Construction of Cell Factory Capable of Efficiently Converting L-tryptophan Into 5-hydroxytryptamine

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Research

Keywords: 5-hydroxytryptamine, 5-hydroxytryptophan, tryptophan hydroxylase, dopa decarboxylase, enzyme cascade, cell factory

Posted Date: August 10th, 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-770180/v1>

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Version of Record: A version of this preprint was published at Microbial Cell Factories on March 24th, 2022. See the published version at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12934-022-01745-0>.

Abstract

Background: L-Tryptophan (L-trp) derivatives such as 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) and 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT), N-Acetyl-5-hydroxytryptamine and melatonin are important molecules with pharmaceutical interest. Among, 5-HT is an inhibitory neurotransmitter with proven benefits for treating the symptoms of depression. At present, 5-HT depends on plant extraction and chemical synthesis, which limits its mass production and causes environmental problems. Therefore, it is necessary to develop an efficient, green and sustainable biosynthesis method to produce 5-HT.

Results: Here we propose a one-pot production of 5-HT from L-trp via two enzyme cascades for the first time. First, a chassis cell that can convert L-trp into 5-HTP was constructed by heterologous expression of tryptophan hydroxylase from *Schistosoma mansoni* (*SmTPH*) and an artificial endogenous BH_4 module. Then, dopa decarboxylase from *Harminia axyridis* (*HaDDC*), which can specifically catalyse 5-HTP to 5-HT, was used for 5-HT production. The cell factory, *E. coli* BL21(DE3) $\Delta\text{tnaA}/\text{BH}_4/\text{HaDDC-SmTPH}$, which contains *SmTPH* and *HaDDC*, was constructed for 5-HT synthesis. The highest concentration of 5-HT reached 414.5 ± 1.6 mg/L (with conversion rate of 43 mol%) at the optimal conditions (induced temperature, 25°C; IPTG concentration, 0.5 mM; catalysis temperature, 30°C; catalysis time, 72 h).

Conclusions: This protocol provided an efficient one-pot method for converting L-trp into 5-HT production, which opens up possibilities for the practical biosynthesis of natural 5-HT at an industrial scale.

Background

L-tryptophan (L-trp) is an essential amino acid, and its derivatives, such as L-5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP), 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT), N-Acetyl-5-hydroxytryptamine and melatonin, have gained increasing attention due to their direct health and medical benefits, and their production of other valuable molecules as key biosynthetic precursors [1–4]. Among these, 5-HT is a major neurotransmitter that is naturally present in animals and plants [5]. Similar to the catecholamines, dopamine, epinephrine, and norepinephrine, 5-HT modulates the activity of the nervous system and plays a significant role in the coordination of movement and the regulation of mood. As well as scavenging harmful free radicals, 5-HT also plays roles in behaviour management, sleep cycles, appetite and liver regeneration [6].

Currently, the main supply of 5-HT depends on the extraction from mammals (e.g. buffalo, rat, and pig) or plants (safflower, sea buckthorn, and *Moringa Oleifera* seeds) [7]. However, the low 5-HT yield from natural extraction and the insufficient supply of raw materials result in demands that exceed the supply. With the rapid development of biotechnology, biological approaches show great potential for synthesizing natural and non-natural molecules. Previous studies have shown that 5-HT can be produced from L-trp in the nervous system of human and animals via two enzymatic steps: L-trp is hydroxylated to 5-HTP by pterin-dependent tryptophan hydroxylase (TPH), then converted to 5-HT by pyridoxal 5-phosphatemonohydrate (PLP)-dependent tryptophan decarboxylase (TDC) [8]. However, the protocol has several issues, including the problems that TPH possesses poor stability and the expensive cofactor,

pterin, is required [5, 9]. Aromatic amino acid decarboxylases (AAADs) play important roles in the key step of 5-HTP conversion to 5-HT. Previously, tryptophan decarboxylase (TDC) was regarded as an enzyme that catalyses non-specific reactions in L-tryptophan or 5-HTP (prefer to L-tryptophan), with the result that a one-pot cascade reaction cannot be performed and has therefore never been reported [10, 11].

