

## A Single-step Diagnostic Lightcycler Assay for Detection of Lactose Tolerance Gene Variants In the MCM6 -13907 to -13915 Region

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Accepted 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2013

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Diagnosis of lactose intolerance is commonly based solely on the absence of the European lactose tolerance allele *MCM6* -13910T, although other lactose tolerance mediating alleles exist, especially in defined African populations and in the Middle East. Therefore, a SimpleProbe assay was developed which can simultaneously detect -13910T as well as common African variants.

**Methods:** A SimpleProbe oligonucleotide was used to discriminate between three classes of *MCM6* alleles: I: Intolerance (-13910C); II: Caucasian type tolerance (-13910T); III: African/Arabian type tolerance (-13907G, -13913C, -13915G). Genotyping standards for all these alleles were constructed through PCR amplification and cloning from genomic DNA. Assay performance was tested using real-time PCR and melting curve analyses with genotyping standards as templates. Finally, the genotyping accuracy was tested using two panels: 100 individuals, previously genotyped using Sanger-sequencing and 20 individuals, previously genotyped using TaqMan analyses.

**Results:** The assay showed a clear discrimination between gene variants conferring lactose tolerance and intolerance. Mean  $T_m$ -values for the Caucasian alleles -13910C and -13910T were 55.3 °C and 60.8 °C respectively, whereas  $T_m$ -values for all three African/Arabian variants (-13907G, -13913C and -13915G) were in the interval of 50-52 °C. SimpleProbe genotyping of both panels showed 100 % concordance with the results of the reference methods.

**Conclusions:** The new SimpleProbe LightCycler assay provides a rapid, cost effective and reliable method to diagnose lactose intolerance and is especially suited for populations with African or Middle Eastern admixture.

**KEYWORDS:** lactose tolerance, *MCM6* gene, African variants, SimpleProbe LightCycler assay

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Adult type lactose intolerance is the ancestral human phenotype, caused by an age-dependent down-regulation of the lactase-phlorizin hydrolase gene (*LCT*). However, several single nucleotide (SNP) variants exist, leading to high expression of lactase in adults. These variants are generally found 13,900 - 14,010 bp upstream the *LCT* gene, in an enhancer region located in intron 9 of the *MCM6* gene [Ingram et al. (2009), Tishkoff et al. (2007)]. The most frequent variant, *MCM6* -13910T, believed to originate in

Europe 5,000 - 10,000 years ago, now shows an almost worldwide distribution. In Europe, a strong South-East to North-West gradient of prevalence exist [Itan et al. (2009)], with up to 95 % of Scandinavians being lactose tolerant. The other lactose tolerance variants -13907G, -13913C, and -13915G, as well as -14010C which is located further upstream, are believed to originate in dairy-consuming populations in East Africa or Middle East and are far less abundant, but still show a high frequency in populations descending from these [Olds et al. (2011)]. Due to soaring global migration, genotyping assays considering all known lactose tolerance alleles should be preferred.

### 2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Assay Design

Most published assays and commercial kits based on real-time PCR allow only discrimination of the ancestral intolerant variant and the Caucasian tolerant variant [Bodlaj et al. (2006)]. For detection of the African/Arabian variants, C-13907G, T-13913C and T-13915G, a separate assay or a different detection technique would be required [Nilsson et al. (2008), Tag et al. (2008)]. The OLIGO6 Primer Analysis Software Version 6.59 was used to verify the design of a SimpleProbe which can differentiate the Caucasian as well as the African variants from the ancestral lactose-intolerant variant.

Primers were designed for specific PCR amplification covering all of the mutations mentioned above in the range of nucleotides 26,563 to 26,720 (GenBank accession number AY220757), avoiding to target sites containing other base polymorphisms. The SimpleProbe oligonucleotide (nucleotides 26,623 to 26,647) was designed identical to the Caucasian mutation (-13910T) sequence, giving the highest melting temperature of calculated 60 °C. A significantly lower melting temperature at approximately 55 °C was expected for the ancestral variant due to the one C/T mismatch. For the African/Arabian variants the melting temperatures were expected to be in the range of 50 to 52 °C caused by the additional mismatch of the corresponding nucleotide variant.

## Genotyping Standards

Positive genotyping standards for -13907 G/G, -13910 C/C, -13910 T/T, -13913 C/C and -13915 G/G were prepared by GenExpress GmbH (Berlin, Germany) from donors with known genotypes and cloned into a pUC21 vector; plasmid sequences were confirmed by Sanger-sequencing.

