**Inhibition of thrombin generation by dermatan sulfate isolated from the skin of Oreochromis niloticus**

Tayane Caetana Salles¹, José Ariévilo Gurgel Rodrigues¹, Priscila Gomes Barcellos¹, Gerlânia Farias Amaral², Ianna Wivianne Fernandes Araújo², Paulo Antônio de Souza Mourão¹

**ABSTRACT**

Oreochromis niloticus has skin anticoagulant glycosaminoglycans (GAGs), but their effects on thrombin generation (TG) are unknown. This study partially characterized skin GAGs and analyzed as inhibitors of TG. Papain-extraction yield of 0.1% contained two fractions separated by DEAE-cellulose chromatography, differing on charge density and carboxylated groups by a combination of agarose/polyacrylamide electrophoresis and sequential toluidine blue/stains-all staining, presenting molecular sizes ca. 40 kDa. Depolymerization of the fractions with chondroitin ABC lyase showed dermatan sulfate (DS) as the unique GAG by agarose analysis. Both activated partial thromboplastin time (APTT) and prothrombin time tests only showed anticoagulation by fractions and mammalian DS by APTT (0.61, 0.47 and 1.72 IU, respectively) against heparin (193 IU). Fractions acted concentration-dependent on both intrinsic/extrinsic pathways in TG using 60-fold diluted human plasma, with more than 50% inactivation (41.6 and 83.3 µg), whereas DS and heparin entirely abolished at low amounts. DS from O. niloticus skin blocks in vitro TG in human plasma.

**Key words:** Cichlidae; freshwater fish; sulfated glycans; thrombosis in vitro; waster

---

**Inibição da geração de trombina por dermatam sulfato isolado da pele de Oreochromis niloticus**

**RESUMO**

Oreochromis niloticus possui glicosaminoglicanos (GAGs) anticoagulantes de pele, porém desconhecidos são seus efeitos sobre geração de trombina (GT). Caracterizou-se parcialmente GAGs de pele e analisou-se como inibidores de GT. Rendimento de 0,1% da extração com papaina, conteve duas frações separadas por cromatografia de DEAE-cellulose, e por combinação de eletroforese de agarose/poliacrilamida e coramento sequencial azul de toluidina"stains-all", diferiram quanto à densidade da carga e grupos carboxilados, apresentando tamanhos moleculares ca. 40 kDa. Depolimerização das frações com chondroitina ABC mostrou, por análise em agarose, dermatam sulfato (DS) como GAG único. Ambos os testes do tempo de tromboplastina parcial ativada (TPPA) e do tempo de protrombina mostraram anticoagulação, das frações e DS de mamífero, somente pelo TPPA (0,61; 0,47 e 1,72 UI, respectivamente) contra ao da heparina (193 UI). Frações atuaram sobre ambas vias intrínseca/extrínseca dependente de concentração na GT usando plasma humano diluído 60 vezes, com inativação mais que 50% (41,6 e 83,3 µg), enquanto em quantidades baixas DS e heparina aboliram totalmente. DS da pele de O. niloticus bloqueia GT in vitro no plasma humano.

**Palavras-chave:** Cichlidae; peixe dulcícola; glicanos sulfatados; trombose in vitro; resíduo
Introduction

GAGs comprise a variable family of highly complex glycans produced from vertebrate and invertebrate tissues (Volpi & Maccari, 2002; Arima et al., 2013; Pomin, 2014; Sayan et al., 2016). They are heteropolysaccharides consisting of units of alternating residues of N-acetylgalactosamine or glycosamine linked to a non-nitrogenated sugar, like uronic acid (D-glycuronic acid or L-iduronic acid) or a galactose, making themselves typical chains are known as mucopolysaccharides, and their association to proteoglycans form the matrix’ principal elements playing several physiological and pathological events (Tovar et al., 2005; Volpi, 2011; Oliveira et al., 2015). Chondroitin sulfate (CS), dermanatan sulfate (DS), heparan sulfate (HS), keratan sulfate and heparin (HEP) are the most GAGs found, varying not only the hexosamine and non-aminated sugar residue but also the degree and position of sulfated groups, as well as the type of glycoside bond. Hyaluronic acid does not contain sulfation and may occur freely in tissue (Volpi, 2011; Kang et al., 2015; Oliveira et al., 2015).

