions, the absence of cell interaction sites, hydrophobicity and poor solubility [25, 8 44]. Coupling electrically conductive AT with hydrophilic, non-toxic, degradable and soluble 9 hemicellulose is a promising solution to overcome the aforementioned drawbacks of previously 10 utilized conductive polymers.

11 3.6. Swelling Behavior of ECHHs

12 The swelling behavior is a key feature of hydrogels because their applications typically rely on their 13 ability to absorb large amounts of water in a reproducible fashion. The swelling ratio (SR) of the 14 hydrogels depends on the DS of C-AcGGM and the AT content (Fig. 7). Therefore, the SR could be 15 tuned to meet the requirements of specific applications. The DS of MA proved to have a large effect 16 on the swelling properties of the hydrogels (Fig. 7A). An increase in the amount of introduced MA to 17 AcGGM led to a decrease in hydrogel swelling. The maximum SR of the hydrogels varied as follows: 18 C1.0-AcGGM (DS=1.14) < C0.5-AcGGM (DS=0.60) < C0.25-AcGGM (DS=0.24). This is due to a 19 higher degree of cross-linking for the C1.0-AcGGM hydrogels compared to the C0.5-AcGGM 20 (DS=0.60) and C0.25-AcGGM (DS=0.24) hydrogels. The crosslinking density calculated from 21 swelling ratio is an important network parameter for composite hydrogels. The crosslinking density 22 (\overline{M}_c) was calculated according to Peppas et al. [45], Eq. (4):

23
$$\frac{1}{\bar{M}_c} = \frac{2}{\bar{M}_n} - \frac{\left(\frac{\vartheta}{V_1}\right) \left[ln(1 - \vartheta_{2,s}) + \vartheta_{2,s} - \chi_1 \vartheta_{2,s}\right]}{\vartheta_{2,s}^{1/3} - \frac{\vartheta_{2,s}}{2}}$$
(4)

Here \overline{M}_n is the number-average molecular weight of the polymer chain (substituted acetylgalactoglucomannan); v is the specific volume of the polymer, which is similar with that of dialdehyde konjac glucomannan [46], ~0.7 cm³/g; V₁ is the molar volume of the swelling medium (18.06 cm³/mol

1 for water); the Flory-Huggins interaction parameter between polymer and water χ_1 , which is similar 2 with that of guar gum [47], χ_1 =0.4940; and the $v_{2,s}$ is relative with swelling ratio (SR⁻¹) [46]. The 3 crosslinking densities (\overline{M}_c , g/mol) of C0.25-AcGGM, C0.5-AcGGM and C1.0-AcGGM hydrogels 4 were 346, 335 and 273, respectively. The results demonstrated that the crosslinking density decreased 5 with the increase of the DS of MA. The decrease in crosslinking density means less space for the 6 accommodation of water in the network of these hydrogels, and decreases the flexibility of the 7 uncrosslinked polymer chain, further leading to a decrease of the SR. The C0.5-AcGGM and C0.25-8 AcGGM hydrogels became softer after 48 h of swelling and did not retain their mechanical integrity as 9 well as the C1.0-AcGGM hydrogels. Therefore, the latter were chosen for further investigations. A 10 remarkable difference is seen when comparing C1.0-AcGGM/GMA with C1.0-AcGGM hydrogels. 11 The SR of the former (758 %) is less than half of the SR of the latter (1613 %) after 48 h of swelling. 12 Additionally, the swelling of C1.0-AcGGM/GMA hydrogels is much slower than that of C1.0-13 AcGGM hydrogels. To clarify the effect of the hydrophilicity of the hydrogels on SR, contact angles were measured [48]. The contact angles of C1.0-AcGGM and C1.0-AcGGM/GMA hydrogels films 14 15 were 28° and 63° (Fig. 7B). It indicated that the introduction of GMA increased the hydrophobicity of 16 the hydrogels, which makes difficult to adsorb water. After coupling with 10 wt. % of AT, the contact 17 angle of the ECHH (C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT) increased up to 75° because of the hydrophobicity 18 of AT, which resulted in a decrease in SR. The SR of the hydrogels containing covalently attached AT 19 decreased with increasing AT content due to the hydrophobicity of AT. The C1.0-AcGGM/GMA 20 hydrogel swelled most rapidly and had the highest SR (Fig. 7C). Compared to previous reports on 21 other conductive hydrogels, the SR of ECHHs in the present study with the same weight percentage of 22 AT are higher [31, 39]. This is most likely due to the superior hydrophilicity of AcGGM compared 23 with chitosan [31] and GMA-poly(E-caprolactone)-PEG-poly(E -caprolactone) [39]. Fig. 7D shows 24 photographs of cut pieces of C1.0-AcGGM, C1.0-AcGGM/GMA and C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT 25 hydrogels in dried and swollen states demonstrating the volume increase following 48 hours of 26 swelling.



Fig. 7. Swelling ratios as a function of time of the different hydrogels (A and C); the water contact
angle of C1.0-AcGGM, C1.0-AcGGM/GMA and C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT hydrogels films (B),
and images of C1.0-AcGGM, C1.0-AcGGM/GMA and C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/10%AT hydrogels (D) in
the dried and swollen state (48 h of swelling).

