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Naphthalene-based environmentally sensitive fluorescent 8-substituted 2'-deoxyadenosines: Application to DNA detection

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ABSTRACT

We synthesized various C8-naphthylethynylated 2'-deoxyadenosine derivatives and investigated their photophysical properties. Among them, cyano- and *N*,*N*-dimethylamino-substituted 8-naphthylethynylated 2'-deoxyadenosine derivatives (^{cn}A and ^{dn}A) showed strong fluorescence with high quantum yields and a remarkable solvatofuorochromicity. In particular, fluorescence of *N*,*N*-dimethylamino-substituted ^{2.6dn}A was not quenched by neighboring guanines (Gs) when incorporated in DNA duplexes, in contrast to ^{cn}A. We developed a new fluorescent probe containing ^{2.6dn}A that can be used for the detection of target DNA via a bulge formation regardless of the neighboring sequences.

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Fluorescent molecules are powerful research tools since they are simple, inexpensive, highly sensitive, and non-invasive. They are used for bioimaging,¹ drug delivery,² sensing,³ monitoring of chemical interactions of biomolecules,⁴ gene detection,⁵ diagnosis⁶ and targeted therapeutics.⁷ Thus, there is still a growing interest in the development of newly designed fluorescent molecules, particularly, environmentally sensitive fluorophores of high quantum yield. The design of such fluorophores that changes their emission wavelength and quantum yield in response to the change of local environments such as dielectric properties, structural variation, surrounding pH and viscosity is of special interest owing to their wide range of applications. Although numerous environmentally sensitive fluorescent molecules are known, only limited number of environmentally sensitive fluorescent (ESF) nucleosides have been reported recently.⁸ Incorporation of fluorescent nucleosides that are sensitive to their local environment into oligonucleotide can provide useful tools for structural study of nucleic acids as well as for the detection of target gene and for single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) typing.

In our research program directed toward the design of environmentally sensitive fluorescent (ESF) nucleoside,⁹ we have recently reported various C8-arylethynylated 2'-deoxyguanosines.^{9a,b,e} Among them, acetyl-substituted 8-arylethynylated deoxyguanosine ^{ac}G, which contains an electron donor-acceptor system within a molecule, exhibited a remarkable solvent-dependent fluorescence property.^{9a,b} While acetyl-substituted ^{ac}G derivatives exhibited interesting solvatofluorochromic properties, their emis-

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Various substituted C8-naphthylethynylated 2'-deoxyadenosines **1a-c** were prepared via the palladium(0)-mediated Sonogashira cross-coupling reaction¹⁰ (Scheme 1). 8-Ethynyl-2'deoxyadenosine **3** prepared by a previous method¹¹ was coupled with 2-bromo-6-cyanonaphthalene **4a** and 2-bromonaphthalene **4c** to afford the corresponding C8-substituted 2'-deoxyadenosines ^{2,6cn}A (**1a**) and ²ⁿA (**1c**), respectively.¹² Because of the low reactivity of bromonaphthalene containing electron-donor substituents toward cross-coupling reactions, bromonaphthalene **4b** was converted to the corresponding iodide **5b**, which was then used in the Pd(0)-mediated cross-coupling reaction to afford ^{2,6dn}A (**1b**).¹²

C8-substituted-2'-deoxyadenosines **2a–c** with 1,4-disubstituted naphthalenes were also synthesized by a similar route. 8-Ethynyl-2'-deoxyadenosine **3** was coupled with 1-bromo-4-cyanonaphthalene **6a** and commercially available 1-iodonaphthalene **7c** to afford ^{1,4cn}A (**2a**) and ¹ⁿA (**2c**), respectively. Iodonaphthalene



Figure 1. Structures of solvatofluorochromic nucleosides with donor-acceptor system.

7b prepared from **6b** was coupled with **3** using Pd(PPh₃)₄ to afford ^{1,4dn}A (**2b**).