GAGs have been traditionally used as health food ingredients and medications (Volpi, 2011); however, the decontrolled fishing of sharks (Arima et al., 2013) and lobsters (Sayan et al., 2016) and the risk of viral contamination from the pig as another source of commercially-important GAGs (Mourão, 2015), as well as the price and limited supply of GAGs produced by fermentation from bacteria or extracted from avian (Arima et al., 2013) indicate the need to look for alternative sources of glycans with both economic and environmental benefits (Cardozo et al., 2007; Volpi, 2011).

GAGs from fish tissues have been isolated as a highly valuable platform for the valorization of residues obtained from food processing for the development of novel commercially-important biomaterials (Arima et al., 2013). DS has been predominantly found in the skin of several marine fish species than other GAGs types (Dellias et al., 2004; Souza et al., 2007; Mansour et al., 2009).

The anticoagulant potential of GAGs isolated from the skin of fishes has been still few studied. DSs isolated from the ventral skin of four Brazilian species of rays (Dasyatis americana, D. gutatta, Aetobatus narinari and Potamotrygon motoro), Dellias et al. (2004) reported only those from D. americana and D. gutatta exhibited anticoagulation mediated by HCl (IC_{50} = 1-3 mg mL^{-1}). This anticoagulant mechanism was also proposed for skins DSs from the electric eel Electrophorus electricus (Souza et al., 2007). Skin DS from the ray Raja radula showed a significant factor Xa inhibition (IC_{50} = 0.6 mg mL^{-1}) (Mansour et al., 2009). Teleost fishes also exhibited GAGs with in vitro anticoagulant actions (2-5 IU) (Rodrigues et al., 2009; Rodrigues et al., 2012; Krichen et al., 2017).

The employment of classical coagulation methods, such as the activated partial thromboplastin time (APTT) and the prothrombin time tests, indicate only a limited value on the total amount of thrombin formed. Because this limitation in terms of precision toward direct measurement of thrombin generation (TG) potential in a plasma sample, TG-based methods more precisely represent the haemostatic status (Castoldi & Rosing, 2011; Jun et al., 2014) and provide relevant information to analyze substitutes to HEP by preventing thrombosis in vitro (Glauser et al., 2009; Rodrigues et al., 2016), which it induces bleeding and thrombocytopenia (Mourão, 2015). No contribution of fishes GAGs concerning their effects on TG assays has been described so far.

Oreochromis niloticus (Linnaeus, 1758) is a popular freshwater fish in world aquaculture for meet human nutrition (Araújo et al., 2010). This African tropical species, belonging to the Cichlidae family, has greater growth performance in intensive systems and its commercial production to agribusiness had a rapid expansion in recent decades, and generating side-products from fish meat processing, such as skin tissue (Moreira et al., 2001). GAGs previously isolated from this fish species revealed anticoagulation (4-23 IU) less potent than HEP (193 IU) (Rodrigues et al., 2011).

The current study analyzed physical-chemical characteristics of complex GAGs present in the skin of O. niloticus by a combination of agarose/polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis and sequential staining with toluidine blue and stains-all; it also whether these GAGs inhibit an in vitro TG continuous system in 60-fold diluted human plasma.

Material and Methods

Fish skin samples and sulfated GAGs analyses

Skin tissue samples of O. niloticus were obtained from experimentally cultured specimens (Weigh: 495.6 ± 58.13 g; Total length: 29.90 ± 0.87 cm, n = 5) from the Farm of the Federal University of Ceará, Brazil. All the fishes were cultured in ponds (4 fishes.m^{-2}) and fed (twice per day) with a commercial diet containing 28% crude protein at the end of the cultivation. The water quality parameters temperature (29 ± 2 °C), pH (7.5 ± 0.7), dissolved oxygen (5 ± 0.4 mg L^{-1}) and ammonia (0.01 ± 0.3 mg L^{-1}) showed normal levels for tilapia culture (Moreira et al., 2001; Araújo et al., 2010).

The dehydrated skin tissue samples (40 °C, 24 h) were conserved in plastic bags and then conducted at the Connective Tissue Laboratory, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for analyses. Tilapia skin dehydrated and cut into small pieces (19.5 g) was subjected to papain digestion (60 °C, 24 h) in 100 mM sodium acetate buffer (pH 5.0) containing cysteine and EDTA (both 5 mM), as previously published elsewhere (Rodrigues et al., 2011) and the yield expressed as the percentage (%) of the dehydrated matter. The total extract (18.5 mg) was dissolved in 10 mL of 50 mM sodium acetate buffer (pH 5.0) and applied to a DEAE-cellulose column (1.2 × 12 cm) equilibrated with the same buffer. The fractionation was conducted using a stepwise ranging from 0 to 1.5 M NaCl at 0.25 M intervals in the same buffer. Fractions of 2.5 mL were collected and analyzed for GAGs using the metachromatic assays (A_{525 nm}) containing dimethyl methylene blue with an Amersham Bioscience Ultrospec 3100 spectrophotometer at 525 nm, as also described (Rodrigues et al., 2011). The metachromatic fractions were further dialyzed and freeze dried.

