



Nucleosides and Nucleotides

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

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Synthesis and Biophysical Properties of Oligothymidylates Containing Alkoxyphosphoramidate Internucleoside Linkages

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Published online: 16 Feb 2007.

To cite this article: Suzanne Peyrottes, Jean-Jacques Vasseur, Jean-Louis Imbach & Bernard Rayner (1995) Synthesis and Biophysical Properties of Oligothymidylates Containing Alkoxyphosphoramidate Internucleoside Linkages, *Nucleosides and Nucleotides*, 14:3-5, 1061-1064

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15257779508012534>

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SYNTHESIS AND BIOPHYSICAL PROPERTIES OF OLIGOTHYIMIDYLATES CONTAINING ALKOXYPHOSPHORAMIDATE INTERNUCLEOSIDE LINKAGES.

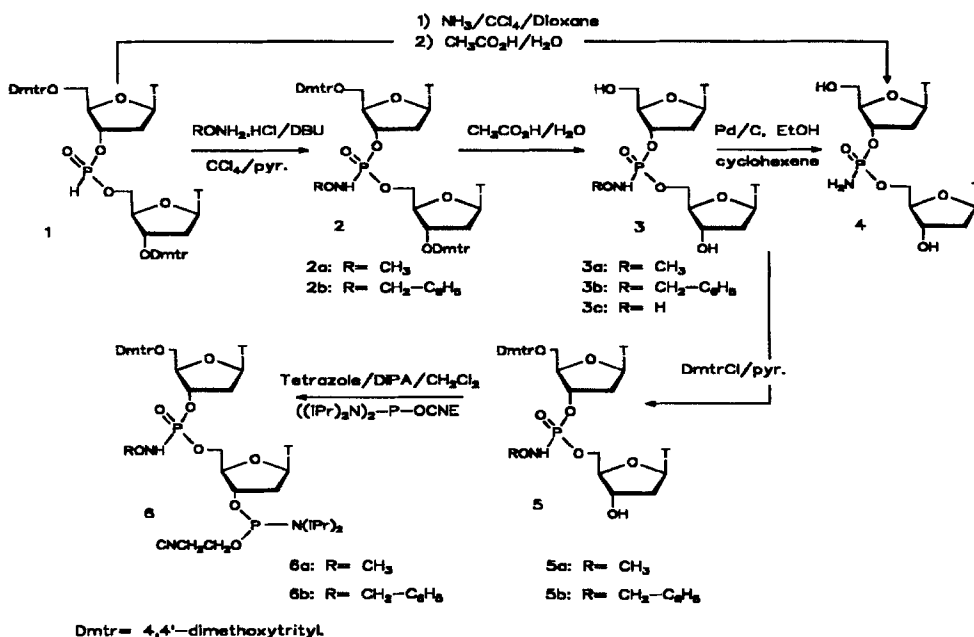
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Abstract: The synthesis and the biophysical properties of oligothymidylate analogs containing N-methoxy- and N-benzyloxyphosphoramidate combined with phosphodiester internucleoside linkages are reported.

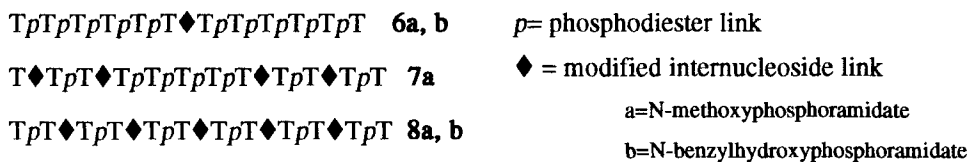
Antisense strategy is restricted by the nuclease degradation and the insufficient cellular uptake of the natural charged phosphodiester oligonucleotides. Therefore, chemical modifications of oligonucleotides are required for their effective use as potential antisense drugs. Here, we report a new internucleosidic modification in which the phosphodiester bond is replaced by an N-alkoxyphosphoramidate link.

The N-alkoxyphosphoramidate dimers **2a** and **2b** were obtained by oxidation of the dinucleoside H-phosphonate **1** with a solution of the corresponding alkoxyamine hydrochlorides in CCl₄/pyridine medium (5/1, v/v) in the presence of 1,8-diazabicyclo [5.4.0] undec-7-ene (DBU), (80% yield). Then, subsequent detritylation gave the deprotected dimers **3a** and **3b** as mixtures of diastereoisomers. From the ¹H-NMR spectra (DMSO-d₆) exchangeable protons resonating as well resolved doublets (δ=9.12 ppm, J¹HN-³¹P=17.9 Hz) were in accord with the literature data¹. An attempt to obtain the N-hydroxyphosphoramidate dimer (**3c**, R=H) from **3b** under catalytic transfer hydrogenation in ethanol using 10% Pd/C and cyclohexene as the hydrogen donor² was unsuccessful, and resulted exclusively in the formation of the phosphoramidate **4**. Structure of this compound was confirmed by comparison with an authentic sample of **4** obtained by oxidation of the H-phosphonate **1** with saturated ammonia solution in CCl₄/dioxane³, followed by acidic detritylation. In order to incorporate the N-alkoxyphosphoramidate link into oligonucleotides, dimers **3a** and **3b** were

dimethoxytritylated and phosphitylated to provide phosphoramidite synthons **6a** and **6b**, (overall yield of 25% for **6a** and 50% for **6b**).