7 3.7. Morphology of The Hydrogels by Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)

1 2

The morphological changes of the hydrogels before and after swelling also provide information on the 8 9 swelling behavior of the hydrogels. SEM images of a cross-section of the C1.0-AcGGM (A), C1.0-10 AcGGM/GMA (B) and C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/20% AT (C) hydrogels in the dried state (A-1, B-1 and C-11 1) and the swollen state (48 h) after lyophilization (A-2, B-2 and C-2) are shown in Fig. 8. Before 12 swelling, all hydrogels had a compact structure, while a homogenous macro-porous structure appeared 13 after 48 h of swelling, indicating that these hydrogels swelled in a homogenous manner. Interestingly, 14 the C1.0-AcGGM hydrogels had larger pores with thinner walls, which could absorb a larger amount 15 of water compared to the other hydrogels (C1.0-AcGGM/GMA and C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/20%AT).

This confirms and explains the findings concerning the SR where the C1.0-AcGGM hydrogels had a high SR of 1613 %, while the SR dropped to 758 % for C1.0-AcGGM/GMA and to 468 % for the C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/20%AT hydrogels. It becomes increasingly difficult for the water molecules to penetrate through the thicker walls in the hydrogels, and an increased hydrophobicity also decreases the SR. Therefore, the swelling rate of C1.0-AcGGM hydrogels is higher than those of C1.0-AcGGM/GMA and C1.0-AcGGM/GMA/20%AT hydrogels.

7



8

9 Fig. 8. SEM images of the cross-section of C1.0-AcGGM (A), C1.0-AcGGM/GMA (B) and C1.010 AcGGM/GMA/20%AT (C) hydrogels in the dry state (A-1, B-1 and C-1) and lyophilized from the

11 swollen state at 48 h (A-2, B-2 and C-2). Magnification: \times 500.

1 4. Conclusions

Electrically conductive hemicellulose hydrogels (ECHHs) have been successfully synthesized by a 2 3 straight-forward and robust approach by introducing the conductive aniline tetramer (AT) into 4 hydrophilic, non-toxic, and biocompatible hemicellulose networks. The ECHHs were prepared in two 5 steps: first, carboxylated AcGGM (C-AcGGM) was dissolved with GMA followed by a 6 polymerization initiated by ammonium persulfate; second, the formed hydrogels were covalently 7 coupled with varying amounts of AT, which was homogeneously distributed throughout the network. 8 C-AcGGM hydrogels were synthesized with 0.25, 0.5 and 1.0 eq of maleic anhydride and had 9 swelling ratios (SR) of 2300 %, 2180 % and 1613 %, respectively. By increasing of the AT content, 10 the SRs were tuned from 548 % to 228 %, while simultaneously altering the conductivities by two 11 orders of magnitude. The ability to control both swelling behavior and conductivity provides a wide 12 range of material properties able to meet the needs of many specific applications.

13 **5. Acknowledgments**

The authors are grateful to the China Scholarship Council (CSC), ERC Advanced Grant, PARADIGM (Grant Agreement No. 246776) and The Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) for financial support for this work. Dr. Simon Leijonmarck at the Department of Applied Electrochemistry, School of Chemical Science in KTH is thanked for the kind support in the conductivity testing. Finally, our great appreciation goes to Professor Changsheng Zhao in Sichuan University for the generous help in applying to the scholarship from CSC.

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Stranger Hander







Chip Man



24 28 Time (h)



Samples



Time (h)



AND MARINE





- A hydrogel material based on hemicellulose with electrically conductive features was synthesized and produced;
- Renewable and functional materials for added-value were prepared by a macromolecular synthetic technique by a straight-forward route;
- These free-standing hydrogels with tunable conductivity and controllable swelling behavior have a broad potential for biomedical applications.

Supporting Information:

A Robust Pathway to Electrically Conductive Hemicellulose Hydrogels with

High and Controllable Swelling Behavior

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Albertsson,^{*,†}



Fig. S1. The structural characterization of aniline tetramer in DMSO-*d6* by ¹H NMR.



Fig. S2. ¹H NMR (A) spectra of pristine AcGGM and C-AcGGM in DMSO-*d*₆.

Samples	mol% of MA	$A_{1674-1776}$	A ₉₆₆₋₁₁₃₃	<mark>R</mark>	GD (%)
AcGGM	0	<mark>7.1879</mark>	<mark>74.3301</mark>	<mark>0.10</mark>	<mark>0</mark>
C0.25-AcGGM	<mark>25</mark>	10.5531	<mark>69.4246</mark>	<mark>0.15</mark>	<mark>50</mark>
C0.5-AcGGM	<mark>50</mark>	<mark>15.6706</mark>	<mark>66.0416</mark>	<mark>0.24</mark>	<mark>140</mark>
C1.0-AcGGM	100	<mark>21.2987</mark>	<mark>61.1921</mark>	<mark>0.35</mark>	<mark>250</mark>

Table S1. The grafting density of MA calculated from ATR-FTIR spectrum.