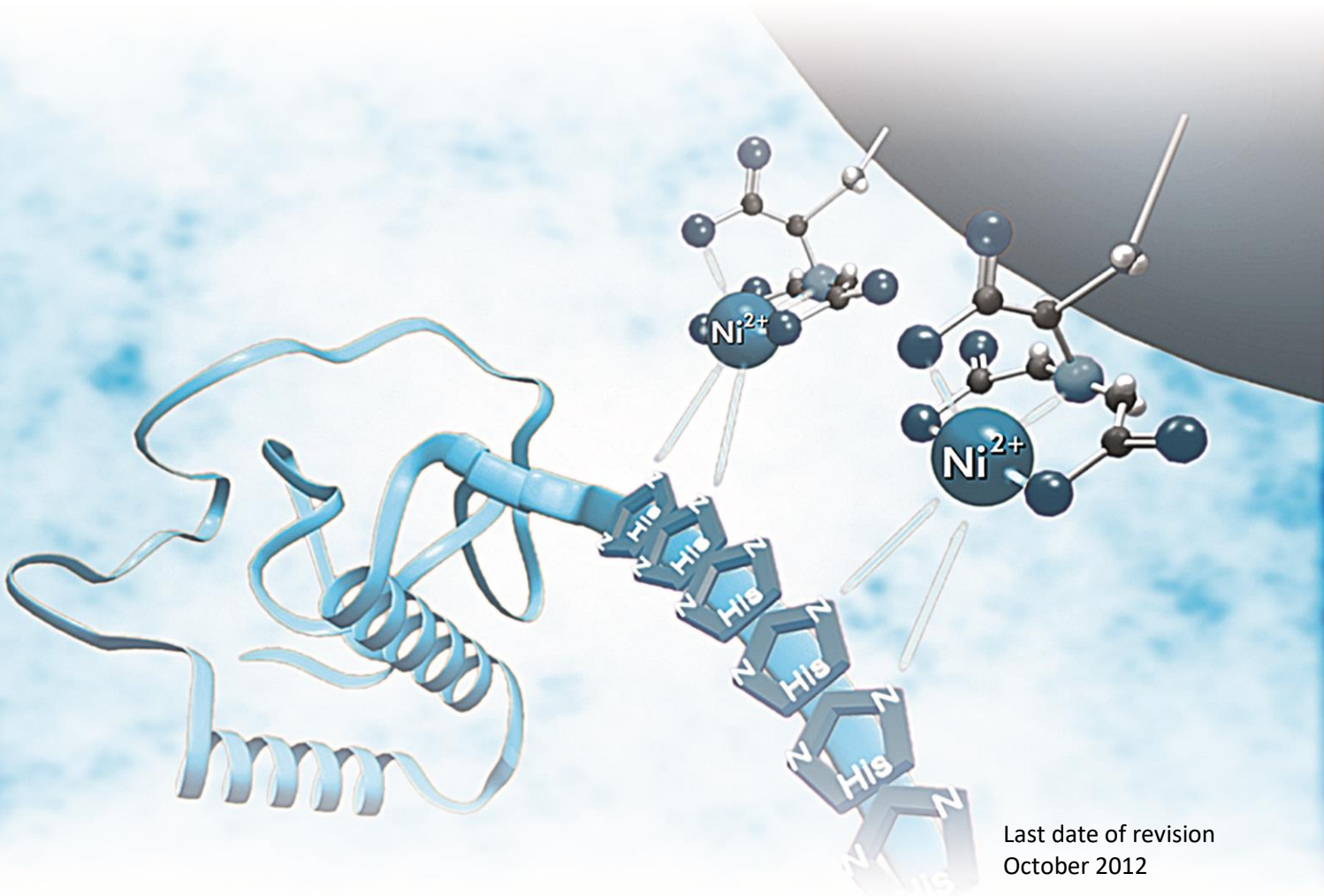


Expression and purification of proteins using *6xHistidine-tag*

A comprehensive manual



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Content

1	Introduction	4
1.1	His-tag/Ni-NTA system	4
1.2	Ni-NTA Resins	4
2	Expression	9
2.1	Expression in <i>E. coli</i> with the tet-system (pASG-IBA vectors)	9
2.2	Expression in <i>E. coli</i> with the T7-system (pPSG-IBA vectors*)	11
2.3	Expression with other systems	12
2.4	Trouble shooting – Expression	13
3	Preparation of cleared lysates	14
3.1	Preparation of cleared lysate after cytoplasmic expression of His-tag proteins under native conditions	14
3.2	Preparation of cleared lysate after periplasmic expression of His-tag fusion proteins	15
3.3	Preparation of cleared lysate of His-tag proteins under denaturing conditions	16
4	Purification of His-tag proteins	18
4.1	Batch purification of His-tag proteins under native conditions	18
4.2	Gravity flow purification of His-tag proteins under native conditions	19
4.3	Batch purification of His-tag proteins under denaturing conditions	21
4.4	Gravity flow purification of His-tag proteins under denaturing conditions	22
4.5	Troubleshooting	24
4.5.1	“Protein does not bind to Ni-NTA”	24
4.5.2	“Protein elutes in the Ni-NTA Wash Buffer”	24
4.5.3	“Protein precipitates during purification”	24
4.5.4	“Protein does not elute”	25
4.5.5	“Protein elutes with contaminants”	25
4.5.6	“Discoloration of resin”	25
5	References	26

1 Introduction



1.1 His-tag/Ni-NTA system

The His-tag Ni-NTA interaction is based on the selectivity and high affinity of Ni-NTA (nickel-nitrilotriacetic acid) resin for proteins containing an affinity tag of e.g. six consecutive Histidine residues [1,2]. NTA, which has four chelating sites for nickel ions, binds nickel more tightly than metal-chelating purification systems like IDA which have only three sites available for interaction with metal ions.

1.2 Ni-NTA Resins