The photophysical properties of newly synthesized 2'-deoxyadenosine derivatives **1a-c** and **2a-c** were examined. Initially, we measured the fluorescence spectra of 2,6-disubstituted naphthalene derivative ^{2,6cn}A (1a) containing an electron-withdrawing cyano substituent in various solvents of different polarities. By excitation of ^{2,6cn}A (1a) at 340 nm in 1,4-dioxane, strong fluorescence emission was observed at 424 nm with a high quantum yield (0.82) as shown in Figure 2a. Fluorescence emission of ^{2,6cn}A (1a) was observed at 454 nm in acetonitrile. In contrast, in polar solvents such as methanol (462 nm), DMF (478 nm), and DMSO (490 nm), weaker fluorescence emissions were observed for ^{2,6cn}A (1a) at longer wavelengths. Thus, ^{2,6cn}A (1a) exhibited a typical solvatofluorochromocic behavior with a considerable large solvatofluorochromicity ($\Delta\lambda = 66$ nm). Interestingly, a similar but much larger solvatofluorochromicity ($\Delta \lambda = 71 \text{ nm}$) was observed with ^{2,6dn}A (1b) bearing an electron donor substituent (Fig. 2b). While C8-naphthylethynylated 2'-deoxyadenosine derivatives ^{2,6cn}A (1a) and ^{2,6dn}A (1b) exhibited highly solvatofluorochromic properties, non-substituted naphthalene derivative ²ⁿA (1c) did not show a clear solvatofluorochromic behavior, indicating the requirement of an intramolecular donor-acceptor system within a molecule for the solvatofluorochromicity (Fig. 2c, Table 1). In case of electron-withdrawing cyano-substituted naphthalene ^{2,6cn}A (1a), adenine moiety acts as an electron donor. In contrast, adenine moiety can act as an electron acceptor in ^{2,6dn}A (1b), which contains an electron-donating N,N-dimethylamino group. It is assumed that such an intramolecular donor-acceptor system is the origin for the solvatofluorochromic effects.

The photophysical properties of C8-substituted-2'-deoxvadenosines with 1,4-disubstituted ^{1,4cn}A (2a) and ^{1,4dn}A (2b) and nonsubstituted ¹ⁿA (2c)-naphthalenes were also investigated. As shown in Figure 3, very similar results to those observed for 2,6disubstituted naphthalene derivatives were obtained. The fluorescence wavelengths of non-substituted ¹ⁿA (2c) were not changed remarkably by changing solvent polarity, showing almost no solvatochromocity. In contrast, ^{1,4cn}A (2a) and ^{1,4dn}A (2b) exhibited very strong fluorescence emissions in non-polar solvents but only weak red-shifted fluorescence emission in polar solvents, indicating that both ^{1,4cn}A (2a) and ^{1,4dn}A (2b) are effective ESF nucleosides of a considerable solvatofluorochromicity (**2a**: $\Delta \lambda = 71$ nm; **2b**: $\Delta \lambda$ = 36 nm). Interestingly, each of 2,6- and 1,4-disubstituted naphthalene derivatives ^{2,6cn}A (1a), ^{2,6dn}A (1b), ^{1,4cn}A (2a), and ^{1,4dn}A (2b) exhibited high solvatofluorochromic properties. Among them, $\hat{\mathbf{A}}_{,6dn}^{\mathbf{A}}(\mathbf{1b})$ bearing an electron donating *N*,*N*-dimethylamino substituent is a very attractive ESF nucleoside that has a high quantum yield (0.88 in dioxane) and may probably be usable regardless of the flanking sequences, because unlike cyano-substituted ^{2,6cn}A (1a), electron donor substituted naphthalene ^{2,6dn}A (1b) may not be a quenchable fluorophore by neighboring Gs when incorporated in duplex DNA. It should be reminded here that *N*.*N*-dimethylamino substituted ^{2,6dn}A (1b) exhibit strong fluorescence at nonpolar environments but only weak fluorescence in polar aqueous solvents at longer wavelength (Fig. 2b).

Next, to study the photophysical properties of these ESF nucleosides in duplex DNA, ^{2,6cn}A (1a), ^{2,6dn}A (1b), ^{1,4cn}A (2a), and ^{1,4dn}A (2b) were incorporated into oligodeoxynucleotides (ODNs) via automated DNA synthesis. The synthetic route to the corresponding phosphoramidites of the 2,6-disubstituted naphthylethynylated 2'-deoxyadenosines is indicated in Scheme 2. After protection of the amino group with *N*,*N*-dimethylformamide diethylacetal, compounds of general formula **8** were reacted with DMTrCl in the presence of catalytic amount of DMAP in dry pyridine to give **9**. The protected compounds **9** were then converted to phosphoramidites **10**. Using a similar protocol, phosphoramidites of 1,4disubstituted naphthylethynylated 2'-deoxyadenosines were also prepared (Supplementary data, Scheme S1). Each phosphoramidite



Scheme 1. Reagents and conditions: (a) 4a,c, 5b, 6a, 7b, or 7c, Pd(PPh₃)₄ Cul, Et₃N, DMF, 50–80 °C, 30 min–3 h; (b) *n*-BuLi, THF, –78 °C, 30 min and then I₂, THF, rt, 30 min.



