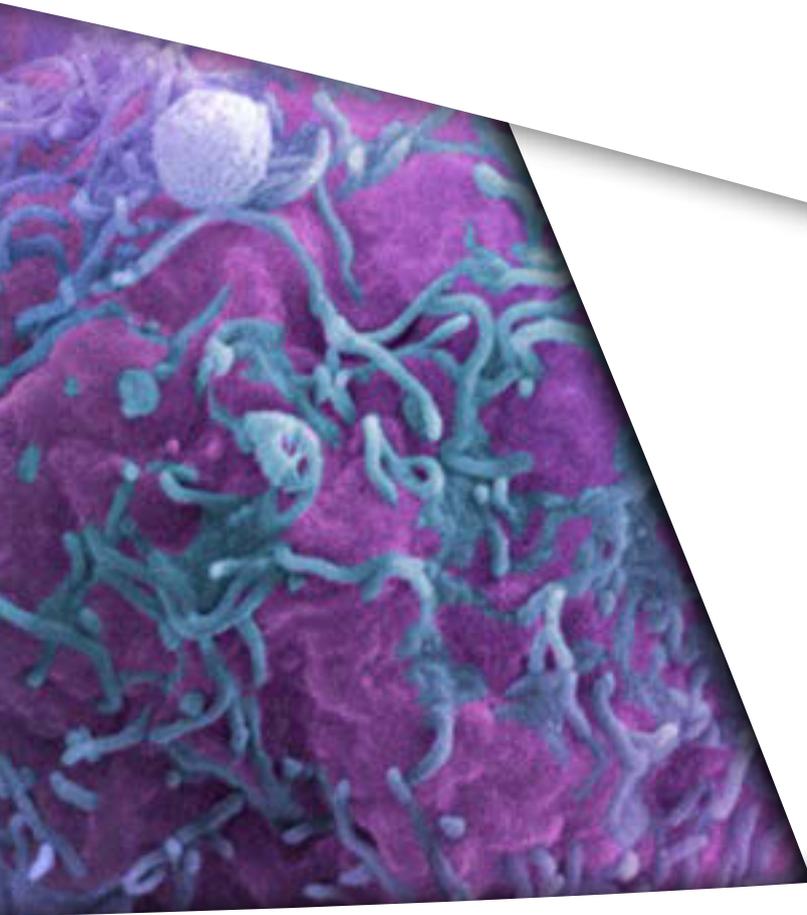


MELANOMA PEPTIDES BACHEM

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MELANOMA PEPTIDES OFFERED BY BACHEM

Malignant melanoma is a dramatically increasing public health problem with overall more than 232`000 new cases and about 55`000 deaths estimated in 2012. At an early stage melanoma is surgically completely curable, but recurrent or metastatic melanoma is often resistant to classical therapies and the outcome of advanced melanoma is almost always fatal. A major breakthrough in the treatment of melanoma was obtained in March 2011, when the FDA granted broad approval for use of the immune-checkpoint inhibitor ipilimumab for patients with late-stage metastatic melanoma. This brought a clear survival advantage observed for a patient group with no other therapeutic options. Nowadays, immunotherapy plays an outstanding role for the melanoma therapy, reflected by the fact, that only two of six drugs approved in recent years by the FDA are not immunotherapies. However, several therapeutic hurdles are still to overcome, and approaches like vaccination could contribute to further improvements in melanoma therapy. Thereby, peptides are indispensable tools for experimental research.

Melanoma

Cutaneous melanoma is a malignant tumor of pigment-producing cells in the skin. These cells, known as melanocytes, produce the pigment melanin, which is responsible for the color of our skin. Melanoma is the most aggressive form of skin cancer. Although melanomas occur in more than 95 % of cases in the skin, they can also be found in the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose, anus, and vagina and, to a lesser extent, the intestine; melanocytes are also present in the conjunctiva, the retina, and the meninges [1].