Recombinant proteins containing a His-tag can be purified by **Ni-NTA** (nickel-nitrilotriacetic acid) chromatography which is based on the interaction between a transition Ni^{2+} ion immobilized on a matrix and the histidine side chains.



Abb. 1. Tighter binding of the His-tag. The capture of His-tag proteins by metal-chelate affinity matrices relies on two interactions. Both are important for optimal performance. If interaction A is weak, there is no binding of the His-tag protein. If interaction A is strong but interaction B weak protein is lost as protein-metal complexes during wash steps. When NTA ligand and nickel are used to bind His-tag molecules, both interactions are stronger, providing advantages over systems that rely on other ligands or metals.

The extra chelating site prevents nickel-ion leaching, thus providing greater binding capacity and high-purity protein preparations. Under denaturing conditions this system is the system of choice because the His-tag/Ni-NTA interaction tolerates high concentrations of urea and guanidine (see Table 1).

Under physiological conditions host proteins with histidine stretches or host proteins containing metal ions may contaminate the protein preparation. Working with 20 mM imidazole can reduce this problem. However, we recommend the Strep-tag® system for the purification of proteins under physiological conditions.

The highly specific interaction of the Strep-tag®II with Strep-Tactin® (biotin binding pocket) and the high affinity of the tag leads to the purification of proteins with outstanding purity of >95% without the need for optimization of the buffers (see Abb.2 next page).

Furthermore, the system tolerates the use of variable buffers and detergents or additives and makes it therefore a very robust purification system for a large subset of proteins from different protein classes and expression hosts.



Abb.2. Comparison of the His-tag vs. Strep-tag purification procedure under physiological conditions with regard to ease of use and purity.