Figure 2. Fluorescence spectra of (a) ^{2.6cn}A (1a, 10 μm), (b) ^{2.6dn}A (1b,10 μm) and (c) ²ⁿA (1c, 10 μm) in various solvents. The excitation was conducted at (a) 340 nm, (b) 382 nm and (c) 326 nm. (slit width: 1.5).

 Table 1

 Photophysical properties of fluorescent 2'-deoxyadenosine derivatives

Compound	Solvent	λ_{max}^{abs} (nm)	λ_{max}^{fl} (nm)	$arPhi_{ m fl}$
^{2,6cn} A (1a)	1,4-Dioxane	347	424	0.82
	Acetonitrile	338	454	0.58
	DMF	348	478	0.33
	Methanol	338	462	0.36
^{2,6dn} A (1b)	1,4-Dioxane	360	435	0.88
	Acetonitrile	365	488	0.51
	DMF	385	480	0.62
	Methanol	385	506	0.05
²ⁿ A (1c)	1,4-Dioxane	330	392	0.66
	Acetonitrile	325	398	0.57
	DMF	333	414	0.51
	Methanol	328	392	0.20
^{1,4cn} A (2a)	1,4-Dioxane	362	450	0.51
	Acetonitrile	357	482	0.14
	DMF	365	503	0.04
	Methanol	359	494	0.04
^{1,4dn} A (2b)	1,4-Dioxane	371	442	0.41
	Acetonitrile	371	465	0.40
	DMF	375	464	0.47
	Methanol	374	478	0.05
¹ⁿ A (2c)	1,4-Dioxane	339	397	0.52
	Acetonitrile	335	401	0.40
	DMF	340	424	0.36
	Methanol	336	391	0.20

was used for ODN synthesis using an automated DNA synthesizer. Two 13 mer fluorescent ODN probes containing ESF nucleoside X at AT rich site (ODN 1) and at GC rich site (ODN 2) were synthesized (Table 2).

As predicted by molecular modeling, adenine base containing large substituents such as naphthylethynyl group at C8 position cannot form Watson-Crick AT base pair when hybridized with complementary strand, because the steric bulkiness of the naphthylethynyl group is repulsive to sugar backbone and the syn-conformation of the adenine glycoside bond is generally preferable for adenines with large substituents at C8 position. In fact, melting temperature of full matched 13 mer duplex ODN $1(X = {^{2,6cn}A})/{3'}$ -GCGTTATATTGCG-5' (13 mer) is 9.3 °C lower than that of the native duplex (52.6 °C) containing unmodified ODN1(X = A), suggesting a lack of base pairing between $^{2.6cn}A$ and T to result in the observed large destabilization of the duplex (Supplementary data, Table S1). Thus, 8-naphthylethynylated adenosines such as ^{2,6cn}A (1a) and ^{2,6dn}A (1b) cannot form AT base pair with opposite T in hybridization with a complementary strand and such ESF nucleosides are not usable as a modified adenine base opposite to T in a fluorescence hybridization assay. We, therefore, selected 12 mer blODN 1 as a target ODN that may form a bulge structure at X in hybridization with ODN1 (X). For GC rich sequence, ODN2 (X) and 12 mer blODN 2 were selected. Examples of such ODNs are summarized in Table 2.

First, the fluorescence of cyano-substituted ESF nucleoside (^{2.6cn}A)-containing 13 mer ODN was examined. The fluorescence



Figure 3. Fluorescence spectra of (a) ^{1.4cn}A (2a, 10 µm), (b) ^{1.4dn}A (2b, 10 µm) and (c) ¹ⁿA (2c, 10 µm) in various solvents. The excitation was conducted at (a) 360 nm, (b) 375 nm and (c) 337 nm. (slit width: 1.5).



Scheme 2. Reagents and conditions: (a) DMF acetal, DMF, 80 °C, 30 min; (b) DMTrCl, DMAP, pyridine, rt, 3 h; (c) 2-cyanoethyldiisopropylchlorophosphoramidite, Et₃N, acetonitrile, rt, 30 min.

spectra of single-stranded ODN1 ($^{2,6cn}A$) exhibited relatively weak fluorescence at 446 nm. Then, the fluorescence of ODN1 ($^{2,6cn}A$) when hybridized with a complementary 12 mer blODN1 forming

a bulge structure at ^{2,6cn}A was examined. Strongly enhanced fluorescence emission appeared with a maximum at 446 nm (Fig. 4a), suggesting that the naphthalene fluorophore is located at the

