



APR 03, 2024

Tissue Fixation | HubMAP | JHU-TMC

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OPEN ACCESS



DOI:

dx.doi.org/10.17504/protocols.io.3byl4929jgo5/v1

Protocol Citation: Kyu Sang Han, Pei-Hsun Wu, Joel Sunshine, Ashley Kiemen, Miklhail James, Sashank Reddy, Denis Wirtz 2024. Tissue Fixation | HubMAP | JHU-TMC.

protocols.io

<https://dx.doi.org/10.17504/protocols.io.3byl4929jgo5/v1>

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Protocol status: Working
We use this protocol and it's working



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ABSTRACT

First and most important - the original tissue sample must be of good quality. Factors such as warm ischemic time, the time delay between tissue excision and fixation, etc. are important. Ideally, tissues should be acquired as close to still being viable as possible, and put into fixative as soon as possible following excision. Delays lead to cell death, autolysis, and loss of tissue and cell integrity with concomitant losses of immunostaining (e.g., due to proteolysis of the antigen). If acquiring animal tissues, consider performing perfusion fixation before organ/tissue removal if it is an option

Created: Mar 28, 2024

Last Modified: Apr 03, 2024

PROTOCOL integer ID: 97517

Funders Acknowledgement:

Institute of Arthritis and
Musculoskeletal and Skin
Diseases

Grant ID: U54AR081774

National Cancer Institute

Grant ID: U54CA143868

Tissue Fixation

- 1 Tissue is harvested using our protocol ([Tissue Harvesting Protocol](#))
- 2 We submerge the biopsy in the histology container prefilled with 10% NBF for fixation
- 3 Minimizing the warm ischemic time is critical. The time delay between tissue excision and fixation is detrimental to further analysis.

Note on the effect of delay to formalin fixation - [Delay to formalin fixation effect on breast biomarkers - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
- 4 The rate of penetration of formaldehyde depends on the size of the biopsy. Trimming is often required to facilitate fixation. Tissues placed in the tissue cassettes should be no thicker than 3-4mm because the interior of a specimen may not become fully fixed, or significant autolysis can occur.

Reference - tmalab.jhmi.edu/histology.html#proc

Tissue Trimming

- 5 Trimming also helps remove unwanted parts of the biopsy such as excessive fat and traumatized edges.
- 6 Label tissue cassette with sample ID with pencil
- 7 Place the trimmed tissue in cassette
- 8 Place cassettes back into the histology container

Tissue fixation (continue)

- 9 Refill 10% NBF into the container and leave for 12~48 hours at room temperature.

Use plenty of fixative. The general rule is to use at least 15 volume equivalents of formalin per volume of tissue. A higher formalin-to-tissue ratio certainly won't hurt, and just requires a larger container. Formalin is relatively cheap, so don't skimp on this step.

Recommended reading - [Active monitoring of formaldehyde diffusion into histological tissues with digital acoustic interferometry - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

- 10 Gentle agitation of the tissue in the formalin during fixation maximize diffusion and reduce the poor local fixation.
- 11 Pour the formalin into an "excess formalin" waste container in the hood.

- 12** Rinse the cassettes in the histology container with 1x PBS

- 13** Drain and refill the PBS. Leave the cassette submerged in PBS and store at 4 degree C until processing.

- 14** Properly fixed tissue can be stored in PBS up to a week.