

Biosynthesis of N-Acetylneuraminic acid (NeuNAc, NANA) from the renewable resource chitin using *Trichoderma reesei* as whole-cell biocatalyst

NeuNAc is used as a precursor for the production of neuraminidase inhibitors, which are used for the treatment of viral diseases (e.g. drug Relenza). The production of NeuNAc is expensive and therefore a new process was developed at the TU Vienna combining the advantage of a single-step process and using the cheap and renewable substrate chitin. For this purpose, the filamentous fungus *Trichoderma reesei* was developed as a whole-cell biocatalyst and the missing enzyme functionalities were genetically introduced.

BACKGROUND

So far, N-acetylneuraminic acid was produced by means of multistage enzymatic catalysis, direct extraction from natural resources or via bacterial fermentation. High costs of the substrates (N-Acetylglucosamine) and enzymes as well as the multistage process make NeuNAc an expensive product. Aim of this project was the development of a single-step process using a renewable feedstock.

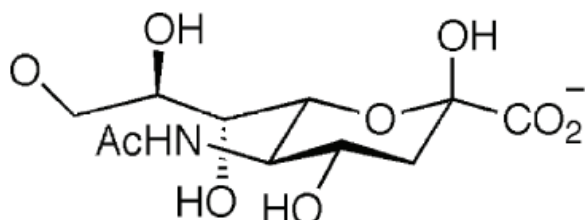


Figure 1: N-Acetylneuraminic acid (NeuNAc)

TECHNOLOGY

The industrially used fungus *Trichoderma reesei* is well known for its ability to degrade biopolymers like cellulose and chitin. The monomer of chitin, N-acetylglucosamine, is used as a precursor for the biosynthesis of NeuNAc. In order to enable the production of NeuNAc directly in the fungus it was necessary to insert two bacterial genes into the genome of *Trichoderma*. A strain carrying both genes has the ability to directly produce NeuNAc when grown on chitin.

ADVANTAGES

- Production of NeuNAc in a single-step process
- The renewable biopolymer chitin is used as a substrate
- *Trichoderma reesei* is used as a whole-cell biocatalyst

REFERENCE 048/10

APPLICATIONS:

Precursor for the production of neuraminidase inhibitors like Zanamivir (active ingredient of Relenza) used for the treatment of viral diseases

KEYWORDS:

- Neuraminidase inhibitor
- NeuNAc NANA
- whole-cell biocatalyst
- *Trichoderma reesei*
- chitin

DEVELOPMENT STATUS:

Proof of concept was done in laboratory scale, process optimization is currently ongoing

OPTIONS:

- R&D collaboration

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