

## Gene sequencing, cloning, and expression of the recombinant L- Asparaginase of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* SN4 strain in *Escherichia coli*

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** L- asparaginase is in an excessive demand in medical applications and in food treating industries, the request for this therapeutic enzyme is growing several folds every year.

**Materials and methods:** In this study, a L- asparaginase gene from *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* strain SN4 was sequenced and cloned in *E. coli*. Primers were designed based on L- asparaginase from *P. aeruginosa* DSM 50071, which show high similarity to SN4 strain, according to *16S rRNA* sequence. The L- asparaginase gene was exposed to restriction digestion with NdeI and XhoI enzymes and then ligated into pET21a plasmid. The ligated sample was transformed into competent *E. coli* (DE3) pLysS DH5a cells, according to CaCl<sub>2</sub> method. The transformed *E. coli* cells were grown into LB agar plate containing 100 µg/ml ampicillin, IPTG (1 mM).

**Results:** Recombinant L- asparaginase from *E. coli* BL21 induced after 9 h of incubation and showed high L- asparaginase activity about 93.4 IU/ml. Recombinant L- asparaginase sequencing and alignments showed that the presumed amino acid sequence composed of 350 amino acid residues showed high similarity with *P. aeruginosa* L- asparaginases about 99%. The results also indicated that SN4 L- asparaginase has the catalytic residues and conserve region similar to other L- asparaginases.

**Discussion and conclusion:** This is the first report on cloning and expression of *P. aeruginosa* L- asparaginases in *Escherichia coli*. These results indicated a potent source of L- asparaginase for *in vitro* and *in vivo* anticancer consideration.

**Key words:** L- asparaginase, Cloning, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, Sequence alignments

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## Introduction

Bacterial L- asparaginase has been broadly used as an actual therapeutic agent against lymphosarcoma and acute lymphoblastic leukemia (1- 3). Numerous cases of current research are accessible regarding the use of L- asparaginase in melanoma therapy (4- 6). The use of anti-tumor therapy is based on its capacity to hydrolase L- asparagine to L- aspartic acid and ammonia in serum and cerebro- spinal fluid. Since tumor cells are unable to make endogenous L- asparagine, starvation for this amino acid hints to death of these cells (7). L- asparaginase received enlarged care in current years as food handling helps to diminish the development of acrylamide in carbohydrate-based foods that were fried, baked or roasted (8 & 9). L- asparaginase has also been considered for presentation in the L- asparagine biosensor for leukemia (10). Meanwhile, the statement that *E. coli* L- asparaginase has an anticancer activity similar to that of guinea pig serum, there has been extensive attention in L- asparaginase from numerous sources particularly microorganisms. Many plants, mammalian and bacterial species can produce L- asparaginases. Although other bacteria, such as *Thermococcus gammatolerans* (11), *Pectobacterium carotovorum* MTCC 1428 (12 & 13), *Cladosporium* sp. (14), *Streptomyces* (15), *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (16), and *Actinomycetes* (17), *Escherichia coli* (18) have a latent for L- asparaginase making, but the enzymes from *Erwinia* sp. and *E. coli* (1, 7 & 19) has been used as an anti-cancer agent.

Up to now, only L- asparaginase from *Erwinia* and *E. coli* has been used in medical application. Because of various side effects of these enzymes, finding other bacterial L- asparaginase received more attention. So, isolation of L- asparaginase gene from *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* strain SN4, cloning, expression in *E. coli* is the aim of this study.

## Materials and methods

**Chemical materials:** L- asparagine and trichloroacetic acid (TCA) were obtained from Sigma Chemicals Co. L- asparaginase- specific primers used in this study were synthesized by Bioneer Co. (Soft Korea). Taq polymerase and dNTPs were procured from Sinaclone (Iran).