The incidence varies 100-fold between countries worldwide, but has been increasing dramatically over the past decades in many populations that are predominantly fair-skinned. Accordingly, more than 80 % of the estimated new cases occurred in Oceania, Europe, and North America. Overall, more than 232'000 new cases of melanoma and about 55'000 deaths were estimated in 2012 [1, 2].

Although melanoma are surgically completely curable at an early stage, recurrent or metastatic melanoma is often resistant to classical therapies. Besides avoidance of excessive UV-irradiation as preventive measurement and the importance of early detection, recent advances have been made in therapeutic treatment of melanoma. Whereas the treatment was limited to interferon- α 2b for adjuvant therapy and dacarbazine or high-dose interleukin 2 (IL-2) for metastatic disease prior to 2011, since then three new agents have been approved. These are pegylated interferon- α 2b in the adjuvant setting, the monoclonal antibody

ipilimumab for metastatic disease and an oral BRAF inhibitor vemurafenib in patients with metastatic melanoma harboring BRAFV600 mutations [3].

Overall, tumor immunotherapy seems to play an outstanding role for the treatment of melanoma, reflected by the fact that of the six approved drugs mentioned above only dacarbazine and vemurafenib are not immunotherapies [3]. In addition, pilot clinical data suggest potential benefits with targeted therapeutic melanoma vaccines [1].

Immunotherapy

The approach to treat tumors by immunotherapeutic means reaches back more than 120 years, when the young surgeon William Coley conducted intra-tumoral injections of live or inactivated *Streptococcus pyogenes* and *Serratia marcescens* in an effort to reproduce the spontaneous remissions of sarcomas. The latter were observed in rare cancer patients who had developed erysipelas [4, 5]. Cancer immunotherapy aims to harness and enhance the innate immune system to fight against cancer and, after decades of disappointments, has become the most promising treatment approach in recent years [5, 6]. Important requirements are thereby the ability of the immune system to recognize tumor-associated antigens (TAAs), which are presented by tumor cells, and to elicit an immune response against these targets (Fig. 1).

Thereby, melanoma together with kidney and lung cancer are natural targets for immunotherapeutic approaches, because

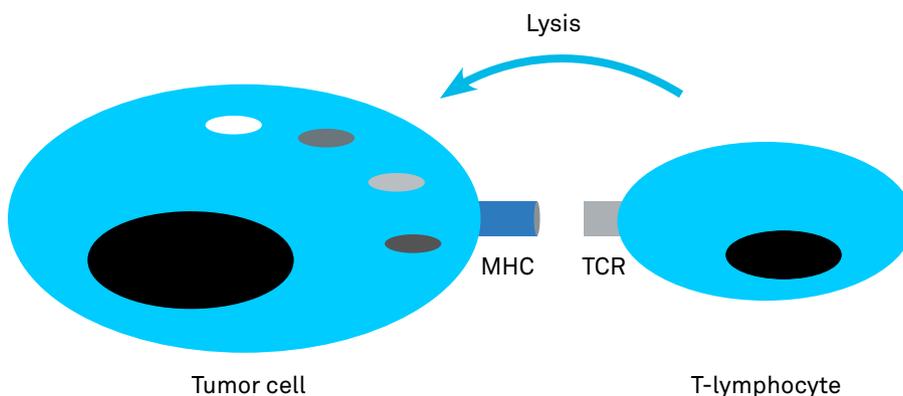


Fig. 1. Induction of an immune response directed against tumor associated antigens (TAAs) leads to the destruction of tumor cells. MHC: Major histocompatibility complex, TCR: T-cell receptor. Simplified representation.

both tumor types are frequently infiltrated with CD8⁺ T-lymphocytes, and occasionally undergo spontaneous regression [7]. Tumor-specific CD8⁺ T-lymphocytes are believed to particularly mediate these anti-tumor effects [8].

The broad approval granted in March 2011 by the FDA for use of the drug ipilimumab for patients with late-stage metastatic melanoma, either as initial therapy or after relapse, was a major breakthrough in the immunotherapy for melanoma. This not only brought a clear survival advantage observed for a patient group with no other therapeutic options, but also employs a mechanism of action which is virtually certain to involve the modulation of endogenous T-cell responses [5].