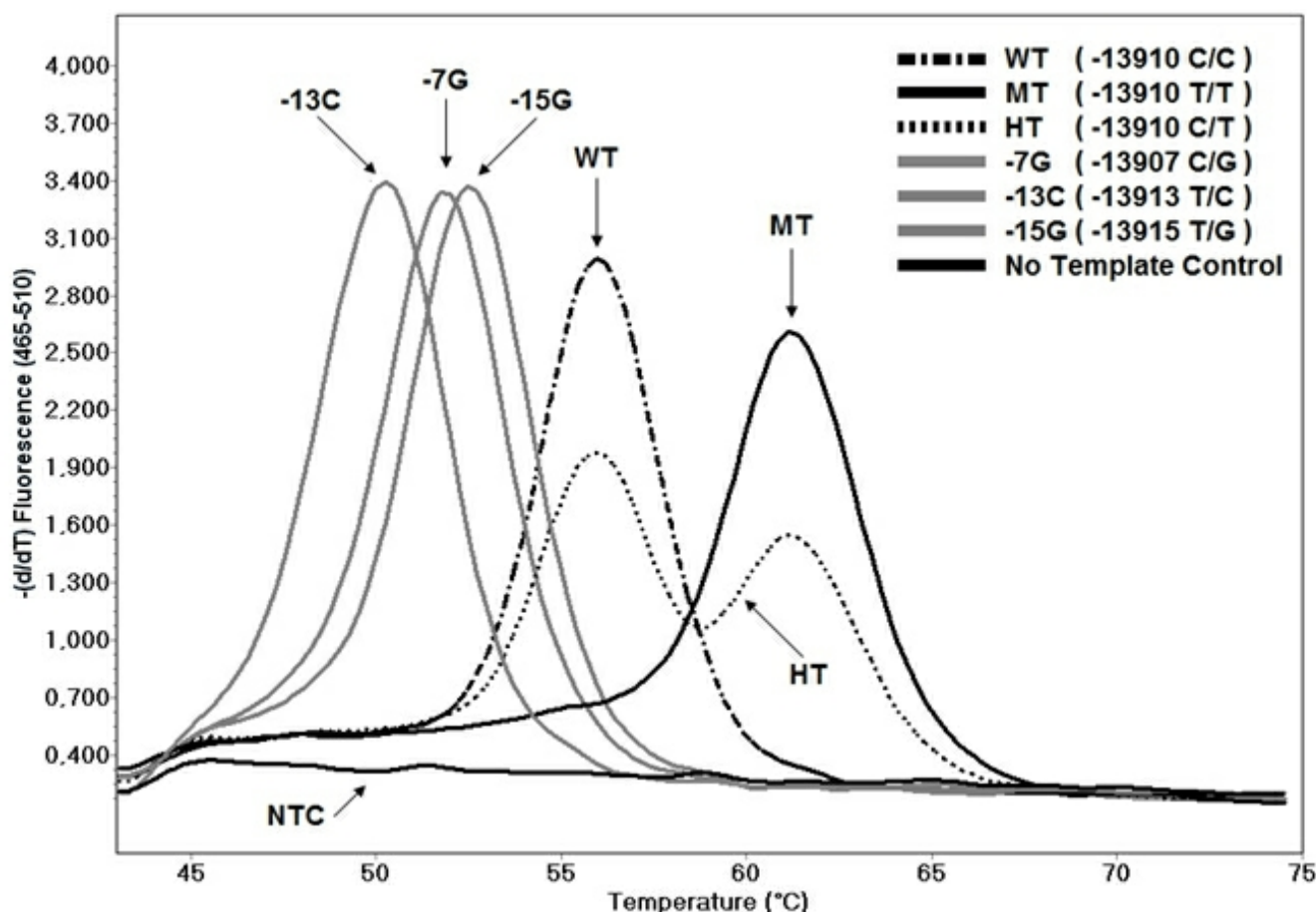
## Experimental conduction

Real-time PCR amplification with consecutively genotyping by melting curve analysis was performed on a LightCycler 480 Instrument II (Roche Diagnostics, Mannheim, Germany). The PCR-mastermix was prepared with 1  $\mu$ M of the forward primer (LCTA-S, 5'-TTCAGGAAAAATGTAAGTACTTAGACCC-3'), 0.2  $\mu$ M of the reverse primer (LCTA-A, 5'-AATGCAGGGCTC AAAGAA-3') and 1  $\mu$ M of the internal fluorescent labelled SimpleProbe oligonucleotide (5'-AGGCCAGGGACTACATTAT CTTATC-block-3'), 3 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub> and 1x FastStart DNA Master Hybridization Probes (Roche Diagnostics, Mannheim, Germany). A total reaction volume of 10  $\mu$ l (8  $\mu$ l mastermix and 2  $\mu$ l sample DNA) was heated at 95 °C for 10 min followed by 50 cycles of 5 s at 95 °C, 10 s at 60 °C and 15 s