Dopa decarboxylase (DDC), another AAAD, is able to convert L-dopa to dopamine [12]. In addition, previous study reported that DDC can catalyse 5-HTP into 5-HT without the ability of converting L-tryptophan [13, 14]. However, almost studies have focused on the characterization of the enzyme involved in the biosynthesis of dopamine, and systematic studies for the production of 5-HT have not been conducted [7, 15].

In this study, we proposed a one-pot enzymatic catalytic approach for converting L-tryptophan into 5-HT using a whole-cell factory for the first time. First, artificial endogenous cofactor tetrahydrobiopterin (BH_4) and tetrahydromonapterin (MH_4) modules were constructed and compared to catalyse L-tryptophan into 5-HTP using a tryptophan hydroxylase (TPH) from *Schistosoma mansoni* with high stability and catalytic ability. Then, a DDC from *Harmonia axyridis* that specifically catalyses 5-HTP to produce 5-HT was introduced to the chassis cell to form the cell factory. The optimal conditions of the recombinant cell for 5-HT production were also studied.

Results And Discussion

Construction of chassis cells for 5-HTP production

To produce 5-HT from L-tryptophan, a chassis cell that could efficiently convert L-tryptophan to the intermediate product 5-HTP, needed to be constructed first. Previous studies have reported that TPH from *S. mansoni* (*SmTPH*) possesses good activity and stability compared that of other resources [16]; therefore, *SmTPH* was chosen for converting L-tryptophan into 5-HTP in this study. However, *SmTPH* is a cofactor-dependent enzyme and requires the expensive cofactor biopterin [9, 17]. To solve this issue, synthesis and regeneration cofactor tetrahydrobiopterin (BH_4) and tetrahydromonapterin (MH_4) modules were constructed in the chassis cell containing *SmTPH* [1, 18]. As shown in Fig. 1, the 5-HTP concentrations in the cells containing BH_4 and MH_4 increased until 60 h of fermentation, then decreased with the further increase of time. The observed decrease in 5-HTP concentration may have been due to the oxidation and degradation of 5-HTP as the fermentation time increased [5]. The highest concentrations of 5-HTP were 0.93 g/L and 0.34 g/L at 60 h with BH_4 and MH_4 , respectively. Zhang et al reported that the production of 5-HTP from *SmTPH* using BH_4 as a cofactor was higher than that when using MH_4 as a cofactor in *S. cerevisiae*, which correlated with the findings of our study [18]. Therefore, the chassis cell containing the synthesis and regeneration cofactor BH_4 and *SmTPH* was used in the next experiment.

Expression and purification of dopa decarboxylase HaDDC and its catalytic specificity towards L-tryptophan and 5-HTP

Dopa decarboxylase from *Drosophila melanogaster* (*drDDC*) has attracted significant attention, due to its activity for both 5-HTP and L-DOPA but with no activity to L-tryptophan [19–21]. In this study, we used the DDC from *Harmonia axyridis* (*HaDDC*, GenBank: AMQ 13055.1) for 5-HT synthesis.

As shown in Fig. S2, SDS-PAGE analysis revealed that the recombinant *HaDDC* was approximately 55 kD, indicating that *HaDDC* was successfully expressed as an active form in *E. coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA. The recombinant *HaDDC* was purified by a Ni-NTA resin, with a recovery yield of 80.3%.

To evaluate the catalytic specificity of purified *HaDDC*, L-tryptophan and 5-HTP were used as substrates respectively. As shown in Fig. 2(a), no 5-HT was released from L-tryptophan within 4 h or longer (data not shown), indicating that the recombinant *HaDDC* had no activity toward L-tryptophan. However, 5-HT was released within 4 h by *HaDDC* with 5-HTP as a substrate. These results showed that *HaDDC* exhibited strict substrate specificity similar to that displayed by *drDDC* from *D. melanogaster* [7, 15]. According to the results shown in Table 1, *HaDDC* exhibited a high efficiency on 5-HTP, and the conversion rate was 88.45% at 4 h, which was higher than that of TDC reported previously [6, 11]. Therefore, *HaDDC* from *H. axyridis* was chosen for converting 5-HTP into 5-HT.

