



High Resolution Separations of Oligonucleotides using PL-SAX Strong Anion-Exchange HPLC Columns

Application Note

Author

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Introduction

Oligonucleotides are synthesized on solid phase supports using an automated procedure of sequential addition of one nucleotide residue. At the end of the synthesis the oligonucleotide remains attached to the support matrix with the nitrogen and oxygen protecting groups left intact. The cleavage from the solid support matrix removes the protecting groups with the exception of the dimethoxytrityl (DMT) protecting group attached to the 5'-O-oligonucleotide terminus. This DMT protecting group can be used to separate based on hydrophobicity and then following deprotection, removal of the DMT group, anion-exchange HPLC can be performed to further resolve the oligonucleotide product from failure sequences.



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Materials and Reagents

Figure 1

Column: PL-SAX 1000Å, 8 µm, 50 x 4.6 mm (p/n PL1551-1802)
 Eluent A: 7:93 v/v acetonitrile: 0.1 M TEAA, pH 8.5
 Eluent B: 7:93 v/v acetonitrile: 0.1 M TEAA, 1 M ammonium chloride pH 8.5
 Gradient: 0-40% B in 10 min followed by 40-70% B in 14 min and 70-100% B in 25 min
 Flow Rate: 1.5 mL/min
 Temp: 60 °C

Figure 2

Column: PL-SAX 1000Å, 8 µm, 150 x 4.6 mm (p/n PL1551-3802)
 Eluent A: 7:93 v/v acetonitrile: 0.1 M TEAA, pH 7.0
 Eluent B: 7:93 v/v acetonitrile: 0.1 M TEAA, 3.24 M ammonium acetate pH 7.0
 Gradient: 0%B for 2 min followed by 0-100% B in 20 min
 Flow Rate: 1.5 mL/min
 Temp: 60 °C

Figure 3

Column: PL-SAX 1000Å, 8 µm, 50 x 4.6 mm (p/n PL1551-1802)
 Eluent A: 1 M sodium hydroxide
 Eluent B: 1 M sodium hydroxide, 2 M sodium chloride
 Gradient: 75-100%B for 25 min followed by 0-100% B in 20 min
 Linear Velocity: 360 cm/h

Results and Discussion

High resolution separations of oligonucleotides can be achieved using the PL-SAX strong anion-exchanger with separations of n-1 from n being achievable. Figure 1 shows the separation of a poly-T-oligonucleotide size standard spiked with a 10mer, 15mer, 30mer and 50mer (main peaks). Acetonitrile is added to the eluent to suppress the formation of secondary structures which would have a detrimental effect on the separation/resolution. With the gradient used here baseline separation of the n-1 from n is easily obtained up to the 15mer, but as the size increases so the resolution decreases.

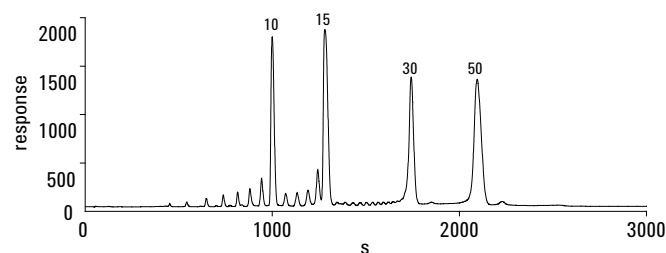


Figure 1. High resolution separation of a Poly-T-Oligonucleotide size standard spiked with a 10mer, 15mer, 30mer and 50mer (main peaks).

With larger oligonucleotides mass transfer becomes more difficult, resulting in less efficient separation, but it can be improved by working at elevated temperature. The PL-SAX 1000Å material has good open pore morphology. When this is used at elevated temperature large oligonucleotides can be chromatographed, as shown in Figure 2.

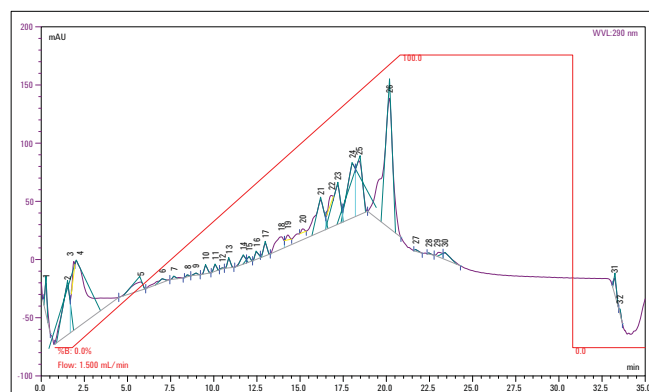


Figure 2. Purification of a large, 91mer, synthetic oligonucleotide.

For oligonucleotide therapy, chemical modifications are made to the phosphodiester oligonucleotide to increase its in vivo resistance to nuclease degradation. One such modification is thiolation to produce the phosphorothioate analog of the oligonucleotide. The purification challenge is then not only to purify from the failure sequences but also to separate the complete and incomplete thiolated forms. For this separation purification under denaturing conditions to avoid aggregation, is required. The use of high pH also suppresses the charge effects of the bases. With a strong ion-exchange functionality on a chemically stable polymeric particle, anion-exchange chromatography can be performed at pH 12 to 13. Figure 3 shows the separation of complete and incomplete thiolated forms of a typical 20mer oligonucleotide using sodium hydroxide as the eluent.

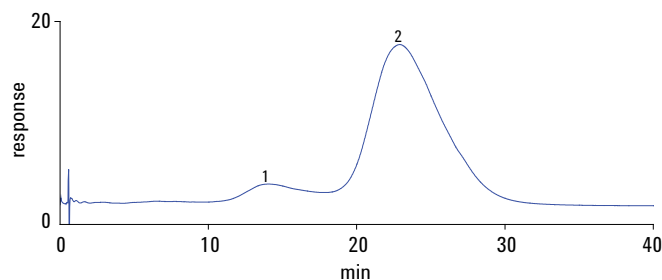


Figure 3. Separation of residual phosphodiester (1) and a phosphorothioate (2) 20mer oligonucleotide.

Conclusion

Polymeric strong anion-exchange materials, such as the PL-SAX, are ideal for anion-exchange analysis and purification of oligonucleotides, due to the material being both thermally and chemically stable. By working at elevated temperature, enhanced mass transfer increases the resolution for longer oligonucleotides. Denaturing conditions, pH 12 and above, can be used to avoid aggregation of modified oligonucleotides, self-complementary and GC-rich oligonucleotides during analysis and purification. The high pH also suppresses ionization of the individual bases, working above their p*H* to enable resolution of phosphodiester and phosphothioate forms of the oligonucleotide.

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Published in UK, May 20, 2011

5990-8297EN



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