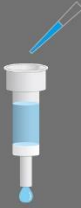



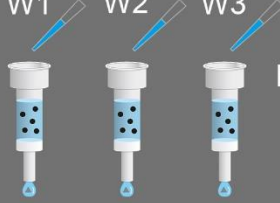

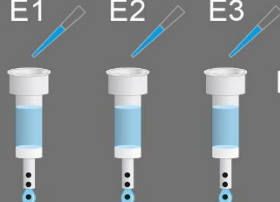
STREP-TAG®	HIS-TAG
Equilibrate with buffer W 	Equilibrate with buffer 
Load sample 	Load sample 
Wash with buffer W 	Evaluate optimal wash buffer W1 W2 W3 
Elute protein 	Evaluate optimal elution buffer E1 E2 E3 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ONE-STEP ELUTION <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HIGH PURITY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALL PROTEIN CLASSES POSSIBLE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> VARIABLE BUFFER CONDITIONS <p style="color: green; font-weight: bold;">Single step purification no additional chromatography necessary</p> <div style="border: 2px solid blue; border-radius: 50%; width: 60px; height: 60px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 0 auto;"> >95% PURITY </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TEDIOUS OPTIMIZATION OF ELUTION <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HIGH UNSPECIFIC BACKGROUND <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO METALLOPROTEINS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO CHELATING AGENTS <p style="color: red; font-weight: bold;">For more purity additional chromatography is necessary</p> <div style="border: 2px solid gray; border-radius: 50%; width: 60px; height: 60px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 0 auto;"> ~80% PURITY </div>



Table 1. Reagents compatible with His-tag/Ni-NTA interaction.**

Reagent	Effect	Comments
Buffer reagents		
Tris, HEPES, MOPS	Buffers with secondary or tertiary amines may reduce nickel ions.	Up to 100 mM can be used, however sodium phosphate or phosphate-citrate buffer is recommended.
Chelating reagents		
EDTA, EGTA	Strips nickel ions from resin.	Up to 1 mM has been used successfully in some cases, but care must be taken.
Sulfhydryl reagents		
β -mercaptoethanol	Prevents disulfide cross-linkages. Can reduce nickel ions at higher concentration.	Up to 20 mM can be used. Do not store resin under reducing conditions.
DTT, DTE	At high concentrations (>1 mM) resin may turn reversibly brown due to nickel reduction. Up to 10 mM has been tested and shown not to compromise purification or increase nickel leaching.	Up to 10 mM DTT has been used successfully. Do not store resin under reducing conditions.
TCEP	Prevents disulfide cross-linkages.	Up to 1 mM tested successfully. Do not store resin under reducing conditions.
Nonionic detergents		
n-Hexadecyl- β -Dmaltoside	Removes background proteins and nucleic acids, resolubilizes membrane proteins from membrane compartments.	0.0003 %*
n-Tetradecyl- β -Dmaltopyranoside		0.005 %*
n-Tridecyl- β -Dmaltopyranoside		0.016 %*
Brij 35		0.1 %*
Digitonin		0.6 %*
Cymal 6, n-Nonyl- β -Dglucopyranoside, n-Decyl- β -Dmaltopyranoside,		1 %*
n-Octyl- β -Dglucopyranoside		1.5 %*
Triton X-100®, Tween-20®, NP-40		Up to 2 % can be used.
Zwitterionic detergents		
Fos-Choline 16		0.05 %*
Dodecyl-dimethylphosphine oxide		0.15 %*



Table 1, continued. Reagents compatible with His-tag/Ni-NTA interaction.**

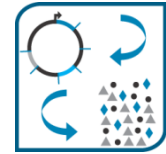
Reagent	Effect	Comments
Cationic detergents		
CHAPS		Up to 1 % can be used.
Anionic detergents		
(SDS, sarkosyl)		Not recommended, but up to 0.3 % has been used successfully in some cases.
Triton X-114	Removes endotoxins	Up to 2 % can be used.
Denaturants		
GuHCl	Solubilizes proteins	Up to 6 M.
Urea		Up to 8 M.
Amino acids		
Glycine		Not recommended.
Glutamine		Not recommended.
Arginine		Not recommended.
Histidine	Binds to Ni-NTA and competes with histidine	Can be used at low concentrations (1–2 mM) to inhibit non specific binding and at higher concentrations (>20 mM) to elute the His-tagged protein from the Ni-NTA matrix.
Other additives		
NaCl	Prevents ionic interactions.	Up to 2 M can be used, at least 300 mM should be used.
MgCl ₂		Up to 4 M.
CaCl ₂		Up to 5 mM.
Glycerol	Prevents hydrophobic interaction between proteins, stabilizes proteins.	Up to 50 %.
Ethanol	Prevents hydrophobic interactions between proteins.	Up to 20 %.
BugBuster® Protein Extraction Reagent		Use as recommended.
Imidazole	Binds to Ni-NTA and competes with histidine residues in the His-tag.	Can be used at low concentrations (20 mM) to inhibit non specific binding and at higher concentrations (>100 mM) to elute the His-tagged protein from the Ni-NTA matrix.
Sodium bicarbonate		Not recommended.
Hemoglobin		Not recommended.
Ammonium		Not recommended.
Citrate	Buffer	Up to 60 mM has been used successfully.