**Cloning of PaA gene:** *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* strain SN4 was previously isolated and identified in our lab (20). A BLAST search of *P. aeruginosa* genome sequence using as a query, the gene encoding for L- asparaginase from *P. aeruginosa* yielded a single 1041- bp ORF that was hypothesized to code for L- asparaginase. This strain was grown- up at 30°C in a medium containing 0.5% yeast extract, 1% peptone and 1% NaCl. After 16 h, cells were harvested by centrifugation (10,000× g 10 min, at 4°C) and genomic DNA was isolated according to a standard method (21). Genomic DNA isolated from *P. aeruginosa* strain SN4 was used as the template for amplification of L- asparaginase gene using the primers: pCFP (5- GGAATTCCATATGATGGCCCTGATGCTC- 3) and pCRP (5- CCGCTCGAGGTATTCCCAGAAGAT- 3), where, the italic sequences are the



**L- asparaginase production and purification:** The *E. coli* BL21 cells were grown into LB agar plate containing ampicillin (100 µg/ml). 2 ml of an overnight cultures inoculated into 20 ml of LB medium in Erlenmeyer flasks (100 ml) and grown for 24 h at 37°C in a 180 rpm shaker incubator. L- asparaginase synthesis was induced by the addition of 1mM IPTG (isopropyl- β- D-thiogalactopyranoside) after 9 h of growth. 9 hours after induction, cells were pelleted by centrifugation at 5000 g and 4°C for 15 min, resuspended in sodium phosphate buffer (10 mM, pH 7.5), sonicated and centrifuged at 10,000×g for 15 min. The supernatant was gathered and used for purification.

The lysate of *E. coli* BL21 containing pET21aASN was applied to a Q-Sepharose column, an anion exchanger, pre- equilibrated with 45 mM Tris- HCl buffer, pH 8.5. The proteins were eluted (1 ml/min) with NaCl gradient (0.1- 0.5 M) and 45 mM Tris- HCl buffer (pH 8.5). The active fractions were concentrated with ammonium sulphate (80%) and dialyzed. The purity of the enzyme was valued by SDS- PAGE. SDS- PAGE was done according to the method of Laemmli (24) on a slab gel comprising 10.0% (w/v) polyacrylamide (running gel) and 5.0% (w/v) (stacking gel). The molecular size of the purified L- asparaginase was estimated using molecular markers and the proteins were stained with Coomassi Brilliant Blue R-250. The purified L- asparaginase was dialyzed to remove salt.

**L- asparaginase assay:** The L- asparaginase activity was investigated by the technique of Imada, utilizing the Nessler reaction (25). In this method, the ammonia liberated from L- asparagine in the enzyme reaction measured by the Nessler reaction. The reaction was started by adding 100 µl cell suspension into the 900 µl of 100 mM L- asparagine prepared in 50 mM Tris/HCl buffer, pH 8.0 and incubated for 20 min at 37°C. The reaction was stopped by the addition of 100 µl 1.5 M TCA. The reaction mixture was pelleted by centrifugation at room temperature (10,000 g for 10 min) to remove the precipitate and the ammonia released into the supernatant was determined colorimetrically ( $A_{480}$ ) by adding 0.2 ml Nessler reagent into tubes containing 0.3 ml supernatant and 1.5 ml H<sub>2</sub>O. The content in the tubes was vortexed and incubated at room temperature for 10 min, and the  $A_{480}$  values were measured against the blank that received TCA before the addition of cell suspension. One L- asparaginase unit (U) is defined as the amount of enzyme that liberates 1 µmole of ammonia per min at 37°C. Ammonium sulphate was used as the standard for enzyme activity calculations. For rapid colorimetric assay the recombinant bacteria were screened using the modified M9 medium (1 l: 3.0 g KH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>; 6.0 g Na<sub>2</sub>HPO<sub>4</sub>·2H<sub>2</sub>O; 0.5 g NaCl; 5.0 g L- asparagine; 0.5 g MgSO<sub>4</sub>·7H<sub>2</sub>O; 0.014 g CaCl<sub>2</sub>·2H<sub>2</sub>O; 2.0% (w/v) glucose, and 15.0 g agar) combined with a pH indicator (phenol red). Development of pink color was considered as a positive result for L- asparaginase production (20).

## Results

**Cloning PaA:** A BLAST search of *P. aeruginosa* SN4 genome sequence in NCBI database (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>) using the amino acid sequence of L-asparaginase from *P. aeruginosa* DSM 50071 (accession number: CP012001) as a query sequence, generated a high-probability match to a single 1041- bp ORF, encoding a predicted protein of 346 amino acids. To define whether the supposed *P. aeruginosa* protein was actually an active L- asparaginase, we cloned and expressed the full- length gene in *E. coli* and confirmed for its capacity to hydrolysis L- asparagine.

PCR was used to amplify the full- length gene from genomic DNA of *P. aeruginosa* SN4 (Fig. 2). The PCR product was cloned into the pET21a vector. This plasmid was used to transform the *E. coli* BL21 (DE3) pLysS as an expression host. L- asparaginase from *Erwinia carotovora* has been cloned in *E. coli* BL21 (26).