Table 1
Substrate specificity of *HaDDC*.

Substrate	Concentration (mM)	Time (h)	Conversion rate (mol%)
L-tryptophan	200 ± 0.13	4	0
5-HTP	200 ± 0.14	4	99.88 ± 0.775

One-pot catalysis for 5-HT production

The enzyme cascade of purified *SmTPH* and *HaDDC* was investigated both *in vitro* and *in vivo*. The catalysis processing of L-tryptophan by recombinant *SmTPH* and *HaDDC* *in vitro* showed that 5-HT production increased along with increasing time before 48 h, then decreased with the further increase of time (Fig. 3). Meanwhile, the concentration of L-tryptophan decreased continuously. The highest concentration of 5-HT was 352.4 mg/L, with a yield of 17.62 %, at 48 h, which was similar to the two steps to produce 5-HT [6]. The *in vivo* studies of *SmTPH* and *HaDDC* were investigated with *Escherichia coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA/BH₄/*HaDDC-SmTPH* and *E. coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA/BH₄/*SmTPH-HaDDC*, respectively. The production of 5-HT was obtained in the former but not in the latter (data not shown). To explore the reasons, SDS-PAGE was used to analyse the protein expression of *E. coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA/BH₄/*HaDDC-SmTPH* and *E. coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA/BH₄/*SmTPH-HaDDC*. As shown in Fig. 4(a), *E. coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA/BH₄/*HaDDC-SmTPH* exhibited better protein expression than *E. coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA/BH₄/*SmTPH-HaDDC* with *HaDDC* in the second multiple cloning site. This phenomenon may be attributed to the insert position of the *HaDDC* gene, which affects the expression of both enzymes. Thus, *E. coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA/BH₄/*HaDDC-SmTPH* was chosen to produce 5-HT from L-tryptophan. As shown in Fig. 4(b), the L-tryptophan concentration decreased continuously from 2.00 to 0.899 g/L within 96 h. Meanwhile, the 5-HT concentration increased as time increased and reached the highest

concentration (0.3136 g/L) at 84 h, which was 2.04-fold higher than that obtained from the two-stage fermentation process by *CtAAAH* and TDC [6]. The intermediate product, 5-HTP, was not detected, possibly because it was converted to 5-HT quickly by the catalysis of *HaDDC*. However, the concentration of 5-HT decreased after 84 h and the fermentation broth turned dark, which was similar to the results reported previously [22]. This may have been due to the side reaction of decarboxylation-dependent transamination caused by *HaDDC* of *E.coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/BH₄/*HaDDC-SmTPH* [22–24].

Optimisation of one-pot cascade in vivo

To determine the optimal conditions for 5-HT production, a number of catalysis conditions were investigated. The effect of induction temperature on the production of 5-HT is shown in Fig. 5(a). The production of 5-HT increased quickly as the induction temperature increased from 18°C to 25°C, then decreased with the temperature increased from 25°C to 37°C. Therefore, the optimal induction temperature for the production of 5-HT is 25°C.

The effects of concentration of IPTG on 5-HT synthesis were investigated (Fig. 6 (b)). 5-HT concentration increased with the increase in concentration of IPTG from 0.025 mM to 0.05 mM, followed by a decrease at higher IPTG concentrations. The results suggested that 0.05 mM is the optimal. IPTG concentration.

As shown in Fig. 5 (c), an increase in the concentration of 5-HT in the broth appeared at 8 h to 12 h during incubation with *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/BH₄/*HaDDC-SmTPH*, then decreased. Thus, the optimal time for induction was 12 h.

The relationship between 5-HT concentration and catalysis temperature is presented in Fig. 7(d). 5-HT production from L-tryptophan increased as the catalysis temperature increased from 25°C to 30°C, and the maximum concentration of 5-HT (0.4145 ± 1.6 g/L, reduced L-tryptophan was 1.13 g/L) was reached at 30°C. However, with the temperature increased from 30°C to 40°C, the yield of the product decreased rapidly.