Note: These reagents have been successfully used in concentrations up to those given.

* Highest concentration tested at QIAGEN. Maximum concentration compatible with Ni-NTA may be higher.

**Data according to references from Qiagen: <http://www.qiagen.com/literature/resources/Protein/CompatibilityTable.pdf>.

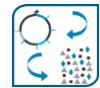
2 Expression



2.1 Expression in *E. coli* with the tet-system (pASG-IBA vectors)

The production of a heterologous protein is often accompanied by an impaired growth of *E. coli* cells. Consequently, regulation of heterologous biosynthesis is generally recommended by the use of a promoter whose activity can be blocked by a repressor. If the foreign protein is cytotoxic, even the production of minute quantities can result in a dramatic selection against the *E. coli* cells which harbour the expression plasmid. In such cases, tight repression of the promoter is required. Synthesis of the gene product is then switched on in a controlled manner simply by adding a chemical inducer. The pASG His-tag expression vectors that carry the promoter/operator region from the *tetA* resistance gene are the state-of-the-art solution for such an inducible expression system [3,4]. The strength of the *tetA* promoter is comparable with that of the *lac*-UV5 promoter (nearly 25 % activity of the T7 promoter). It can be fully induced by adding anhydrotetracycline at a concentration that is not antibiologically effective (200 ng/ml). The constitutive expression of the *tet* repressor gene, which is also encoded on the expression plasmids, guarantees the repression of the promoter in the absence of the inducer. In a Western blot, no expression is detectable under these conditions [3,5]. In contrast to the *lac* promoter, which is susceptible to catabolite repression (cAMP-level, metabolic state) and chromosomally encoded repressor molecules, the *tetA* promoter/operator is not coupled to any cellular regulation mechanisms. Therefore, when using the *tet* system, there are basically no restrictions in the choice of culture medium or *E. coli* expression strain. For example, glucose minimal media and even the bacterial strain XL1-Blue, which carries an episomal copy of the tetracycline resistance gene, can be used for expression.

Recommended Buffers/Solutions	Concentration of ingredients	Notes
Ampicillin	stock solution 100 mg/ml in H ₂ O, sterile filtered	Store in aliquots at -20°C
Anhydrotetracycline	stock solution: 2 mg/ml in Dimethylformamid (DMF)	Store at -20°C
LB medium	10 g/l trypton 5 g/l yeast extract 5 g/l NaCl	
Buffer W	100 mM Tris/HCl 150 mM NaCl 1 mM EDTA Adjust pH to 8.0	
5x SDS-PAGE sample buffer	250 mM Tris/HCl 25 % glycerol 7,5 % SDS 0.25 mg/ml bromophenolblue 12.5 % v/v mercaptoethanol Adjust pH to 8.0	





Important notes

The tet promoter system is independent of the *E. coli* strain. Following strains were successfully tested: JM83, WK6, B, BL21, MG1655, W3110, XL1-Blue, BL21-CodonPlus™

→ We recommend JM83 or W3110 for periplasmic secretion.

Protocol

- 1. Preculture: Inoculate 2 ml of LB medium containing 100 µg/ml ampicillin (pASG-IBA plasmids except 2C to 7C) or 30 µg/ml chloramphenicol (pASK-IBA2C to 7C) with a fresh colony harbouring the pASG-IBA expression plasmid and shake overnight (200 rpm) at 37°C.**

 The colony should not be older than 1 week.
 Do not inoculate from glycerol stocks.

The yield of soluble, functional protein can be substantially increased in most cases by lowering the preculture growth temperature to 22°C - 30°C. Take care that cells do not reach the stationary phase for extended periods prior to inoculating the production culture.