Ipilimumab is a monoclonal antibody to CTLA4 (cytotoxic T-lymphocyte antigen-4). The latter is an immune checkpoint regulator protein and negative regulator of the immune response. Under physiological conditions, CTLA4 attenuates the chances for chronic autoimmune inflammation, but also inhibits the development of an active immune response by acting primarily at the level of T cell development and proliferation. Blocking of CTLA4 with an antibody overcomes the negative regulation [5, 9]. This, following a current rationale, gives rise to activation of pre-existing anticancer T-cell responses and possibly triggers new responses [5].

A second immune checkpoint, PD-1 (programmed cell death-1), has garnered significant interest since the blockade of PD-1 with a single agent was associated with objective responses in melanoma, kidney cancer, and lung cancer [7].

However, despite of the significant progress recently obtained, cancer immunotherapy is still suffering a number of limitations. In case of ipilimumab challenges are a significant rate of on-site toxicity effects, leading to serious colitis and hypophysitis due to induced inflammation in up to 23 % of the patients. In co-therapy with dacarbazine, significant elevations in liver function tests in 20 % of the so treated patients were observed. Moreover, the stimulation of T-cell response with ipilim-

umab may take several months to occur, while treatment with conventional cytotoxic therapies may trigger rapid tumor shrinkage due to direct killing of cancer cells [5]. The adverse effects with PD-1 blockade seem to be less pronounced, than with CTLA-4 blockade [7].

Both, for antibody-based therapy or for cancer vaccines, the search for human tumor antigens as potential immunotherapeutic targets has been a continuous task in the field of tumor immunology. For tumor antigens to be potential immunotherapeutic targets, the antigen must have no or highly restricted expression in normal tissues so that autoimmunity can be prevented [10,11].

Tumor Associated Antigens

The first TAA recognized by cytotoxic CD8⁺ T-lymphocytes was described in 1991 [12]. Since then, researchers utilize expression cloning of TAA cDNAs as well as novel strategies such as reverse immunology, biochemical methods, genetic approaches, and serological analysis of recombination expression libraries (SEREX) to identify TAAs. This aims to develop more refined approaches to immune-mediated cancer therapy [8]. This led to more than 400 T-cell-defined human tumor antigens registered in a relevant data base in 2013 [13]. Categories of tumor antigens can be discriminated according to their expression in neoplastic and normal tissues (Table 1).

Since most TAAs used for immunotherapy are considered to be “self”-antigens, one of the main challenges is to develop methods that can effectively and safely break tolerance to TAA. Peptides can be used for example in a simple and inexpensive strategy for vaccination, utilizing the host's endogenous antigen presenting cells to present TAA peptides. For this, the peptides are generally delivered in an adjuvant, required for effective activation of dendritic cells [5, 8].

TAA Categories	Antigen Characteristics	Genes
Cancer-testis	Expressed in various tumors but not normal tissues except in testis and placenta	MAGE, GAGE, BAGE, NY-ESO-1
Differentiation	Antigens shared between tumors and normal tissues from which they arose	Tyrosinase, Melan-A/MART-1, gp100, TRP-1, TRP-2
Tumor-specific	Antigens generated by point mutations or splicing aberrations in ubiquitous genes	p53, Ras, CDK4, β -catenin, TRP-2/INT2
Widely occurring over-expressed	Proteins over-expressed in histologically different types of tumors	Survivin, MUC1/2, AFP and EphA2

Table 1.

Summary of tumor antigen categories. Modified on basis of [8].

Cancer/Testis Antigens

Cancer/testis antigens (CTs or CTAs) (Table 2) are protein antigens with normal expression restricted to adult testicular germ cells, but are aberrantly activated and expressed in some human cancers. Thereby, melanoma, ovarian and bladder cancer as well as lung cancer, particularly in case of the squamous cell type, have been found to have the highest frequency of CT expression and sometimes are referred to as “CT-rich” tumor types [10, 11].