Detection of GAGs on agarose (Dietrich & Dietrich, 1976) and polyacrylamide (Rodrigues et al., 2013) gels by sequential staining with toluidine blue and stains-all (Volpi & Maccari, 2002) was also performed by comparison with the
electrophoretic mobility of standard compounds low molecular weight dextran sulfate ( 8 kDa), chondroitin-4-sulfate ( 40 kDa), chondroitin-6-sulfate ( 60 kDa) (Rodrigues et al., 2013), dermatan sulfate (DS) and/or heparan sulfate (HS) (Rodrigues et al., 2011). Subsequently, fractions were also characterized by a new agarose analysis after enzymatic digestions (12 h, 37 °C) with chondroitin AC and ABC lyases in order to demonstrate the GAG species in respective fractions as described by Dellias et al. (2004) and Souza et al. (2007).

**Activated partial thromboplastin time (APTT) and prothrombin (PT) tests**

The anticoagulant effects of the fractions were assessed by both *in vitro* APTT and PT tests, using normal citrated human plasma (10 different donors, University Hospital Clementino Fraga Filho, FURJ) according to the manufacturers’ specifications, for measure a possible anti-clotting effect in a coagulometer Amelung KC4A before of the *in vitro* TG assay. For APTT assay, a mixture of 100 μL of plasma and concentration of GAGs (1 mg mL⁻¹) was incubated with 100 μL of APTT reagent (kaolin bovine phospholipid reagent). After 2 min of incubation at 37°C, 100 μL of 25 mM CaCl₂ was added to the mixtures, and the clotting time was recorded. Regarding the PT assay, a mixture of 100 μL of plasma and concentration of GAGs (1 mg mL⁻¹) was incubated for 1 min at 37 °C. After that, 100 μL of PT reagent was added to the mixtures, and the clotting time was recorded using same coagulation equipment. Unfractionated heparin (UHEP) with 193 international units per mg (IU mg⁻¹) of polysaccharide was used as the standard on both tests. All the tests were performed in triplicate.

**TG-based coagulation assay**

This assay was carried out in a microplate format, containing: 10 μL of APTT reagent (contact-activator system) or PT reagent (830 μg well-plate⁻¹, factor tissue-activator system) + 30 μL of 0.02 M Tris-HCl/PEG buffer (pH 7.4) + 10 μL of GAGs (O. niloticus fractions: 0, 4.1, 41.6 or 83.3 μg well-plate⁻¹; UHEP: 2 or 4 μg well-plate⁻¹; mammalian DS: 4 or 8.3 μg well-plate⁻¹) + 60 μL of 20 mM CaCl₂/0.33 mM chromogenic substrate S2238 (10:50 ratio, v:v⁻¹). The *in vitro* reaction was triggered at 37 °C by addition of plasma (diluted 60-fold well-plate⁻¹, ten μL), and the absorbance (405 nm) was recorded every 1 min for 60 min using a Thermomax Microplate Reader (Molecular Devices, Menlo Park, CA, USA). The *in vitro* inhibitory response of TG by GAGs was analyzed by lag phase, peak thrombin (PTH) and time to peak (TPeak) (Rodrigues et al., 2016).

**Statistical analyses**

The APTT and PT values were expressed as mean ± S.E.M., and analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed, followed by Tukey’s test for unpaired data, with p < 0.05 as statistically significant.

**Results and Discussion**

**Tilapia skin reveals a little amount of matrix' GAGs**

Skin samples of *O. niloticus* were subjected to proteolytic incubation (60 °C, 24 h) to obtain and partially characterize GAGs. Based on the dehydrated tissue, a total GAGs extraction yield of approximately 0.1 ± 0.05% was revealed to be 10-fold lower than that of the overall extract (1%) from the skin tissue of the ray *R. radula* using same papain method (Mansour et al., 2009). This amount of GAGs contained in the *O. niloticus* skin contrasted with a previously described study from Arima et al. (2013), who digested (55 °C, three h) defatted dry scale tissue with protease N Amano G, yielding a very scarce amount of total GAGs. This combined information allowed the assumption that some GAGs in this Cichlidae species varies depending on the tissue of origin. Therefore, these findings demonstrate that the abundance of fish GAGs vary according to the species and tissue for use as raw material supplies for the world’s biopolymers industry (Rodrigues et al., 2009; Kang et al., 2015). It is described that the nature of first matter and the protocol of extraction are determining factors for some polysaccharides (Cardozo et al., 2007; Rodrigues et al., 2012).