 Table 2
 Oligonucleotides (ODNs) used in this study

ODNs	Sequences
ODN1 (x)	5'-d(CGCAA <u>TXT</u> AACGC)-3' X = ^{cn} A or ^{dn} A (13 mer)
ODN2 (x)	5'-d(CGCAA <u>CXC</u> AACGC)-3' X = ^{cn} A or ^{dn} A (13 mer)
b10DN1	3'-d(GCGTT <u>AA</u> TTGCG)-5' (12 mer, <u>bulge</u>)
b10DN2	3'-d(GCGTT <u>GG</u> TTGCG)-5' (12 mer, <u>bulge</u>)

hydrophobic site in the bulge structure as illustrated in Figure 4e. On the other hand, when the fluorescence probe ODN2 ($^{2,6cn}A$) for GC rich sequence was used, the fluorescence emission was completely quenched by the neighboring C/G base pairs in the bulge

formed in duplex ODN2 (^{2,6cn}**A**)/bIODN2 (Fig. 4c). This result showed that the fluorescence emission of ^{2,6cn}**A** in DNA is completely quenched by neighboring guanines (Gs) in a bulged structure, indicating that there is a strict sequence limitation for the use of cyano substituted ESF nucleoside fluorescence ^{2,6cn}**A**.

Then, the fluorescence spectrum of the electron-donating *N*,*N*-dimethylamino-substituted ^{2.6dn}**A**-containing oligodeoxynucleotide ODN1(^{2.6dn}**A**) was examined in the absence and presence of bulge-forming 12 mer blODN1. As shown in Figure 4b, the fluorescence intensity of single-stranded ODN1(^{2.6dn}**A**) was weak at 520 nm, probably because the naphthalene fluorophore is extruded to a polar aqueous solvent. In contrast, the fluorescence of the duplex ODN1(^{2.6dn}**A**)/blODN1 (bulge) was enhanced 3.6-folds with the fluorescence maximum being red-shifted to 537 nm



Figure 4. Fluorescence spectra of ODN1 [$X = {}^{2.6cn}A$ (a) and ${}^{2.6dn}A$ (b)] hybridized with b1ODN1 and of ODN2 [$X = {}^{2.6cn}A$ (c) and ${}^{2.6dn}A$ (d)] hybridized with blODN2 (2.5 μ m ODNs, 50 mM sodium phosphate, 0.1 M sodium chloride, pH 7.0, rt). The excitation wavelength was (a) 349 nm, (b) 420 nm, (c) 342 nm, and (d) 420 nm; (e) schematic illustration of the target DNA detection by ${}^{2.6dn}A$ -containing ODN probe via a bulge formation. (slit width: 1.5).



Figure 5. Fluorescence spectra of ODN1 [X = ^{1.4cn}A (a) and ^{1.4dn}A (b)] hybridized with blODN1 and of ODN2 [X = ^{1.4cn}A (c) and ^{1.4dn}A (d)] hybridized with blODN2 (2.5 μm ODNs, 50 mM sodium phosphate, 0.1 M sodium chloride, pH 7.0, rt). The excitation wavelength was (a) 368 nm, (b) 380 nm, (c) 365 nm and (d) 380 nm. (slit width:1.5).

(Fig. 4b), probably because the naphthalene fluorophore is located at the hydrophobic site in the bulge structure as proposed in case of ^{2,6cn}A. Interestingly, when the fluorescence probe containing GC rich sequence ODN2 (^{2,6dn}A) was used, the quenching by flanking C/G base pairs in the bulge was not observed as shown in Figure 4d. The fluorescence intensity of duplex ODN2(^{2,6dn}A)/blODN2 (bulge) was enhanced 2.9-folds compared to single-stranded ODN2(^{2,6d-} ^{n}A). These results indicate that *N*,*N*-dimethylamino substituted ESF nucleoside ^{2,6dn}A is usable for the detection of target DNA via the formation of a bulge structure regardless of the flanking bases, in contrast to ^{2,6cn}A whose fluorescence was strongly quenched by neighboring Gs. Essentially the same results were obtained with ODNs containing 1,4-disubstituted naphthylethynylated 2'-deoxyadenosines, ^{1,4cn}A and ^{1,4dn}A as shown in Figure 5. Thus, ESF nucleoside ^{1,4dn}A is also useful for the detection of target sequence regardless of the flanking sequences via the bulge formation.

In summary, we have succeeded in the molecular design of solvatofluorochromic ESF 2'-deoxyadenosine derivatives. We found that cyano- and *N*,*N*-dimethylamino substitution on the naphthalene ring of 8-naphthylethynylated 2'-deoxyadeosine derivatives induces a remarkable solvatofluorochromic property. In particular, *N*,*N*-dimethylamino containing ESF nucleosides ^{2.6dn}A and ^{1.4dn}A exhibited a strong fluorescence emission with high quantum yield without quenching by neighboring Gs contained in DNA duplexes. We demonstrated that ^{2.6dn}A- and ^{1.4dn}A-containing ESF oligonucleotides can be used as an effective fluorescent probe for the detection of target DNA via a bulge formation in a homogeneous fluorescence assay without DNA sequence limitations.

Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bmcl.2012. 11.029.

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- Spectroscopic data for ^{2,6cn}A (1a): ¹H NMR (DMSO-d₆, 400 MHz) δ 2.32 (ddd, J = 2.9, 6.6, 13.2 Hz, 1H), 3.20 (m, 1H), 3.54 (ddd, J = 5.0, 7.6, 11.8 Hz, 1H), 3.71 (ddd, J = 4.4, 4.5, 11.8 Hz, 1H), 3.94 (m, 1H), 4.56 (m, 1H), 5.33 (dd, J = 4.5,

7.6 Hz, 1H), 5.41 (d, *J* = 4.4 Hz, 1H), 6.60 (m, 1H), 7.71 (br, 2H), 7.88 (m, 1H), 7.91 (dd, *J* = 1.6, 8.5 Hz, 1H), 8.18–8.24 (complex, 3H), 8.49 (m, 1H), 8.68 (m, 1H); 13 C NMR (DMSO- d_6 , 100 MHz) δ 37.8, 62.2, 71.2, 80.4, 85.1, 88.4, 93.9, 110.0, 118.9, 119.8, 120.5, 127.6, 129.4, 129.4, 129.5, 131.9, 132.4, 132.5, 133.8, 134.3, 148.6, 153.6, 156.2; HRMS (ESI) *m*/*z* 449.1338 calcd for C₂₃H₁₈N₆O₃Na [M+Na]⁺ found 449.1309.

Spectroscopic data for ^{2.6dn}**A** (**1b**): ¹H NMR (DMSO-d₆, 400 MHz) δ 2.30 (ddd, J = 2.6, 6.5, 13.2 Hz, 1H), 3.07 (s, 6H), 3.19 (m, 1H), 3.54 (ddd, J = 4.9, 7.9, 11.8 Hz, 1H), 3.70 (ddd, J = 4.3, 4.4, 11.8 Hz, 1H), 3.95 (m, 1H), 4.54 (m, 1H), 5.39–5.42 (complex, 2H), 6.59 (m, 1H), 6.98 (m, 1H), 7.31 (dd, J = 2.5, 9.2 Hz, 1H), 7.51 (dd, J = 1.7, 8.5 Hz, 1H), 7.64 (br, 2H), 7.74 (d, J = 8.5 Hz, 1H), 7.84 (d, J = 9.2 Hz, 1H), 8.12 (m, 1H), 8.18 (s, 1H); ¹³C NMR (DMSO-d₆, 100 MHz) δ 37.8, 40.0 (×2), 62.3, 71.3, 77.8, 85.2, 88.4, 96.2, 105.1, 111.8, 116.9, 119.7, 125.2, 126.6, 127.9, 129.0, 132.3, 133.4, 135.2, 148.6, 149.6, 153.2, 156.0; HRMS (ESI) m/z 467.1808 calcd for C₂₄H₂₄N₆O₃Na [M+Na]⁺, found 467.1782. Spectroscopic data for ²ⁿA (fc): ¹H NMR (DMSO-d₆, 400 MHz) δ 2.32 (ddd,

Spectroscopic data for ²ⁿ*A* (1*c*): ¹H NMR (DMSO-*d*₆, 400 MHz) δ 2.32 (ddd, J = 2.8, 6.6, 13.2 Hz, 1H), 3.20 (m, 1H), 3.54 (ddd, J = 4.9, 7.7, 11.8 Hz, 1H), 3.71 (ddd, J = 4.4, 4.5, 11.8 Hz, 1H), 3.95 (m, 1H), 4.55 (m, 1H), 5.36 (dd, J = 4.4, 7.7 Hz, 1H), 5.41 (d, J = 4.4 Hz, 1H), 6.60 (m, 1H), 7.62–7.73 (complex, 5H), 8.01–8.07 (complex, 3H), 8.20 (s, 1H), 8.37 (m, 1H); ¹³C NMR (DMSO-*d*₆, 100 MHz) δ 37.8, 62.2, 71.2, 78.9, 85.1, 88.4, 94.8, 117.2, 119.7, 127.3, 127.7, 127.9, 128.0, 128.1, 128.8, 132.4, 132.5, 132.9, 133.1, 148.6, 153.5, 156.1; HRMS (ESI) *m/z* 424.1386 calcd for C₂₂H₁₉N₅O₃Na [M+Na]⁺, found 424.1409.