Since the early 1980s, about 70 families of CT antigens have been identified with over 140 members [14], including for example the melanoma-associated antigens MAGE, BAGE, GAGE, PRAME, NY-ESO-1 and HOM-MEL-40 (SSX-2) [15].

As well-known and intensively studied biomarkers in cancer, the MAGE (melanoma antigen gene) family may provide novel targets to develop cancer-specific therapies for a broad range of cancers because

Antigen	Target Antigen	Restricting HLA	Epitope	Sequence / Prod. No.
Cancer/Testis Antigens	MAGE-A1	HLA-A1	161-169	EADPTGHSY (H-3636)
		HLA-A24		NYKHCFPEI
		HLA-Cw16	230-238	SAYGEPRKL
	MAGE-A2	HLA-A2	112-120	KMVELVHFL
			157-166	YLQLVFGIEV
	MAGE-A3	HLA-A1	168-176	EVDPIGHLY (H-3634)
			271-279	FLWGPRLV (H-3714)
			195-203	IMPKAGLLI
			167-176	MEVDPIGHLY (H-3686)
			HLA-DR13	
	BAGE	HLA-Cw16	2-10	AARAVFLAL
	GAGE-1	HLA-Cw6	9-16	YRPRPRRY
	PRAME	HLA-A24	301-309	LYVDSLFFL
NY-ESO-1/CAG-3/ LAGE	HLA-A2	155-163	QLSLLMWIT	
		157-165	SLLMWITQC	
		157-167	SLLMWITQCFL	
		HLA-A31	53-62	ASGPGGGAPR

Table 2.

Antigenic epitopes of cancer/testis antigens recognized by cytotoxic T-lymphocytes (CTL). HLA: human leucocyte antigen. Modified on basis of [15].

of their relatively restricted expression and antigenicity [6]. This family of proteins includes more than 50 identified members in humans, all of which containing a highly conserved MAGE homology domain (MHD) with a length of around 170 to 200 amino acids and multiple tandem winged-helix motifs [6, 16].

Based on the expression patterns in several tissues, two types of MAGEs can be discriminated: Type I includes MAGE-A, -B, and -C subfamily members and are clustered on the X-chromosome. They are normally restricted to expression in the testis, but are aberrantly expressed in cancers and have antigenic properties. Antigens of subfamilies MAGE-A and MAGE-C are reported to be associated with poor clinical prognosis in different types of cancers and are proved to have oncogenic activity [6]. Type II includes MAGE-D, -E, -F, -G, -H, -L subfamilies and necdin, which are not expressed in cancers [6].

As the first human tumor-associated antigen found to be specifically recognized by CD8⁺ T-cells, MAGE-A3 is promising for antigen-specific immunotherapy of malignant cells. Along with encouraging results obtained in mouse model, tests performed in non-small cell lung carcinoma patients and metastatic melanoma patients showed that patients receiving recombinant MAGE-A3-based vaccine will develop MAGE-A3-specific antibodies and have more clinical benefits than the placebo-treated group [6]. However, one of the largest-ever phase III lung cancer trials trying to investigate the efficacy of MAGE-A3 antigen-specific cancer immunotherapeutic agents in preventing cancer relapse, turned out to have no improvement in progression-free survival [6].

Differentiation Antigens

Differentiation antigens (Table 3) are tissue-specific tumor antigens with higher expression in cancer cells compared with normal cells. However, only a low immunogenicity is assigned to the melanocyte differentiation antigens, because of the development of an immunological tolerance for the potential

epitopes of these “self” proteins [15].

Differentiation antigens include tyrosinase, Melan-A/MART-1, gp100, tyrosinase-related proteins-1 (TRP-1/gp75) and -2 (TRP-2) [8, 15, 17].

Tyrosinase consists of 529 amino acid residues and is involved in the synthesis of melanin [15]. In general, the generation of a tyrosinase-specific response in a melanoma patient is a relatively infrequent event and is usually only seen in patients showing a high response to several melanoma-associated antigens [15].