**Combined physical-chemical analyses reveal unique DS**

The analysis by anion-exchange chromatography (DEAE-cellulose) of the crude GAG confirmed the separation into two fractions (F I and F II), eluted at 0.5 and 0.75 M of NaCl, respectively, as demonstrated by Rodrigues et al. (2011), who previously reported *O. niloticus* skin GAGs isolation. According to the metachromasy assay, 0.5 M NaCl fraction (F I), which was obtained at the beginning of the stepwise, accounted about 8-fold greater the total material recovered from the column (9.8 mg yield) than F II (1.2 mg yield), which required a 0.75 M salt concentration for the elution of sulfated GAGs. Total fraction yield was 3.66-fold greater compared with that found for this same fish species by Rodrigues et al. (2011). On elution with stepwise of NaCl, the concentration of GAGs in *O. niloticus* skin was also greater than that of freshwater fish *Cyprinus carpio* (5.7 mg) (Rodrigues et al., 2009), but lower than those found in the deep-sea fishes *Lycodes nakamurae* and *L. toyamensis* (13 and 18 mg, respectively), when sulfated GAGs fractions were obtained by stepwise of LiCl (Arima et al., 2013).

As the separation by DEAE-cellulose of a complex mixture of sulfated glycans is not always possible (Tovar et al., 2005), our studies further extended to physical-chemically analyze by electrophoretic techniques the degree of purity and molecular mass of the *O. niloticus* fractions, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Agarose analysis revealed, by treatment with the cationic dye toluidine blue, an electrophoretic profile of sulfated GAGs (Figure 1Aa). On the basis this result, 0.5 M NaCl fraction (F I), which had greater yield from the DEAE-cellulose column, showed strong homogeneous band co-migrating as porcine DS on gel, similar to other studied fishes DS-type GAGs (Dellias et al., 2004; Souza et al., 2007; Rodrigues et al., 2012). On the contrary, fraction F II, eluted at 0.75 M, appeared virtually due to its relatively lower charge density in the chemical structure than F I, which revealed great metachromasy (Rodrigues et al., 2009).

Although clearly individualized by polyanionic character, both fractions suggested same structural conformation due to their interaction with the 1,3-diaminopropane/acetate buffer along their electrophoretic migrations on the gel (Dietrich &
Dietrich, 1976). Similarly, the staining of the fraction F II after its separation by polyacrylamide analysis with toluidine blue led to a weak revelation of the band containing sulfated GAGs. On the basis this procedure, the fractions exhibited average molecular mass distribution as C-4-S (ca. 40 kDa) (Figure 1Ba) (Souza et al., 2007). Taking to literature data, it was speculated a possible mixture of O. niloticus skin DS and CS, which were not separated by DEAE-cellulose using different ionic strength (Tovar et al., 2005).

To clarify this hypothesis, samples of the fractions (at high concentrations) were subjected to enzymatic digestions with particular lyases (chondroitin AC and ABC) and examined by comparison with the known porcine DS standard. Fractions evaluated by chondroitin AC lyase were resistant to action this enzyme after incubation at 37 °C for 12 h. By contrast, treatment with chondroitin ABC lyase totally degraded both fractions, revealing DS as the unique sulfated GAG species contained in these preparations (Figure 1Ca); therefore, free of CS contamination (Dellias et al., 2004). Overall, DS exhibiting an average molecular mass of 40 kDa (Figure 1Ba) was present in the O. niloticus skin as an attractive report on freshwater fishes because this GAG is the most abundant express in marine fish skin tissues (Dellias et al., 2004; Mansour et al., 2009; Arima et al., 2013; Krichen et al., 2017).

Therefore, both low molecular size and low charge density of F II did not limit the complex formed with the acidic residues (D-glycuronic acid or L-iduronic acid) of the compound (Figure 1Ab; Figure 1Bb). The observation was also supported by treatment with chondroitin ABC lyase because no band was observed on agarose gel after stains-all staining (Figure 1Cb). The purity of GAGs is an essential step in the course of their extraction to quality control of commercially available products (Volpi & Maccari, 2002).

