Published in final edited form as:

J Am Chem Soc. 2006 February 22; 128(7): 2230–2231.

Radiosensitization by a Modified Nucleotide that Produces DNA Interstrand Cross-Links under Hypoxic Conditions

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A number of anti-cancer agents induce cell death by oxidizing or alkylating DNA. Molecules, such as mitomycin, that produce interstrand cross-links (ISCs) by alkylating opposing DNA strands are particularly deleterious to the cell.^{1–3} γ -Radiolysis is also a very common treatment for a variety of cancers in which DNA is the biologically relevant target.⁴ Radiation damage is enhanced by O₂, which “fixes” damage by trapping DNA radicals and helps to explain why hypoxic solid tumors resist ionizing radiation. Exogenous molecules have been developed that sensitize DNA to γ -radiolysis under anoxic conditions, in some cases possibly by acting as a surrogate for O₂.^{5,6} The non-native nucleosides, 5-bromo- and 5-iodo-2'-deoxyuridine, are also used as radiosensitizers. Random substitution of these molecules for thymidine enhances DNA damage by γ -radiolysis under anoxic conditions.⁷ We wish to report on the first modified nucleotide whose nucleotide triphosphate is accepted as a substrate by DNA polymerases and that sensitizes DNA to γ -radiolysis by producing interstrand cross-links.

Recently, we showed that phenyl selenide **1** produces an ISC with the opposing dA upon UV photolysis or oxidation (Scheme 1).^{8–10} Cross-linking proceeds through 5-(2'-deoxyuridinyl) methyl radical (**2**) upon photolysis or methide **4** under oxidative conditions. Both reaction conditions produce a kinetic ISC product believed to be **5** that isomerizes in solution to the isolated N6 adduct (**6**). The modest carbon-selenium bond dissociation energy, utility of aryl selenides in radical ion fragmentation chemistry, and their facile oxidation led us to investigate whether γ -radiolysis initiates ISC formation from **1**.^{11,12}

¹³⁷Cs irradiation of **7** produced ISC in a dose-dependent manner, as determined by denaturing polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (Figure 1A). The determination that ISC yield is dependent upon O₂ concentration (Figure 1B) eliminated the radical as an intermediate upon radiolysis of **1** because cross-link formation via **2** is independent of O₂.¹⁰ We investigated the possibility that ¹³⁷Cs irradiation produced ISC via the oxidation-rearrangement pathway (Scheme 1) by examining the effects of various additives that react with reactive oxygen species (Table 1).

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Supporting Information Available: Experimental procedures, sample velocity versus [dNTP] plots, and autoradiograms describing full-length primer extension for incorporating dTTP or **8**, and formation of 7,200 nt duplex from linearized M13mp7. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

Addition of mannitol, which traps hydroxyl radical, prior to irradiation of **7**, has almost no effect on ISC yield. In addition, ISC formation increased slightly when superoxide dismutase was added to the mixture prior to irradiation, suggesting superoxide was not involved in oxidation of **1** but perhaps H₂O₂ was. The involvement of H₂O₂ produced during radiolysis was confirmed by the large decrease in ISC formation upon catalase addition. As expected based upon the effect of catalase on cross-link formation, reaction of **7** with added H₂O₂ also produces ISCs (data not shown).

The indicated involvement of H₂O₂ suggested that γ -radiolysis-induced cross-links result from oxidation of **1** to the selenoxide (**3**) and rearrangement to electrophilic **4**, as shown to occur upon reaction with ¹O₂ or NaIO₄.⁹ Further support for this mechanism was obtained by determining the rate constants for ISC formation in **7** treated with NaIO₄ (5 mM) or exposed to ¹³⁷Cs (235 Gy) (Figure 2). ISC growth followed first-order kinetics in each instance. Moreover, the observed rate constants for ISC formation when **7** was exposed to ¹³⁷Cs (k_{obs}) 3.6 ($0.5 \times 10^{-4} \text{ s}^{-1}$, $t_{1/2}$) 32.1 min) or NaIO₄ (k_{obs}) 4.1 ($0.3 \times 10^{-4} \text{ s}^{-1}$, $t_{1/2}$) 28.2 min) were within experimental error of one another.