Based on these results, the optimal conditions for 5-HT production of one-pot catalysis using *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/BH₄/*HaDDC-SmTPH* were 12 h for the expression of proteins at 25°C with 0.05 mM IPTG, and the optimal conditions for catalysis were 30°C for 48 h. The highest yield of 5-HT from L-tryptophan was 43 mol%.

Conclusions

In this study, a cell factory capable of efficiently converting L-tryptophan into 5-HT was successfully constructed. First, a chassis cell that contained a screened artificial endogenous BH₄ module as a cofactor and tryptophan hydroxylase from *Schistosoma mansoni* (*SmTPH*) was constructed, which could convert L-tryptophan into 5-HTP efficiently. The dopa decarboxylase from *Harminia axyridis* (*HaDDC*) that can specific catalyse 5-HTP to 5-HT was chosen for 5-HT production. Finally, the two enzymes were cascaded *in vivo* for converting L-tryptophan to 5-HT, which lead to a yield of 414.5 ± 1.6 mg/L at the optimal conditions. This study provides a novel and important foundation for artificial cell factory synthesis of 5-HT.

Methods

Chemicals

L-tryptophan (L-trp), 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) and 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT) standards were purchased from Aladdin Industrial Corporation (Shanghai, China). (6R)-L-erythro-5, 6, 7, 8-tetrahydrobiopterin (BH₄), pyridoxal 5-phosphatemonohydrate (PLP) were purchased from Shanghai Yuanye Bio-Technology Co., Ltd. (Shanghai, China). Other chemicals and solvents in this study were purchased from local suppliers and were of analytical grade or higher purity.

Plasmid and Strain Construction

E. coli Trans1T1 was used for plasmid construction and propagation, and *E. coli* BL21(DE3) was used for protein expression. For the biosynthesis of 5-HTP or 5-HT, the Δ tnaA gene was knocked out in *E. coli* BL21(DE3), using the previously established CRISPR/Cas9 protocol [1, 25]. The expression vectors pCDFDuet-1 and pET-28a (+) were supplied by Novagen Co., Ltd.

Plasmid construction and DNA manipulation were performed following the standard molecular cloning protocols. First, the PTPS, SPR, PCD, DHPR human genes and mtrA from *Bacillus subtilis* were codon-optimized, synthesized and inserted into pCDF-Duet-1 to acquire *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/BH₄ [1]. Another cofactor, tetrahydromonapterin (MH₄), whose relative genes were also constructed in pCDF-Duet-1, was used to acquire *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/MH₄ according to a previous study [18]. *SmTPH* from *Schistosoma mansoni* was codon-optimised for *E. coli* expression, synthesised, and inserted into pET-28a(+), then transferred into *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/BH₄ and *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/MH₄ to acquire *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/BH₄/*SmTPH* and *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/MH₄/*SmTPH*. *HaDDC* from *Harminia axyridis* was also codon- optimised for *E. coli* expression, synthesized and inserted into pET-28a (+), then transferred into *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA to acquire *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/*HaDDC*.

The gene fragment of *HaDDC* was amplified from pET-28a (+)-*HaDDC* using the primer pairs, *HaDDC*-F-BamHI, *HaDDC*-R-HindIII, *HaDDC*-F-EcoRI, and *HaDDC*-R-Sall. First, BamHI- and HindIII-digested polymerase chain reaction (PCR) products of *HaDDC* were ligated to BamHI- and HindIII- digested pET28a (+)-*SmTPH* and EcoRI- and Sall- digested pET28a (+)-*SmTPH* to construct the plasmids pET28a (+)-*SmTPH*-*HaDDC* and pET28a (+)-*HaDDC*-*SmTPH*. The plasmids were constructed in *E. coli* Trans1T1 and transferred into *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/BH₄ a to acquire *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/BH₄/*SmTPH*/*HaDDC* and *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA /BH₄/*HaDDC*/*SmTPH*. The plasmids and strains along with the primers and specific structures of the plasmids, are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
List of strains and plasmids used for the production of 5-HTP and 5-HT.