Anticoagulation by O. niloticus GAGs is better reflected on an in vitro TG protocol than typical APTT and PT tests

The in vitro effects of O. niloticus GAGs on both standard APTT and PT clotting assays are summarized in Table 1, and were compared with UHEP (193 IU mg⁻¹, ca. 14 kDa) and mammalian DS.

On a weight-to-weight basis, normal human plasma treated with a high concentration (1 mg mL⁻¹) of both fractions (F I and F II) only marginally inactivated the intrinsic coagulation pathway in 1.6 (53.50 ± 0.30 s, 0.61 IU mg⁻¹) and 1.25-fold (42.00 ± 0.04 s, 0.47 IU mg⁻¹) (p < 0.05), respectively, compared with plasma control (33.5 ± 0.08 s), whereas UHEP and mammalian DS still delayed the plasma clotting time at...
Inhibition of thrombin generation by dermatan sulfate isolated from the skin of Oreochromis niloticus

Table 1. In vitro anticoagulant effects of fractions obtained by anion-exchange chromatography (DEAE-cellulose) from the skin of Oreochromis niloticus compared with mammalian DS and UHEP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fractions</th>
<th>NaCl (M)</th>
<th>APTT (s)</th>
<th>PT (s)</th>
<th>T1, T2 (min)</th>
<th>IU mg⁻¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>53.50 ± 0.30</td>
<td>11.20 ± 0.01</td>
<td>1.60 ± 0.04</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>42.00 ± 0.04</td>
<td>10.20 ± 0.02</td>
<td>1.25 ± 0.07</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NaCl – Sodium chloride; Activated partial thromboplastin time (APTT); Prothrombin time (PT).

The difference in the degree of in vitro inactivation by the different classes of polysaccharides suggested to a distinct mode of action of each polymer added to plasma collected from Brazilian for display anticoagulation. It is recognized that UHEP (that has AT-binding pentasaccharide sequence which does not present in other SPs) shows inhibitory mechanism on the coagulation system by AT, and by preventing the formation of the factor X- and thrombin-activating complexes (Morão, 2015) because UHEP modifies TG in plasma as also revealed for Chinese (Jun et al., 2014), whereas mammalian DS has HCII-dependent anticoagulant mechanism (Morão, 2015).

Some inhibitory roles on the coagulation have been proposed for GAGs isolated from fishes (Dellias et al., 2004; Souza et al., 2007; Mansour et al., 2009) and other polysaccharides from different sources (Glauser et al., 2009; Mourão, 2015; Rodrigues et al., 2013; Rodrigues et al., 2016). It seemed that O. niloticus GAGs may display their in vitro inhibitory actions by stereospecific features independent of their degree of sulfation and/or molecular size (Morão, 2015) since these physical-chemical features did not limit the levels of anticoagulant responses between both fractions (Figures 1 and 2) in comparison with the classical assays, which were of limited value (Table 1) (Castoldi & Rosing, 2011). On the basis of application, our in vitro TG assay could perhaps be an additional tool for biochemically explore O. niloticus matrix GAGs role against stress-related responses under intensive production conditions (Moreira et al., 2001; Araújo et al., 2010).
alternative anticoagulants to UHEP. Due to the importance of this species in world aquaculture and the generally discarded wasters from its food processing (Moreira et al., 2001), its skin is a rich source in unique DS (ca. 40 kDa) with therapeutic implications in the coagulation, when an increase of plasma prothrombin's referential values increase the TG after activation by both intrinsic and extrinsic pathways (Castoldi & Rosing, 2011). A more detailed analysis regarding its anticoagulant mechanisms is needed as an essential step to antithrombotic drug development (Tovar et al., 2005; Jun et al., 2014; Mourão, 2015).

Conclusion

The skin of Nile tilapia, Oreochromis niloticus, reveals dermatan sulfate-type glycosaminoglycans (ca. 40 kDa) displaying experimental thrombosis inhibition by both intrinsic and extrinsic pathways independently of charge and molecular size, when in 60-fold diluted human plasma using continuous method of thrombin generation in vitro, but with less efficacy than heparin and mammalian dermatan sulfate.

Acknowledgements

We thank the funding from CAPES/PNPD, FAPERJ, CNPq, and MCT.

Literature Cited


Inhibition of thrombin generation by dermatan sulfate isolated from the skin of Oreochromis niloticus


