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Organic Chemistry: Current Research

Commentary

Study and Synthesis of Enantiomers and its Unique Properties

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DESCRIPTION

Enantiomers, also known as optical isomers, are molecules that have the same chemical composition and molecular formula but differ in their spatial arrangement. They are mirror images of each other, just like our hands are mirror images of each other, but they cannot be superimposed on each other. Enantiomers have identical physical and chemical properties except for their interaction with polarized light and other chiral molecules. This seemingly subtle difference in structure has significant implications in the fields of pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and materials science, making enantiomers a fascinating subject of study. The properties of enantiomers arise from their distinct three-dimensional arrangements, which affect how they interact with other molecules. Many biological systems, such as enzymes and receptors, are chiral, meaning they can distinguish between enantiomers and have different affinities for them. For example, the drug thalidomide, which was used in the 1950s to treat morning sickness in pregnant women, was a racemic mixture of enantiomers. It was later discovered that only one enantiomer had therapeutic benefits while the other caused birth defects. This tragic incident highlighted the importance of enantiomeric purity in pharmaceuticals and led to the development of chiral separation techniques. Chiral separation is the process of separating enantiomers from a racemic mixture or a mixture of different enantiomers. It can be achieved by various methods, such as chromatography, crystallization, and enzymatic resolution. Chiral separation is essential for ensuring the safety and efficacy of drugs and reducing side effects. It is also crucial in the development of agrochemicals, where different enantiomers can have different effects on crops and pests. Apart from their biological and pharmaceutical applications, enantiomers also have unique properties in materials science. For example, liquid crystals, which are used in electronic displays, can exhibit different optical properties depending on their enantiomeric form. Similarly, chiral polymers, which have a helical structure, can exhibit different mechanical and optical properties depending on their enantiomeric form. The use of enantiopure materials can lead to improved performance and efficiency in various applications. Despite their importance and potential, the study and synthesis of enantiomers remain challenging. Enantiomers are typically synthesized from chiral starting materials or through chiral catalysis. However, these methods are often expensive, time-consuming, and limited in their scope. Recent advances in asymmetric synthesis and biocatalysts have led to the development of more efficient and sustainable methods for enantiomer synthesis. Furthermore, the use of computational methods, such as molecular modeling and machine learning, can aid in the prediction and design of enantiomers with desired properties. Enantiomers also pose unique challenges in regulatory and legal frameworks. In many countries, enantiomers are considered separate chemical entities and are subject to different regulations and intellectual property laws. The development and marketing of enantiopure drugs can require additional testing and approval processes, leading to higher costs and delays. Furthermore, the patenting of enantiomers can be complex, as the discovery of one enantiomer does not necessarily guarantee the discovery of the other. The study and synthesis of enantiomers offer exciting opportunities for the development of new materials, drugs, and agrochemicals. However, it also highlights the need for responsible research practices and regulatory frameworks that ensure the safety, efficacy, and accessibility of enantiopure products. The use of enantiomers also raises questions about the societal and ethical implications of their discovery and application. For example, the discovery of enantiomers with unique properties can lead to the development of monopolies and inequitable access to healthcare.

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Received: 10-Jan-2023, Manuscript No. OCCR-23-22697; **Editor assigned:** 12-Jan-2023; PreQC No. OCCR-23-22697 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 26-Jan-2023, QC No. OCCR-23-22697; **Revised:** 02-Feb-2023, Manuscript No. OCCR-23-22697 (R); **Published:** 09-Feb-2023, DOI: 10.35841/2161-0401.23.12.313.

Citation: Goldust H (2023) Study and Synthesis of Enantiomers and its Unique Properties. Organic Chem Curr Res. 12: 313.