Name	Description	Reference
Strains		
<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3)	Protein expression host	This lab
<i>E. coli</i> BL21 (DE3) Δ tnaA	<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA	This study
<i>E. coli</i> Trans 1T1	Cloning host	This study
<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA /BH ₄ / <i>SmTPH</i>	<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/pCDFDuet-BH ₄ /pET-28a(+)- <i>SmTPH</i>	This study
<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/MH ₄ / <i>SmTPH</i>	<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/pCDFDuet-MH ₄ /pET-28a(+)- <i>SmTPH</i>	This study
<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/ <i>HaDDC</i>	<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/pET-28a(+)- <i>SmTPH</i>	This study
<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/BH ₄ / <i>SmTPH</i> / <i>HaDDC</i>	<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/pCDFDuet-BH ₄ /pET-28a(+)- <i>SmTPH</i> - <i>HaDDC</i>	This study
<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/BH ₄ / <i>HaDDC</i> / <i>SmTPH</i>	<i>E. coli</i> BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/pCDFDuet-BH ₄ /pET-28a(+)- <i>HaDDC</i> - <i>SmTPH</i>	This study
Plasmids		
pET-28a (+)	ColE1 ori, Kan ^R , <i>E. coli</i> expression vector	This lab
pET-28a (+)- <i>SmTPH</i>	pET-28a (+); tryptophan hydroxylase gene from <i>S.mansoni</i>	This study
pCDFDuet-1	CloDF13 ori, Sm ^R , <i>E. coli</i> expression vector	This lab
pCDFDuet-BH ₄	pCDFDuet-1; pterin-4-alpha-carbinolamine dehydratase (PCD), dihydropteridine reductase (DHPR), 6-pyruvate-tetrahydropterin synthase (PTPS), sepiapterin reductase (SPR), GTP cyclohydrolase I (GCHI)	[1]
pCDFDuet-MH ₄	pterin-4-alpha-carbinolamine dehydratase (PCD) and dihydropteridine reductase (DHPR) from human	[18]
pET-28a (+)- <i>HaDDC</i>	pET-28a (+); dopa decarboxylase from <i>H.axyridis</i>	This study
pET-28a (+)- <i>HaDDC</i> - <i>SmTPH</i>	pET-28a (+); dopa decarboxylase from <i>H. axyridis</i> ; tryptophan hydroxylase gene from <i>S. mansoni</i>	This study

Name	Description	Reference
pET-28a (+)- <i>SmTPH</i> - <i>HaDDC</i>	pET-28a (+); tryptophan hydroxylase gene from <i>S. mansoni</i> ; dopa decarboxylase from <i>H. axyridis</i>	This study
Primers		
<i>HaDDC</i> -F-BamHI	GGATCCGAATTCATGGAGGCG	This study
<i>HaDDC</i> -R-HindIII	AAGCTTTTATTACCCAGGATATC	This study
<i>HaDDC</i> -F-EcoRI	GAATTCATGGAGGCGAACCAG	This study
<i>HaDDC</i> -R-SalI	GTCGACTTATTACCCAGGATATCGTCC	This study

Luria-Bertani (LB) medium was used for cell cultivation and enzyme expression [26]. Modified M9 medium (M9Y) was used for *in vivo* hydroxylation of L-trp to 5-HTP [27]. All the single colonies of the recombinant strains were separately inoculated into 5 mL of LB media containing 25 mg/L kanamycin and/or streptomycin and incubated at 37°C and mixed at 200 rpm for 12 h. Cultures (1 mL) were then inoculated into 100 mL of LB media at 37°C. When the OD₆₀₀ reached 0.4–0.6, the cells were induced with isopropyl-β-D-thiogalactoside (IPTG) for 12 h at either 25°C (*E. coli* BL21(DE3)Δ*tnaA*/BH₄/*SmTPH*) or 18°C (*E. coli* BL21(DE3)Δ*tnaA*/*HaDDC*).