- 2. Culture for expression: Inoculate 100 ml of LB medium containing 100 µg/ml ampicillin (or 30 µg/ml chloramphenicol) with the preculture and shake at 37°C.**
- 3. Monitor the optical density at 550 nm (OD₅₅₀).**
Cell suspension with an OD₅₅₀ over 1.0 should be diluted with LB medium before measuring.
- 4. Take a 1 ml sample immediately before induction.**
This sample is the non-induced control; pellet cells (microfuge, 30 seconds) and resuspend them in 80 µl Buffer W. Add 20 µl 5x SDS-PAGE sample buffer. Store at -20°C until SDS-PAGE analysis. The whole sample must be incubated in an ultrasonic bath for 15 minutes to shear the chromosomal DNA into small pieces and should be heated to 70°C for 10 minutes prior to SDS-PAGE.
- 5. When OD₅₅₀ equals 0.5-0.6, add 10 µl of anhydrotetracycline solution.**
The yield of soluble, functional protein may be substantially increased, particularly in case of periplasmic expression, by lowering the growth temperature to 22°C - 30°C.
- 6. Shake for 3 hours at 200 rpm.**
Overnight induction may increase protein yields in some cases.
- 7. Harvest the cells by centrifugation at 4500 x g for 12 minutes (4°C).**
- 8. Proceed to "Preparation of Cleared Lysates" (page 15) or store cell pellet at -20°C.**



2.2 Expression in *E. coli* with the T7-system (pPSG-IBA vectors*)

The system uses the T7 promoter and T7 RNA polymerase for high-level transcription of the gene of interest. As the T7 promoter is stronger than the tet promoter, pPSG-IBA vectors can be recommended in cases where expression with the tet promoter does not lead to significant yields of the recombinant protein. In other cases, T7 expression may cause insoluble inclusion bodies. In such cases the tet promoter might be a good alternative if the expression of soluble protein is desired.

Expression of the target genes is induced by providing a source of T7 RNA polymerase in the *E. coli* host cell (DE3 lysogen). This is accomplished by using e.g., BL21(DE3) *E. coli* host which contains a chromosomal copy of the T7 RNA polymerase gene. The T7 RNA polymerase gene is under control of the lacUV5 promoter which can be induced by IPTG [6,7].

(*see <https://www.iba-lifesciences.com/cloning-ecoli-vectors.html>)

Recommended Buffers/Solutions	Concentration of ingredients	Notes
Ampicillin	stock solution: 100 mg/ml in H ₂ O, sterile filtered	Store in aliquots at -20°C
Buffer W	100 mM Tris/HCl 150 mM NaCl 1 mM EDTA Adjust pH to 8.0	
LB medium	10 g/l trypton 5 g/l yeast extract 5 g/l NaCl	
Glucose	20 %, sterile filtered	
IPTG	stock solution (1M): 238 mg/ml in H ₂ O, sterile filtered	Store in aliquots at -20°C
5x SDS-PAGE sample buffer	0.250 M Tris/HCl 25 % glycerol 7,5 % SDS 0.25 mg/ml bromophenolblue 12.5 % v/v mercaptoethanol Adjust pH 8.0	

Protocol

- 1. Preculture: Inoculate 2 ml of LB medium containing 100 µg/ml ampicillin with a fresh colony harbouring the pPR-IBA expression plasmid and shake overnight (200 rpm) at 37°C.**

! The colony should not be older than 1 week.
Do not inoculate from glycerol stocks.

The yield of soluble, functional protein can often be substantially increased by lowering the preculture growth temperature to 22°C - 30°C.



Continue page 12

**Protocol
(continued)**

Take care that cells do not reach the stationary phase for extended periods prior to inoculating the production culture.

In case of toxic proteins, the leakiness of the lacUV5 promoter and the resulting expression may lead to cell death or to the selection of non-productive mutants. Add 2 % glucose and/or use pLysS or pLysE cotransformants in such cases [6].