The dimer blocks **6a** and **6b** were then incorporated into dodecathymidylate analogs using phosphoramidite chemistry on solid support according to a standard 1 μ mole synthesis cycle. Due to the observed instability of the alkoxyphosphoramidate linkage in concentrated aqueous ammonia solution ($t_{1/2}$ hydrolysis~ 1 hr at 55°C) the more labile oxalyl anchor⁴ was employed instead of the usual succinyl linker between the solid support and the growing oligonucleotides. Then, oligonucleotides were deprotected and removed from the solid support by treatment with methanolic ammonia⁵. Analogs combining natural phosphodiester and alkoxyphosphoramidate internucleoside links (up to five) were obtained (See sequences **6a,b**; **7a**, and **8a,b**).



The stability of duplexes of dodecathymidylates analogs with poly (dA) and poly (rA) was investigated by thermal denaturation experiments. The affinity of the N-

TABLE 1: Thermal stability (T_m)^a of duplexes formed between oligothymidylate analogs and poly (dA) or poly (rA) targets.

Compounds		versus poly (dA)		versus poly (rA)	
		T_m (°C)	$\Delta T_m/\text{mod}$ (°C)	T_m (°C)	$\Delta T_m/\text{mod}$ (°C)
d(T) ₁₂		33.5		30.5	
d(T ₆ ♦T ₆)	(6a)	32	- 1.5	27.5	- 3
	(6b)	29	- 4.5	23	- 7.5
d(T♦T) ₂ T ₃ (T♦T) ₂ T	(7a)	27.5	- 1.5	16.5	- 3.5
d(T(T♦T) ₅ T)	(8a)	25.5	- 1.6	11.5	- 3.8
	(8b)	12	- 4.3	<0	nd

(a) Melting temperatures (T_m) measured at 5 μM oligomer concentration in 10 mM sodium cacodylate, 100 mM sodium chloride buffer solution (pH 7).

TABLE 2: Half-lives of oligothymidylate analogs towards nuclease action.

	d(T) ₁₂	d(T♦T) ₂ T ₃ (T♦T) ₂ T (7a)	d(T(T♦T) ₅ T) (8a)
S1 nuclease ^{a)}	16 min	39 min	2.1 days
Snake venom phosphodiesterase ^{b)}	14 min (12 mer)	21 min (12 mer)	26.5 min (12 mer)
	12 min (11 mer)	11.4 hrs (11 mer)	16.2 hrs (11 mer)
Calf spleen phosphodiesterase ^{c)}	22 min (12 mer)	10 days (12 mer)	2 hrs (12 mer)
	21 min (11 mer)		12 days (11 mer)

^{a)} 50 mM sodium acetate buffer (pH 4.5) containing 300 mM sodium chloride and 100 mM zinc acetate, 37°C. ^{b)} 100 mM Tris HCl buffer (pH 9.0) containing 10 mM magnesium chloride, 37°C. ^{c)} 125mM ammonium acetate buffer (pH 6.8) containing 2.5 mM EDTA, 37°C.

methoxyphosphoramidate oligonucleotides for poly (dA) was slightly decreased compared to the affinity of the natural oligomer ($\Delta T_m/\text{mod} \sim 1.5^\circ\text{C}$) (TABLE 1). This decrease was more important with poly (rA) as the target ($\Delta T_m/\text{mod} \sim 3^\circ\text{C}$). Likely due to the steric hindrance around the phosphorus atom, an important destabilization was observed with N-benzyloxyposphoramidate compounds [$\Delta T_m/\text{mod} \sim 4.5^\circ\text{C}$ with poly (dA) and $\Delta T_m/\text{mod} \sim 7.5^\circ\text{C}$ with poly (rA)].

Nuclease resistance of N-methoxyphosphoramidate oligonucleotides **7a** and **8a** towards the action of purified enzymes was investigated in comparison with the resistance of unmodified d(T)₁₂. It was shown (TABLE 2) that N-

methoxyphosphoramidate oligonucleotides were resistant to *exo*- and *endonuclease* hydrolysis. Due to the modified linkage, a stabilizing effect was observed on both 5'- and 3'-vicinal phosphodiester bonds.

N-alkoxyphosphoramidate oligonucleotides represent a new class of backbone modified DNA analogs. Dodecathymidylates with alternating phosphodiester and alkoxyphosphoramidate linkages were synthesized with one to five modifications and their biophysical properties were studied. The replacement of the negatively charged phosphodiester linkage by the N-methoxyphosphoramidate link moderately weaken duplex stability of the oligonucleotides analogs when hybridized with poly (dA), and display a lower binding affinity with poly (rA). Destabilization is more pronounced with N-benzyloxyphosphoramidate compounds. The resistance of N-metoxyposphoramidate oligonucleotides towards nuclease action is significantly improved. Work is currently in progress to obtain less hindered N-hydroxyphosphoramidate oligonucleotides.

Acknowledgments: The work was supported by ANRS (Agence Nationale de Recherche sur le Sida) and ARC (Association pour la Recherche contre le Cancer). One of us (S. P.) thanks the Ministère de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur for the award of a research studentship.

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