Melan-A/MART-1 (melanoma antigen A/ melanoma antigen recognized by T cells 1) is a relatively small transmembrane protein consisting of 118 amino acid residues. It is expressed in most melanoma cells, but cannot be observed in other tumors [15]. The Melan-A/MART-1 gene codes for antigens that are recognized by HLA-A2-restricted cytotoxic T lymphocytes (CTLs) and, among the family of melanocyte differentiation antigens, Melan-A/MART-1 seems to represent the highest relative immunogenicity [15].

Studies identified a nonapeptide (AAGIGILTV) as an immunodominant epitope, which corresponds to residues 27-35 of Melan-A/MART-1 [15]. Further investigations identified the decapeptide Melan-A/MART-1 (26-35) (EAAGIGILTV), which is better recognized by HLA-A2-restricted CTLs [15]. It could be shown that substitutions of the amino acids in position 1 and/or 2 of Melan-A/MART-1 (26-35) lead to an increased binding of the peptide to HLA-A2 and therefore to an increased recognition by Melan-A/MART-1-specific CTLs [15].

The glycoprotein gp100 was originally identified as a melanocyte lineage-specific antigen by the monoclonal antibodies NKI/beteb, HMB45 and HMB50. These antibodies are used as diagnostic markers for human melanoma [15]. Noteworthy, this product of the “Silver” gene locus historically had been mentioned in several texts, and the nomenclature is controversial including names such as PMEL 17, gp100, gp95, gp85, ME20, RPE1, SILV and MMP1 15 [18].



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Antigen	Target Antigen	Restricting HLA	Epitope	Sequence / Prod. No.
Melanocyte Differentiation Antigens	pMel-34/Tyrosinase	HLA-A2	1-9	MLLAVLYCL
			369-377	YMNGTMSQV
			369-377	YMDGTMSQV (H-3862)/(H-7732) ¹⁾
			206-214	7732) ¹⁾
		HLA-A24	192-200	AFLPWHRFLF (H-3848)
		HLA-B44	243-251	SEIWRDIDF (H-3812)
		HLA-A1	146-156	KCDICTDEY (H-3852)
				SSDYVIPIGTY
		HLA-DR4	450-462	DAEKCDKTDEY
			56-70	SYLQDSVPDSFQD (H-4416)
			QNILLSNAPLGPQFP	
	TRP-1/gp75	HLA-A31	1-9 ²⁾	MSLQRQFLR ²⁾
	TRP-2	HLA-A31, A33	197-205	LLPGGRPYR
			HLA-A2	180-188
	pMel17/gp100	HLA-A2	154-162	KTWGQYWQV (H-3958)
			209-217	ITDQVPFSV (H-4106)
			457-466	LLDGTATLRL
			476-485	VLYRYGSFSV
			570-579	SLADTNSLAV
			177-186	AMLGHTTMEV
178-186			MLGHTTMEV	
619-627			RLMKQDFSV	
639-647			RLPRIFCSC	
HLA-A24				VYFFLPDHL
HLA-A3		17-25	ALLAVGATK	
HLA-DR1, 3, 4		614-622	LIYRRRLMK	
		(44-59)	WNRQLYPEWTEAQRIT	
Melan-A/MART-1	HLA-A2	26-35	EAAGIGILTV (H-4102)	
		27-35	AAGIGILTV (H-3956)/(H-7734)	
		32-40	ILTVILGVL	
			GIGILTVL	
	HLA-B45		GILTVILGV	
			ALMDKSLHV	
			AEEAAGIGIL(T)	

¹⁾Natural peptide identified by elution from HLA-A2 molecules.

²⁾Antigenic peptide resulting from translation of an alternative open reading frame (ORF3) of the gp75 gene.

Table 3.

Antigenic epitopes of melanocyte differentiation antigens recognized by cytotoxic T lymphocytes (CTL). Modified on basis of [15].

Gp100 alone has been shown to induce an immune response, but has limited anti-tumor activity [6]. A multi-center phase II clinical trial in patients with advanced melanoma showed that the gp100 peptide vaccine plus interleukin-2 (IL-2) group had a significant improvement in centrally verified overall clinical response and longer progression-free survival, compared with the IL-2-only group (16 % versus 6 %), but without overall survival benefit [6, 19].

