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Opinion Article

Refining Genetic Change: A Closer Look at Prime Editing in Modern Biology

Elena Richter *

Department of Molecular Genetics, Valenridge International University, Zurich, Switzerland

DESCRIPTION

Prime editing represents an advanced approach within gene editing that allows precise changes to Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) without relying on double-strand breaks or donor DNA templates. This method builds upon earlier technologies while addressing some of their limitations, offering a more controlled way to introduce targeted genetic modifications. By combining elements of molecular biology with engineered enzymes and guide molecules, prime editing provides a flexible platform for altering genetic sequences in living cells.

The method relies on a fusion protein that combines a modified enzyme capable of cutting a single strand of DNA with a reverse transcriptase, an enzyme that can synthesize DNA from an Ribonucleic Acid (RNA) template. Alongside this protein, a specially designed guide RNA is used, which not only directs the system to the target location in the genome but also carries the template for the desired edit. This guide RNA plays a dual role, acting both as a locator and as a source of new genetic information. When the system reaches the target DNA sequence, the enzyme creates a nick in one strand of the DNA rather than cutting both strands. This single-strand break reduces the likelihood of unwanted changes that can occur when the cell attempts to repair more extensive damage. The reverse transcriptase then uses the template within the guide RNA to write the new genetic sequence directly into the DNA. Cellular repair processes integrate this new sequence, resulting in a precise modification at the intended site.

One of the notable advantages of prime editing is its versatility. It can introduce a variety of genetic changes, including substitutions, insertions, and deletions, without requiring multiple steps or additional components. This flexibility makes it suitable for correcting a wide range of genetic mutations. Many inherited diseases are caused by small errors in DNA sequences, such as single-base changes, and prime editing provides a method to address these alterations directly.

In medical research, prime editing is being explored as a potential tool for treating genetic disorders. By correcting mutations at their source, it may be possible to restore normal gene function in affected cells. Laboratory studies have demonstrated the ability of this technique to modify genes associated with conditions such as blood disorders and metabolic diseases. Although these findings are still under investigation, they highlight the potential of prime editing as a therapeutic approach.

Compared to earlier gene editing methods, prime editing offers improved precision with fewer unintended effects. Traditional techniques often rely on creating double-strand breaks in DNA, which can lead to unpredictable repair outcomes. In contrast, the single-strand modification used in prime editing allows for more controlled changes. This reduces the likelihood of off-target effects, although ongoing research continues to assess and improve its accuracy.

Another important aspect of prime editing is its ability to function without the need for donor DNA templates. In many gene editing approaches, an external DNA template is required to guide the repair process. Delivering this template into cells can be challenging and may reduce efficiency. Prime editing integrates the template directly into the guide RNA, simplifying the process and increasing the likelihood of successful edits.

Despite its advantages, prime editing faces several challenges. Delivering the necessary components into cells remains a significant hurdle, particularly in clinical applications. The fusion protein and guide RNA must reach the target cells in sufficient quantities to achieve effective editing. Researchers are exploring various delivery methods, including viral vectors and nanoparticle systems, to improve efficiency and safety.

The size of the editing components can also pose limitations. The combined structure of the enzyme and guide RNA is larger than that of some other gene editing tools, which can complicate delivery into certain cell types. Efforts are underway to optimize the system and develop smaller or more efficient variants that maintain functionality while improving accessibility.

In conclusion, prime editing offers a refined method for altering genetic material with accuracy and flexibility. By combining

Correspondence to: Elena Richter, Department of Molecular Genetics, Valenridge International University, Zurich, Switzerland, E-mail: elena.richter@valenridgeiu.ch

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targeted DNA recognition with direct synthesis of new sequences, it provides a powerful approach to addressing genetic challenges. While further research is needed to overcome existing limitations, this technique continues to expand the possibilities of gene editing and its applications