**L- asparaginase expression:** *E. coli* BL21 containing pET21aASN was grown up in LB medium supplemented with 1 mM IPTG. After 9 h of induction, 2 ml of this culture was added to 2 ml of phosphate buffer (20 mM, pH 8.0) containing L-asparagine (10 mM) and phenol red (0.001%). After 10 min incubation at room temperature, a tube containing *E. coli* BL21 with 9h induction, showed a dense pink color against the other (Fig. 3). These results indicated high activity of recombinant L- asparaginase about 93.4 IU/ml.

After induction with 1 mM IPTG, sample was picked up at different time incubation (3, 6 and 9 h). Results showed

that the maximum L-asparaginase production was achieved after 6 h of incubation (Fig 4b).

Purification results showed that active fraction was obtained in 15% of NaCl concentration. After dialysis, active fraction was loaded on SDS-PAGE gel and then the gel stained with Coomassie Blue. Results showed the attendance of only one band with the molecular weight of 35.0 kDa (Fig. 4a).

**Gene sequence analysis:** The sequence of recombinant L- asparaginase gene consisted of 1041 bp showed more than 99% identity with similar sequences of different *P. aeruginosa* strains (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). Results in Fig. 5, showed the multiple sequence alignment of *H. pylori* CCUG 17874 (Hepy; EIE30409.1), *B. subtilis* W168 (Basu; AAA22243.1), *E. coli* (Esco; NP 417432.1), and *Er. chrysanthemi* 3937 (Erch; AAS67028.1), *B. licheniformis* (BaLi, WP\_044789473), *K. pneumoniae* JM45 (Klpn, AGT24790), *P. aeruginosa* SN004 (Pasn) and *P. aeruginosa* (Paea, WP\_023099587).



Fig. 3- L- asparaginase activity in medium supplemented with phenol red and L- asparagine. Lane 1; *E. coli* BL21 containing pET21aASN without induction and Lane 2; extract of *E. coli* BL21 containing pET21aASN after 9 h of incubation induction with 1mM IPTG.

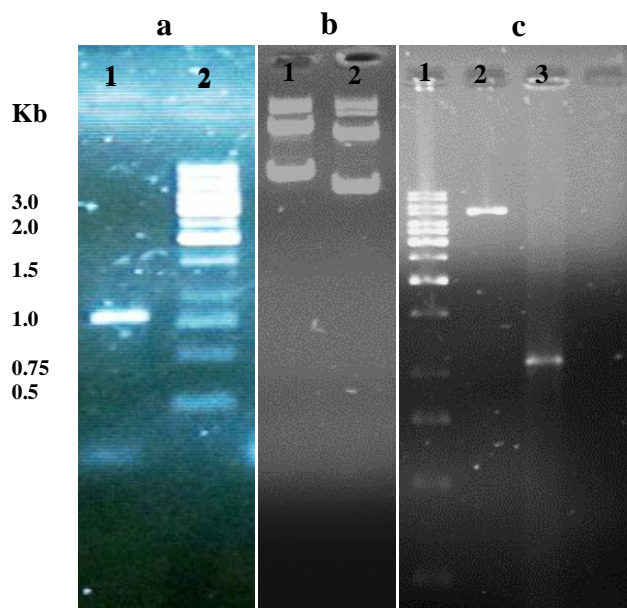


Fig. 2- Agarose gel in the cloning process. a) Electrophoresis in 1% agarose gel of PCR product (1) and DNA ladder (2). b) Recombinant construct (1; 6.5 Kb), (2) pET21a vector without insert. c) Restriction endonuclease digestion of polymerase chain reaction product (3; 1.0 Kb), pET21a digested with NdeI and XhoI (2; 5.4 Kb) and DNA ladder (1).

