American Journal of Physiology Biochemistry and Pharmacology, 2024
VOL 14, NO. 6, PAGE 01-02

PERSPECTIVE

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CRISPR/Cas9: Therapeutic Potential of Precision Medicine for Cancer, Infections, and Autoimmunity

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ARTICLE HISTORY
Received: 18-Oct-2024, Manuscript No. AJPBP-24-153910;
Editor assigned: 21-Oct-2024, PreQC No. AJPBP-24-153910 (PQ);
Reviewed: 05-Nov-2024, QC No. AJPBP-24-153910;
Revised: 13-Nov-2024, Manuscript No. AJPBP-24-153910 (R);
Published: 20-Nov-2024

Description

Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR/Cas9) technology has revolutionized the field of gene editing by providing an efficient and precise tool for modifying Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA). Initially recognized for its applications in genetic research, CRISPR/Cas9 has shown enormous in the therapeutic realm, particularly for treating cancer, infectious diseases, and autoimmune disorders. This gene-editing technology holds the potential to not only target the underlying causes of these diseases but also to offer novel, personalized treatment options for patients.

CRISPR/Cas9 in cancer therapy

Cancer remains one of the most significant global health challenges, with many types resistant to traditional treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation, and targeted therapy. CRISPR/Cas9 has emerged as a transformative tool in cancer treatment due to its ability to edit genes within tumour cells or immune cells, providing new approaches to therapy.

Editing tumour cells

CRISPR/Cas9 can be used to target specific genes in cancer cells that contribute to tumour growth, survival, and resistance to treatment. One approach involves knocking out genes that are essential for cancer cell proliferation or survival, such as oncogenes that drive the growth of malignant cells. Additionally, CRISPR/Cas9 can target genes involved in the tumour's ability to evade the immune system. Cancer cells often downregulate certain immune checkpoint molecules to avoid detection by the immune system.

Gene editing of immune cells

One of the most promising applications of CRISPR in cancer treatment is the modification of immune cells to make them more effective in attacking cancer cells. Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell (CAR-T) therapy, which involves modifying a patient's T-cells to express receptors that specifically target cancer cells, has shown success in treating blood cancers like leukaemia and lymphoma. CRISPR/Cas9 can improve CAR-T cell therapies by enhancing their ability to target solid tumors or by modifying them to avoid immune suppression in the tumour microenvironment.

CRISPR/Cas9 in infectious diseases

Infectious diseases caused by bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens have been the cause of significant morbidity and mortality worldwide. CRISPR/Cas9 has shown potential in treating infectious diseases by targeting the genetic material of pathogens or enhancing the host's immune response.

Targeting pathogen DNA: CRISPR/Cas9 can be used to directly target the DNA or RNA of infectious agents, offering a new method to combat infections. Similarly, CRISPR has been applied to target the genomes of Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) and Zika virus, with promising results in lab models. By cutting viral DNA or RNA, CRISPR could offer a new class of antiviral therapies, particularly for viruses that have developed resistance to conventional drugs.

Enhancing host immune response: In addition to directly targeting pathogens, CRISPR can be used to enhance the host immune system's ability to fight off infections. By editing genes involved in immune function, CRISPR could improve the body's natural defence mechanisms. For instance, scientists are

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exploring the use of CRISPR to boost the activity of immune cells like T-cells and macrophages to enhance their ability to recognize and destroy pathogens.

Challenges and future directions

Despite the enormous potential of CRISPR/Cas9 in treating cancer, infectious diseases, and autoimmune disorders, challenges remain in terms of safety, off-target effects, and ethical considerations. Ensuring that CRISPR edits are accurate and do not cause unintended genetic changes is critical for the widespread clinical application of this technology.

Conclusion

The CRISPR/Cas9 gene-editing technology holds immense promise for revolutionizing the landscape of precision medicine. Its potential to directly modify genetic material offers unprecedented opportunities in treating a wide array of diseases, including cancer, infections, and autoimmune disorders. In cancer therapy, CRISPR/Cas9 can be used to target specific mutations, modify immune cells for enhanced tumour recognition, and disrupt oncogenic pathways.