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Commentary

An Overview on Synthetic Sugar Analogs and Glycan-Based Medicines

Sarkar Langthasa*

Department of Microbiology, Sikkim University, Gangtok, Sikkim, India

DESCRIPTION

Synthetic sugar analogs are artificially created compounds that mimic the structure of natural sugars. These analogs are designed to have similar chemical properties and functions as sugars found in biological systems. They are widely used in various fields, including glycobiology, chemical biology, and medicinal chemistry, for several purposes. The choice of synthetic sugar analog depends on the specific research or therapeutic application. Researchers use these analogs to gain insights into glycan functions, develop new drugs, or create diagnostic tools related to glycosylation and carbohydrate-protein interactions. The field of glycobiology and synthetic sugar analogs continues to advance, offering new avenues for drug development, targeted therapies, and a deeper understanding of the role of sugars in various biological processes.

Types of synthetic sugar analogs

Mimetics of monosaccharides: These analogs imitate individual sugar molecules, such as glucose, mannose, or fucose. They can be used to study glycan binding and metabolic pathways. For example, 2-deoxyglucose is a glucose analog used to study glucose metabolism and its effect on cancer cells.

Sialic acid analogs: Sialic acids are important components of glycoproteins and glycolipids. Synthetic analogs of sialic acids are used to study cell-surface interactions, adhesion, and signaling processes. Peracetylated sialic acid analogs are one example.

Modified sugars: These analogs have modifications or substitutions on the sugar ring to investigate their influence on glycan-protein interactions. For example, peracetylated sugars with acetyl groups on hydroxyl groups can be used as glycosyltransferase inhibitors.

Glycosidase inhibitors: Synthetic analogs that mimic glycosidase substrates are used to inhibit glycosidase enzymes. Miglitol and acarbose are examples of synthetic analogs used to treat diabetes by inhibiting alpha-glucosidases in the digestive system.

Glycoside mimetics: These analogs imitate glycosidic linkages in oligosaccharides and glycoproteins, offering insight into enzymatic processes that involve glycoside cleavage or formation.

Glycolipid analogs: These analogs mimic the structure of glycolipids and can be used to study cell-membrane interactions and signaling pathways.

Glycopeptide analogs: Designed to mimic glycosylated peptide structures, these analogs help researchers investigate protein glycosylation, glycan binding, and the role of glycoproteins in various cellular processes.

Oligosaccharide analogs: Synthetic analogs of complex oligosaccharides are used to study carbohydrate-protein interactions and cell adhesion processes.

Glycan arrays: These are not individual analogs but rather arrays of diverse synthetic carbohydrates immobilized on a solid surface. They are used for high-throughput screening of carbohydrate-protein interactions.

Clickable sugars: These analogs have chemical groups that can be used for bioconjugation and functionalization. They allow for the attachment of various functional moieties to sugars, making them versatile tools in chemical biology and drug development.

Glycan-based drugs

A recent study involving synthetic sugars focuses on the development of glycan-based drugs. One such example is the use of synthetic sialic acid analogs in the treatment of certain cancers. Sialic acids are a family of nine-carbon sugars that play crucial roles in cell signaling, adhesion, and immunity. Researchers developed synthetic sialic acid analogs that could selectively target sialic acid-binding proteins involved in cancer metastasis. These analogs were designed to inhibit the function of sialic acid-binding lectins on cancer cells, which are known to promote tumor growth and metastasis.

The synthetic sialic acid analogs were tested in preclinical models of cancer, including mouse models. The researchers found that these analogs effectively inhibited tumor growth and metastasis by interfering with the interactions between sialic acids on the cancer cell surface and lectins on immune cells and endothelial cells. This study represents an example of how synthetic sugar analogs can be used to develop new therapeutic agents for cancer treatment. By targeting specific glycan-protein

Correspondence to: Sarkar Langthasa, Department of Microbiology, Sikkim University, Gangtok, Sikkim, India, E-mail: sarlang@gmail.com

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interactions, these analogs have the potential to disrupt key pathways involved in cancer progression and metastasis.

Clinical importance

Research tools: Synthetic sugar analogs serve as valuable tools for studying and understanding the roles of sugars in biological processes. Researchers use them to investigate carbohydrate-protein interactions, glycosylation pathways, and their impact on cell signaling and disease.

Drug development: Synthetic sugar analogs are crucial in drug development. They can be used to design potential drugs that target specific sugar-binding proteins, such as lectins or glycosidases. These compounds have the potential to treat diseases by interfering with processes like cell adhesion or viral entry.

Vaccine development: In vaccine research, synthetic sugar analogs can help create glycoconjugates, which are compounds that mimic the surface carbohydrates of pathogens. These mimics trigger an immune response, helping to develop vaccines against infections caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites.

CONCLUSION

Synthetic sugar analogs are also used in diagnostic assays. They can act as molecular recognition elements, binding to specific target sugars and aiding in the detection of diseases or monitoring glycan changes in various biological samples. These analogs can be used to probe and manipulate biological systems. By introducing synthetic sugar analogs, researchers can alter glycan structures in cells and observe the effects on cell behavior and function. They offer researchers and scientists powerful tools to manipulate and investigate the intricate world of carbohydrates in biology and medicine.