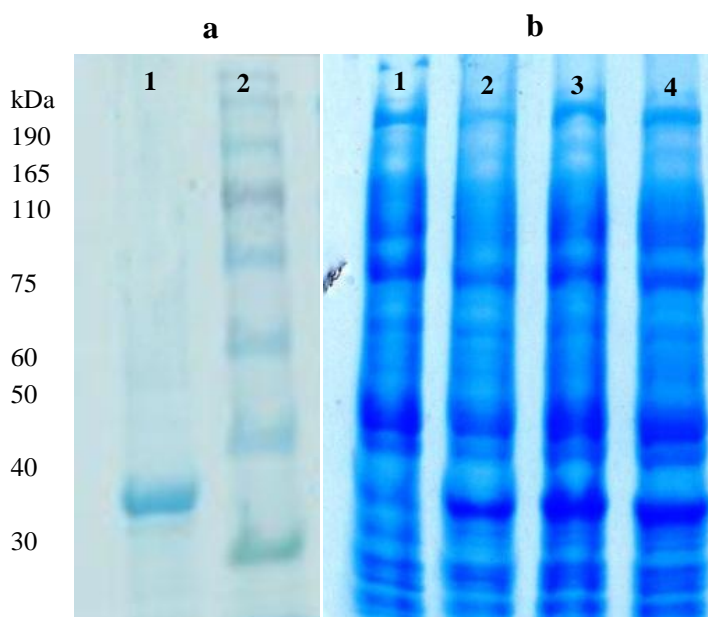


Fig. 4- SDS- polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis of L- asparaginase induction and purification. Protein bands were stained with Coomassie Brilliant Blue R- 250. a) L- asparaginase purification, Lane 1 (molecular weight markers), Lane 2 (purified L- asparaginase). b) *E. coli* crude extract without induction (lane 1) and after 3h (lane 2), 6h (lane 3) and 9 h (lane 4) of incubation induction with 1mM IPTG.