Neoantigens

In contrast to other types of tumor-specific antigens, neoantigens are novel peptides that are not normally found in the host and are unique to a particular cancer [20, 21, 22] (Table 4). These peptides are not subject to central tolerance and hence appear as ideal targets for cancer immunotherapy [20, 21, 22]. They may also contribute to the understanding of the molecular mechanisms of malignant transformation [15]. Neoanti-

Table 4.

Antigenic epitopes of mutated or aberrantly expressed antigens recognized by cytotoxic T lymphocytes (CTL). Modified on basis of [15]

Antigen	Target Antigen	Restricting HLA	Epitope	Sequence / Prod. No.
Mutated or Aberrantly Expressed Antigens	GnT-V ¹⁾	HLA-A2	nt38-64	VLPDVFIRC
			nt38-67	VLPDVFIRC
	NY-ESO-1/CAG-3	HLA-A31	18-27 ²⁾	LAAQERRVPR ²⁾
	gp100-in4	HLA-A24	170-178	VYFFLPDHL
	TRP-2 (int2)	HLA-A68011/ HLA-A3301		
	p15	HLA-A24		(E)AYGLDFYIL
	β-Catenin	HLA-A24	29-37	SYLDSGIHF
	SR-2	HLA-A3		KIFSEVTLK
	MUM-1 ³⁾	HLA-B44	nt782- 808	EEKLIVLFL
	CDK4	HLA-A2		ACDPHSGHFV

¹⁾ N-acetylglucosaminyltransferase V (GnT-V). The peptide is encoded by an intron sequence.

²⁾ Antigenic peptide resulting from translation of an alternative open reading frame (ORF2) of the NY-ESO-1 gene.

³⁾ Mutation occurs in an intron sequence followed by a stop codon.

gens can arise from somatic mutations (or other genetic alterations) that result in the production of a novel peptide, or from viral peptides in virally induced cancers [20]. These antigens have been identified predominantly in melanoma, likely due to their relatively high mutation rate, but also in other tumor types including lung and renal cancers [21].

One major concern with regard to the suitability of neoantigens for tumor therapy is the heterogeneity of tumors. Neoantigens may be expressed in some, but not all tumor cells in an individual patient, leading to tumor escape from immunotherapy [21]. Potential approaches to address this concern are to target multiple neoantigens at the same time, so all tumor cells expressing at least one neoantigen can be destroyed, or to target a single neoantigen, which is ideally expressed in all tumor cells within a patient [21].

Prospects

Melanoma still is a life-threatening disease, for which, besides preventive measurements and conventional therapies, immunotherapies based on peptide epitopes give hope for future therapies. Significant

clinical breakthroughs have already been obtained with immune checkpoint inhibitors, and therapeutic approaches like vaccination have the potential to further improve the prognosis for the patients.

However, future research will need to address a broad variety of open questions. Optimal combinations of antigens, adjuvants and delivery vehicles need to be determined, and combinations of complementary immunotherapies are required to induce robust and sustained anti-tumor responses [23]. It is important to overcome immune tolerance and immune suppression [5, 23]. Appropriate pharmacodynamic biomarkers and diagnostics as well as new metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of immunotherapies will need to be implemented. The metrics of immunotherapies thereby differ significantly from those of conventional cytotoxic drugs [5, 23].

Another important scientific topic will be the use of optimum adjuvants, which might not have been optimally selected in initial trials with melanoma vaccines [5], and are important constituents in current strategies for immunotherapy of melanoma [3].

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SKIN CANCER CELL, SEM

Colored scanning electron micrograph (SEM). Cultured melanoma cell showing the numerous blebs and microvilli characteristic of cancer cells. Skin cancer arises from the skin's melanocytes, the cells that produce the pigment melanin which gives skin its color. Melanoma is an aggressive cancer that often spreads (metastasis) to other tissues of the body. The long cell protrusions seen here are thought to help the cell to move. The main cause of melanoma is exposure to ultraviolet radiation in sunlight. Magnification: x10000 when printed at 10 centimeters wide.