The effect of cofactor BH₄ and MH₄ synthesis and regeneration pathways on the conversion of L-trp into 5-HTP

The fermentation broth of *E. coli* BL21(DE3)Δ*tnaA*/BH₄/*SmTPH* and *E. coli* BL21(DE3)Δ*tnaA*/MH₄/*SmTPH* were centrifuged at 4,000 rpm for 10 min, and the cells were respectively transferred to M9Y media containing 2 g/L of L-trp. Sampling and measuring were conducted at 12-hour intervals.

Purification of *E. coli* BL21(DE3)Δ*tnaA*/*HaDDC* and its catalysis specificity towards L-trp and 5-HTP

The cells harvested from cultures were washed, resuspended in 50 mM HEPES (pH 7.0), and lysed at 4°C by JY92-IIN ultrasonication (Ningbo Xinzhi Biotechnology, Ltd., Ningbo, China). The lysates were centrifuged at 12, 000 rpm at 4°C for 20 min, and the supernatant was used as a crude enzyme solution. The recombinant *HaDDC* was purified using a fast protein liquid chromatography (FPLC) system (GE AKTA Pure 150; General Electric Co., Fairfield, America) with a Ni-nitrilotriacetic acid affinity chromatography (Ni-NTA) column (His Trap™ FF5 mL) according to the manufacturer's instructions. Protein concentrations were determined at 595 nm using the Bradford method with bovine serum albumin as the standard [28]. All protein samples were analysed by reductive SDS-PAGE with 20 mM β-

Mercapto ethanol incubation. A premixed protein marker (Takara Biotechnology Co., Ltd., Nanjing, China) containing 180-, 140-, 100-, 75-, 60- and 45-kDa proteins was used as the molecular mass standard. The method of purification for the recombinant protein *SmTPH* was same as that for *HaDDC*.

The recombinant *HaDDC* activity was assayed at 35°C in a reaction mixture of 2 mL, containing 50 mM HEPES (pH 7.0), 0.4 mM PLP, 50 µL purified *HaDDC* (protein concentration of 15 g/L) and 200 µM L-tryptophan or 5-HTP.

One-pot catalysis for 5-HT production **in vitro** and **in vivo**

The *in vitro* cascade of *SmTPH* and *HaDDC* was conducted in a reaction system (2 mL) that contained 7 mM DTT, 0.1 M ferrous ammonium sulfate, 0.1 mg/mL catalase, 0.6 mM BH₄, 0.1 mM PLP, 0.5 mM L-Trp, 100 µL purified *SmTPH* (1.0 g/L), 100 µL purified *HaDDC* (1.0 g/L) and 50 mM HEPES (pH 7.0), and incubated at 30°C [1, 7]. In addition to these cofactors, reactions were supplemented with catalase and dithiothreitol to protect against oxidative degradation [18].

The *in vivo* cascade of *SmTPH* and *HaDDC* was performed as follows: the *E. coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA/BH₄/*SmTPH*/*HaDDC* and *E. coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA/BH₄/*HaDDC*/*SmTPH* fermentation broths were centrifuged at 4,000 rpm for 10 min and the cells (final cell concentration of 3.8 OD/mL) were transferred to 100 mL of M9Y media containing 2 g/L L-tryptophan [1]. Cells were incubated at pH 7.0 and 30°C. Sampling and measuring were conducted every 12 hours.

Optimisation of the production of 5-HT from L-tryptophan using *E. coli* BL21(DE3)ΔtnaA/BH₄/*HaDDC*-*SmTPH* whole-cell factory

Cells were transferred to 100 mL of M9Y medium in a 500 mL flask and shaken at 200 rpm in various conditions.

In this study, single-factor experiments using four predominant factors (concentration of IPTG, induced time, induced temperature and catalysis temperature) were conducted to investigate the effects of these factors on the production of 5-HT [29]. Investigation of the effect of each factor on the production of 5-HT was carried out based on changes only to that factor, while keeping other variables constant.