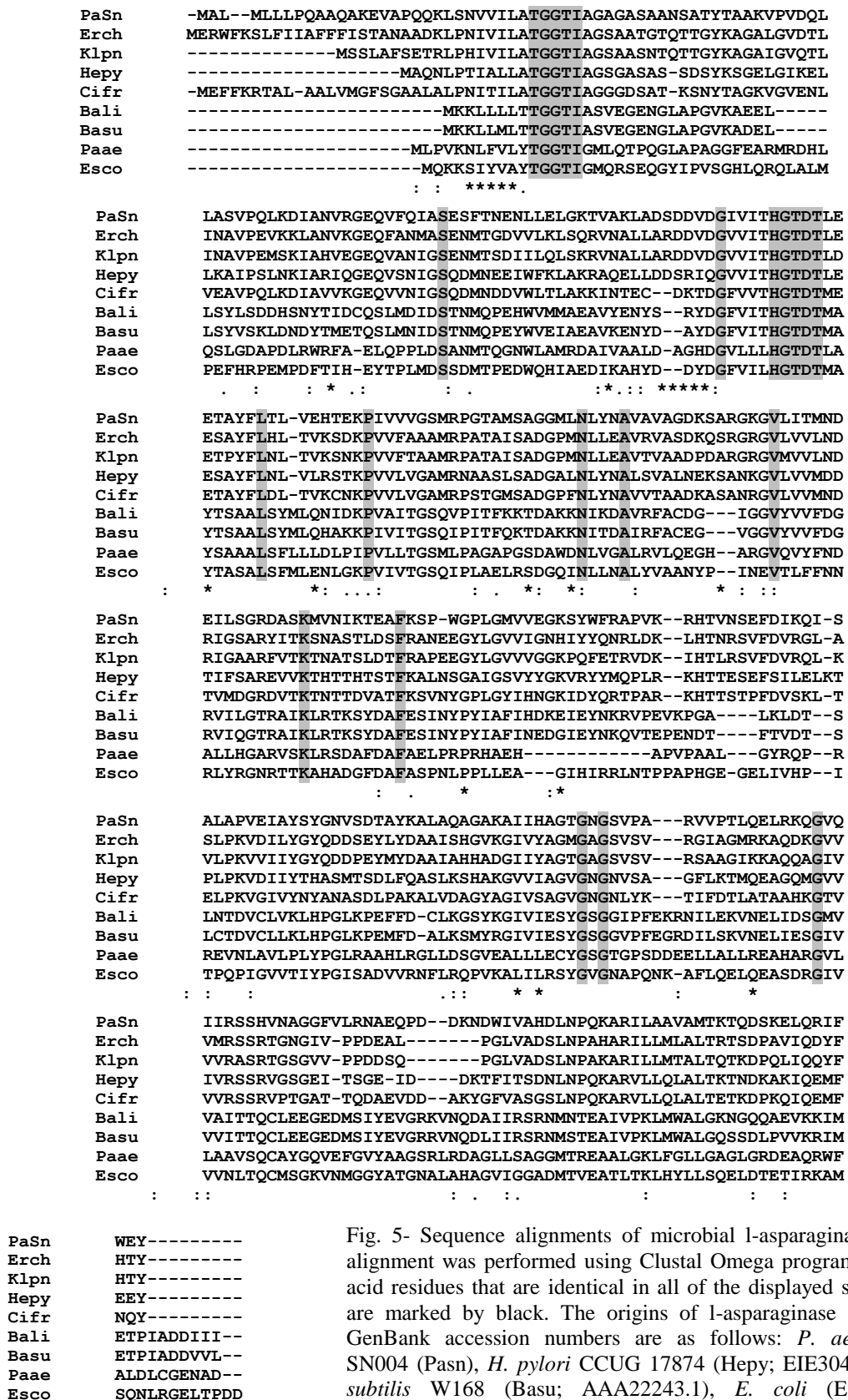


Fig. 5- Sequence alignments of microbial l-asparaginases. The alignment was performed using Clustal Omega program. Amino acid residues that are identical in all of the displayed sequences are marked by black. The origins of l-asparaginase and their GenBank accession numbers are as follows: *P. aeruginosa* SN004 (Pasn), *H. pylori* CCUG 17874 (Hepy; EIE30409.1), *B. subtilis* W168 (Basu; AAA22243.1), *E. coli* (Esco; NP 417432.1), and *Er. chrysanthemi* 3937 (Erch; AAS67028.1), *B. licheniformis* (BaLi, WP\_044789473), *K. pneumoniae* JM45 (Klpn, AGT24790), *P. aeruginosa* (Paae, WP\_023099587).

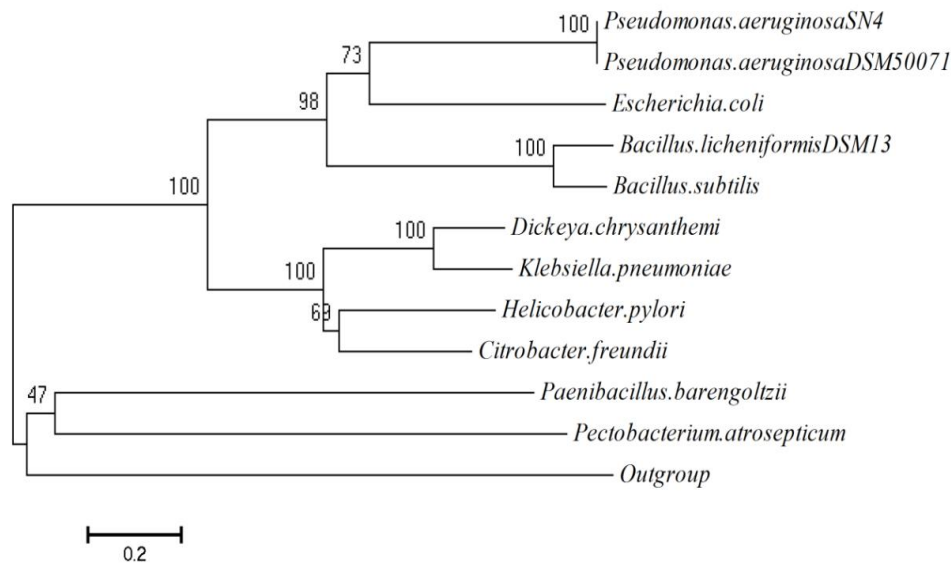


Fig. 6- Phylogenetic analysis of the L- asparaginase protein of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* strain SN4. Bootstrap values and scale bar depicting substitution rate per site are indicated. The phylogenetic tree constructed by the neighbor- joining method showing the position of L- asparaginase of of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* strain SN4. Protease from *Escherichia coli* was used as outgroup.