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MELANOMA PEPTIDES

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MELANOMA PEPTIDES

MAGE-1 Antigen (161-169) (human)

H-3636

EADPTGHSY

MAGE-3 Antigen (167-176) (human)

H-3686

MEVDPIGHLY

MAGE-3 Antigen (168-176) (human)

H-3634

EVDPIGHLY

MAGE-3 Antigen (271-279) (human)

H-3714

FLWGPRALV

Melanocyte Protein PMEL 17 (44-59) (human, bovine, mouse)

H-4406

WNRQLYPEWTEAQRLLD

Melanocyte Protein PMEL 17 (130-138) (human)

H-3958

KTWGQYWQV

Melanocyte Protein PMEL 17 (185-193) (human, bovine, mouse)

H-4106

ITDQVPFSV

(Des-Asp¹⁸⁷, Met¹⁸⁶)-Melanocyte Protein PMEL 17 (185-193) (human, bovine, mouse)

H-4362

IMQVPFSV

(Met¹⁸⁶)-Melanocyte Protein PMEL 17 (185-193) (human, bovine, mouse)

H-4938

IMDQVPFSV

H-Glu-Glu-Lys-Leu-Ile-Val-Val-Ala-Phe-OH

H-3688

EEKLIVVAF

MART-1 PEPTIDES

MART-1 (26-35) (human)

H-4102

EAAGIGILTV

MART-1 (27-35) (human) acetate salt

H-3956

AAGIGILTV

MART-1 (27-35) (human) trifluoroacetate salt

H-7734 NEW

AAGIGILTV

TYROSINASE FRAGMENTS

Tyrosinase (192-200) (human, mouse)

H-3812

SEIWRDIDF

Tyrosinase (206-214) (human)

H-3848

AFLPWHRLF

Tyrosinase (243-251) (human)

H-3852

KCDICTDEY

(Asp³⁷¹)-Tyrosinase (369-377) (human) acetate salt

H-3862

YMDGTMSQV

(Asp³⁷¹)-Tyrosinase (369-377) (human) trifluoroacetate salt

H-7732 NEW

YMDGTMSQV

(Val⁴³⁸)-Tyrosinase (432-444) (human)

H-4416

SYLQDSVPDSFQD

KISSPEPTINS

Kisspeptin-13 (human)

H-5962

LPNYNWNSFGLRF-NH₂

Kisspeptin-13 (4-13) (human)

H-5544

YNWNSFGLRF-NH₂

Kisspeptin-54 (human)

H-6514

GTSLSPPPPESSGSRQQPGL-SAPHSRQIPAPQGAVLVQREK-DLPNYNWNSFGLRF-NH₂

Kisspeptin-54 (27-54) (human)

H-5542

IPAPQGAVLVQREKDLPNYNWNSF-GLRF-NH₂

OTHER MELANOMA PEPTIDES

Band 3 Protein (824-829) (human)

H-1598

YVKRVK

Collagen Type IV α3 Chain (185-203)

H-4208

CNYYSNSYSFWLASLNPER

Fibronectin CS-1 Fragment (1978-1982)

H-2592

EILDV

Fibronectin CS-1 Fragment (1978-1985)

H-2094

EILDVPST

rec GRO/Melanoma Growth Stimulating Activity (human)

H-1714

(Phe¹³,Tyr¹⁹)-MCH (human, mouse, rat)

H-2218

DFDMLRCMLGRVFRPCWQY

Ac-muramyl-Thr-D-Glu-NH₂

G-4270

rec Oncostatin M (human)

H-1716

RGD-4C

H-7946

ACDCRGDCFCG

Peptide 74

H-8545

TMRKPRCGNPDVAN

Peptide 810

H-2586

QDLTMKYQIF

Thrombospondin-1 (1016-1023) (human, bovine, mouse)

H-1414

RFYVVMWK

H-Tyr-Lys-OH

G-3445

YK



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