The investigation was carried out at varying concentrations of IPTG (0.25, 0.5, 0.75, and 1 mM), induced time (8 h, 12 h, 16 h and 20 h), induced temperature (18°C, 25°C, 30°C and 37°C), and catalysis temperature (25°C, 30°C, 37°C and 40°C).

Analytical method

The cell growth density at 600 nm (OD₆₀₀) was measured using an UV1000D ultraviolet-visible spectrophotometer (AOE Instruments, Shanghai Co., Ltd). High-performance liquid chromatographic (HPLC) analysis of the L-tryptophan, 5-HTP and 5-HT contents was performed on an Agilent 1260 series LC system (Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara, CA, USA) with an ultraviolet detector reading at 276 nm [1].

The samples were filtered through Millex-LG filter units (Millipore, Billerica, MA, USA) prior to HPLC analysis. Separation of samples was achieved using a reverse phase Agilent TC-C18 column (5 × 4.6 mm × 250 mm; Agilent) with a constant flow rate of 1 mL/min at 25°C and an injection volume of 10 µL. The mobile phase consisted of methanol(10 mM) and potassium phosphate buffer (pH 6.5). The substrate and product concentration were measured by HPLC against the L-trp, 5-HTP and 5-HT standards using a calibration curve.

The 5-HT yield from L-trp was calculated according to the following equation:

$$\text{5-HT yield (mol\%)} = \text{5-HTP released (mol)} / \text{L-trp reduced (mol)}$$

List Of Abbreviations

L-trp, L-tryptophan

5-HTP, L-5-hydroxytryptophan

5-HT, 5-hydroxytryptamine

AAAD, Aromatic amino acid decarboxylases

FPLC, Fast protein liquid chromatography

HPLC, High-performance liquid chromatographic

LB, Luria-Bertani

PCR, Polymerase chain reaction

PLP, Pyridoxal5-phosphatemonohydrate

Declarations

Authors' contributions

Yingying Wang conceived the project, analyzed results, and wrote the manuscript. Xueman Chen, Qiaoyu Chen, Ning Zhou helped the investigation and data curation; Alei Zhang, reviewed, edited; Kequan Chen, Project Administration, supervision; Pingkai Ouyang, Funding Acquisition. All authors commented on the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this article and its Additional file1.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing interests.

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Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the National Key Research and Development Program (2018YFA0901500), the National Science Foundation for Young Scientists of China (21908101).

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Figures

Figure 1

The effect of artificial endogenous cofactors BH4 and MH4 on 5-HTP synthesis. Experiments were conducted at 37°C, pH 7.0, and 200 rpm for 4 days. The data represent the results of assays performed in triplicate and are presented as the average and standard deviation.

Figure 2

HPLC analysis of HaDDC catalytic product toward L-trp (a) and 5-HTP (b).

Figure 3

Time course of 5-HT production from recombinant SmTPH and HaDDC in vitro. Experiments were conducted with purified recombinant SmTPH and HaDDC in vitro at 37°C, pH 7.2, and 200 rpm for 72 h. Sampling and measuring were conducted every 12 h. Data represent the results of assays performed in triplicate and are presented as the average and standard deviation.

Figure 4

Enzyme cascade of SmTPH and HaDDC to produce 5-HT in vivo. (a) Protein expression in *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/SmTPH-HaDDC/BH4 and *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/HaDDC-SmTPH/BH4. Lane 1. marker; Lanes 2 & 3. soluble and inclusion expression of *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/SmTPH-HaDDC/BH4; Lanes 4 & 5, soluble and inclusion expression of *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/HaDDC-SmTPH/BH4. (b) Batch production of 5-HT using *E. coli* BL21(DE3) Δ tnaA/HaDDC-SmTPH/BH4.

Figure 5

The effects of induction temperature, induction time, IPTG concentration and catalysis temperature on 5-HT synthesis. (a) Optimal culture temperature for 5-HT synthesis. (b) Optimal IPTG concentration for 5-HT synthesis. (c) Optimal induction time for 5-HT synthesis. (d) Optimal catalysis temperature for 5-HT synthesis. Aliquots of solution were taken and diluted for HPLC analysis every 12 h.

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