### Discussion and conclusion

Because of various side effects of *Erwinia* L- asparaginase, finding other bacterial L- asparaginase received more attention. So, production of recombinant L- asparaginase has academic and practical importance. Up to now, there is only one report about cloning of L- asparaginase gene of *P. fluorescens* into *E. coli* BL21 (27) and there is no report about cloning of *P. aeruginosa* L- asparaginase. Multiple sequence alignment of L- asparaginases showed that *P. aeruginosa* L- asparaginase SN4 has 43% similarity with other L- asparaginases from *E. coli* (WP\_047081447) and *Bacillus subtilis* (AID16240). The results also indicated that SN4 L- asparaginase has the catalytic residues and two conserve regions similar to other L- asparaginases from *E. coli*, *B. subtilis*, *H. pylori*, *Er. chrysanthemi* 3937, *B. licheniformis*, *K. pneumoniae* JM45 and

*P. aeruginosa*. In this study, phenol red used as a pH indicator to screen recombinant L- asparaginase. Molecular weight of *P. aeruginosa* L- asparaginase strain SN4 was about 35 kDa. In this respect, L- asparaginases purified from *Pseudomonas stutzeri* MB- 405, *Thermus thermophilus* and *Escherichia coli* were with smaller Mr values, ranging from 33- 34 kDa, (28- 30). Purified L- asparaginase from *Bacillus* sp., *Streptomyces gulbargensis*, *Streptomyces albidoflavus* and S. PDK2 exhibited a molecular weight of 45, 85, 112 and 140 kDa, respectively (31- 34). Recombinant L- asparaginase showed high activity with about 93.4 IU/ml. Gilbert et al., Liu et al. and Oza et al. have cloned and expressed *E. coli*, *E. chrysanthemi* and *Withania somnifera* L- asparaginase gene into *E. coli*. The enzyme activities of these recombinant strains were 49, 106 and 17.3 IU/ml, respectively. High



activity of recombinant SN4 L-asparaginase indicated a potent source of L-asparaginase for anticancer examination *in vitro* and *in vivo*.

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## تعیین توالی ژن، کلونینگ و بیان آل - اسپاراژیناز نوترکیب از سودوموناس آیروجینوزا سویه SN4 در اشریشیاکلی

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### چکیده

**مقدمه:** آل - اسپاراژیناز جایگاه با ارزشی از جنبه کاربردهای پزشکی و صنایع غذایی دارد. تقاضا برای این آنزیم دارویی هر ساله چندین برابر می‌شود.

**مواد و روش‌ها:** در این پژوهش، یک اسپاراژیناز از سودوموناس آیروجینوزا سویه SN4، تعیین توالی و در اشریشیاکلی کلون شد. پرایمرها بر اساس آل - اسپاراژیناز از سودوموناس آیروجینوزا سویه DSM50071 طراحی شدند که بر اساس توالی ژن *16S rRNA* شباهت بالایی را نسبت به سویه SN4 نشان می‌داد. ژن اسپاراژیناز در معرض هضم آنزیمی توسط آنزیم‌های برشی *XhoI* و *NdeI* قرار گرفت و سپس، به داخل پلاسمید pET21a الحاق شد. محصول الحاق به درون سلول‌های مستعد *E. coli* (DE3) pLysS DH5a با روش  $CaCl_2$  ترانسفورم شد. سلول‌های *E. coli* ترانسفورم شده در محیط LB آگار حاوی ۱۰۰ میکروگرم/ میلی‌لیتر آمپیسیلین و ۱mM IPTG رشد داده شدند.

**نتایج:** آل - اسپاراژیناز نوترکیب در باکتری *E. coli* BL21 پس از ۹ ساعت انکوباسیون، به میزان بالایی القا شد و فعالیت اسپاراژینازی بالایی به میزان ۹۳/۴ واحد در میلی‌لیتر را نشان داد. آل - اسپاراژیناز نوترکیب تعیین توالی شد و نتایج هم‌ردیفی نشان داد که توالی پیشنهادی اسید آمینه‌ای آن از ۳۵۰ اسید آمینه تشکیل شده که شباهت بالایی با آل - اسپاراژینازهای سایر سودوموناس آیروجینوزها در حدود ۹۹ درصد را نشان می‌دهد. نتایج نشان می‌دهد که آل - اسپاراژیناز SN4، باقی‌مانده‌های کاتالیزی و نواحی حفظ شده مشابه با سایر اسپاراژینازها را داراست.

**بحث و نتیجه‌گیری:** پژوهش حاضر نخستین گزارش در مورد کلونینگ و بیان آل - اسپاراژیناز نوترکیب از سودوموناس آیروجینوزا در اشریشیاکلی است که منبع بالقوه‌ای از آل - اسپاراژیناز را برای بررسی اثر ضدسرطانی آن هم در شرایط آزمایشگاه و هم در موجود زنده فراهم می‌کند.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** آل - اسپاراژیناز، کلونینگ، سودوموناس آیروجینوزا، هم‌ردیفی توالی

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