at 72 °C. Melting curve analysis was performed by 30 s at 95 °C and 43 °C for 30 s, followed by a temperature increase of 1.5 °C/s to 75 °C with a continuous acquisition (3 acquisitions per °C) with filters 465-510, and a final cooling step of 30 s at 40 °C.

## 3.0 RESULTS

First, melting peaks were established for all the genotyping standards and controls (Fig. 1). For these, melting temperatures of 61.3 °C (-13910 T/T, n = 8, SD = 0.3 °C), 55.9 °C (-13910 C/C, n = 8, SD = 0.3 °C), 51.6 °C (-13907 G/G, n = 6, SD = 0.5 °C), 49.9 °C (-13913 C/C, n = 6, SD = 0.6 °C) and 52.6 °C (-13915 G/G, n = 6, SD = 0.6 °C), were obtained. Although the three African/Arabian type variants yield distinct melting temperatures, the obtained temperature differences were estimated as too small to use them for a reliable identification of a particular African/Arabian allele in routine analysis of patient samples. However, the appearance of a melting peak in the temperature range of 50 to 52 °C indicated an African/Arabian variant, and the African/Arabian variants as a group can clearly be discriminated from the other variants.



**Fig. 1.** Melting curve analysis of Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) amplicons covering the enhancer region located in intron 9 of the MCM6 gene that includes the Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs) controlling adult lactose tolerance.

## 4.0 CLINICAL VALIDATION

Subsequently, the real-time PCR assay was validated on a set of 100 patients and the results were verified by sequencing. Two hundred microliter of EDTA blood samples from 100 donors were collected by TIB Molbiol S.r.l (Genova, Italy) and purified on a Roche MagNAPure instrument using

the MagNAPure LC Total Nucleic Acid Isolation Kit according to the manufacturer's instructions. The purified DNA was eluted in 100  $\mu$ l elution buffer and added undiluted into the real-time PCR assay. Genotyping standards -13910 C/C (wild-type), -13910 T/T (mutant) and an equimolar mixture of -13910 C/C and -13910 T/T imitating the heterozygous genotype were used as reference samples.

## 5.0 DISCUSSIONS

Out of the 100 tested patients, 74 were found carrying the genotype -13910 C/C (wild-type), 23 -13910 C/T (heterozygous), two -13910 T/T (mutant) and one patient, which was classified as 'Unknown' by the LightCycler 480 analysis software. According to the melting temperature of 52.0 °C this sample (S3874) was classified as -13915 G/G. Sequencing was performed by GenExpress on an ABI Prism 310 instrument (Applied Biosystems, Weiterstadt, Germany). 100 percent concordance was obtained with the outcome of the real-time PCR assay. For sample S3874 the assumed genotype -13915 G/G could be confirmed.

To test the robustness of the assay another panel of 20 patient samples of genomic DNA was tested at Copenhagen University Hospital (Roskilde), Denmark, using similar assay conditions, but including a -13915G genotyping standard. The panel, consisting of genomic DNA purified from EDTA blood using the Qiasymphony DNA Midi Kit was kindly donated from Skejby University Hospital, Denmark. According to the routine inhouse-validated TaqMan SNP genotyping assay (Applied Biosystems) the panel represented six of each of the Caucasian MCM6 genotypes -13910 C/C, -13910 C/T and -13910 T/T as well as two African/Arabian type variants, presumed to represent MCM6 -13915G.

For the 18 Caucasian genotypes 100 % concordance was obtained. Also, both of the two African variants showed the expected melting peak corresponding to the African/Arabian -13915G genotyping standard.

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the new SimpleProbe LightCycler assay provides a reliable method to diagnose hereditary lactose intolerance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors thank Lisbeth Nørum Pedersen, MSc, PhD, Aarhus University Hospital, Skejby, Denmark, for the donation of reference DNA samples.

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