Although radiolytically induced ISC formation from **7** is O₂ dependent, cross-links are observed even under severely hypoxic conditions (Figure 1B). A more realistic illustration of how **1** might perform in cellular DNA would be to examine cross-linking in a longer duplex containing randomly incorporated phenyl selenide. This requires demonstrating that **1** can be incorporated enzymatically into DNA. The viability of this process was established by determining the steady-state parameters for incorporation of **1** by a model DNA polymerase, the Klenow exo⁻ fragment of *E. coli* DNA polymerase I.¹³ The corresponding nucleotide triphosphate (**8**) was accepted as a substrate for incorporation opposite dA, albeit ~150 times less efficiently than was dTTP (Table 2). In addition, a template could be fully copied by Klenow exo⁻ in the presence of dATP, dCTP, dGTP, and **8**, indicating that the modified nucleotide does not block extension and **1** can be incorporated at multiple sites within a duplex.¹⁴

A 7,200 nucleotide duplex containing **1** randomly incorporated in one strand was prepared by using Sequenase to copy linearized single-stranded M13mp7 plasmid.¹⁴ Transformation of linearized plasmid to duplex form was carried out in the presence of equal concentrations of **8** and dTTP (0.5 mM), along with the three other native dNTPs (1.0 mM). Using the relative specificity constants for dT and **1** incorporation by Klenow exo⁻ as a guide, on average, ~12 molecules of **1** are believed to be incorporated per duplex. Very high yields of ISC were obtained when the duplex was exposed to low doses of radiation (2-10 Gy) in aerated solution (Figure 3). No cross-linking was detected in a control duplex prepared without **8** (data not shown). Moreover, ~60% of the DNA molecules were cross-linked when exposed to 10 Gy in an O₂ environment (0.17%) found in severely hypoxic cells (Figure 3).

These data show that **1** is the first example of a modified nucleotide that produces interstrand cross-links in duplex DNA when exposed to γ -radiolysis.¹⁵ The ability to produce ISCs under O₂-deficient conditions and the acceptance of the respective nucleotide triphosphate as a substrate by polymerases are also desirable features for a nucleotide radiosensitizing agent. These experiments suggest that phenyl selenide **1** could be a useful radiosensitizing agent if it can be incorporated into cellular DNA.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgment. We are grateful for support from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (GM-054996). We thank Professor Ken Karlin, Mr. Yunho Lee, and Ms. Heather Lucas for use of and technical assistance with a gas mixer, and Dr. Clemens von Sonntag for helpful discussions.

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Scheme 1.
Interstrand Cross-Link (ISC) Formation via **1**

Figure 1. ISC formation from **7** upon γ -radiolysis: (A) as a function of dose under aerobic conditions; (B) as a function of O_2 concentration (98.4 Gy).

Figure 2.
Rate of ISC growth from **7** upon (A) γ -radiolysis (235 Gy) or (B) NaIO_4 (5 mM) treatment.

Figure 3.
ISC formation upon γ -radiolysis: as a function of dose under aerobic ($\bullet$, 21% O_2) and hypoxic ($\blacktriangle$, 0.17% O_2) conditions.

Table 1.
Effect of Reactive Oxygen Species Scavengers on ISC Formation

additive	% ISC (normalized)	additive	% ISC (normalized)
mannitol (1 mM)	93.9 ± 2.1	catalase (600 U)	8.5 ± 0.3
S.O.D. (0.6 U)	112.6 ± 6.6	S.O.D. (0.6 U)/catalase (600 U)	8.6 ± 0.5

Table 2.Comparison of Incorporation of **1** and dT Opposite dA by Klenow exo⁻

5'-d-ACC ATG GGA CGT ACG AC
 3'-d-TGG TAC CCT GCA TGC TGA TGC TAG GTC GTG CAC GTC

5'-d-ACC ATG GGA CGT ACG ACN
 3'-d-TGG TAC CCT GCA TGC TGA TGC TAG GTC GTG CAC GTC

dNTP	$V_{\max}$ (%·min ⁻¹)	K_m (nM)	$V_{\max}/K_m$ (%·min ⁻¹ ·nM ⁻¹)
dTTP	23.7 ± 1.4	8.5 ± 1.4	2.8 ± 0.3
8	10.7 ± 0.8	598.1 ± 58.7	1.8 ± 0.1 × 10 ⁻²