- 1. Culture for expression: Inoculate 100 ml of LB medium containing 100 µg/ml ampicillin with the preculture and shake at 37°C.**
- 2. Monitor the optical density at 550 nm (OD₅₅₀).**
Cell suspension with an OD₅₅₀ over 0.3 should be diluted with LB medium before measuring.
- 3. Take a 1 ml sample immediately before induction.**
This sample is the non-induced control; pellet cells (microfuge, 30 seconds) and resuspend them in 80 µl Buffer W. Add 20 µl 5x SDS-PAGE sample buffer. Store at -20°C until SDS-PAGE analysis. The whole sample must be incubated in an ultrasonic bath for 15 minutes to shear the chromosomal DNA into small pieces and should be heated to 70°C for 10 minutes prior to SDS-PAGE.
- 4. When OD₅₅₀ equals 0.5-0.6, add 50 µl of IPTG stock solution (0.5 mM end concentration).**
- 5. Shake for 3 hours at 200 rpm.**
Overnight induction may increase protein yields in some cases.
- 6. Harvest the cells by centrifugation at 4500 x g for 12 minutes (4°C). Proceed to "Preparation of Cleared Lysates" (page 15) or store cell pellet at -20°C.**

2.3 Expression with other systems

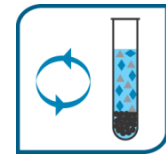
Successful bacterial expression has the advantage of obtaining the expression product in a short time at low costs. Nevertheless, there are proteins which cannot be expressed in *E. coli*. Yeast, insect, mammalian or plant cells are alternative expression hosts for such proteins. The His-tag can be expressed in eukaryotic cells. IBA's pESG-IBA line of vectors is designed for mammalian expression via the CMV promoter and they are compatible in many cases with pASG-IBA vectors so that a PCR fragment can be cloned in parallel for both mammalian and bacterial expression. Expression vectors for *E. coli*, yeast, insect and mammalian protein expression are provided by IBA's StarGate System (for further information see <https://www.iba-lifesciences.com/cloning-strategies.html>).



2.4 Trouble shooting – Expression

Problem	Comments and suggestions
No or low expression	<p>Check the culture condition (e.g., IPTG, anhydrotetracycline, antibiotics).</p> <p>Check vector (sequence, frame).</p> <p>Check whether the protein is found in the insoluble fraction.</p> <p>Reduction of temperature during cultivation may solve this problem (e.g., 16°C, 22°C, 26°C, 30°C).</p> <p>Use another expression system (e.g., T7 promoter instead of Tet promoter, see page 11).</p> <p>Use eukaryotic cells for expression (yeast, insect or mammalian cells).</p>
Protein is degraded	<p>Use protease deficient <i>E. coli</i> strains.</p> <p>If degradation occurs during cell lysis, add protease inhibitor.</p> <p>If the protein is small (<10 kDa), consider adding a terminal carrier protein.</p> <p>Lower temperature during induction can reduce the problem.</p> <p>Secretion of the recombinant protein to the periplasmic space can reduce the problem.</p>
Protein is secreted	<p>Remove all signal sequences from the coding region.</p>
Inclusion bodies are formed: protein is insoluble	<p>Reduce expression level by modifying growth and induction conditions, e.g., lower culturing temperature (16°C, 22°C, 26°C, 30°C).</p> <p>Use another expression system (e.g., Tet promoter instead of T7 promoter, see page 9).</p>

3 Preparation of cleared lysates



3.1 Preparation of cleared lysate after cytoplasmic expression of His-tag proteins under native conditions

Recommended Buffers/Solutions	Concentration of ingredients
Ni-NTA Lysis Buffer	50 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 300 mM NaCl 10 mM imidazole Adjust pH to 8.0
Lysozyme	
5x SDS-PAGE sample buffer	0.25 M Tris/HCl 25 % glycerol 7.5 % SDS 0.25 mg/ml bromophenolblue 12.5 % v/v mercaptoethanol Adjust pH to 8.0

Protocol

- 1. Thaw the cell pellet for 15 minutes on ice and resuspend the cells in Ni-NTA Lysis Buffer at 2-5 ml per gram wet weight.**
Ni-NTA Lysis Buffer contains 10 mM imidazole to minimize binding of untagged, histidine rich contaminating proteins and increase purity with fewer wash steps.
If the tagged protein does not bind under these conditions, the amount of imidazole should be reduced to 1-5 mM. With His-tag proteins exhibiting high binding affinities, the imidazole concentration can be increased to 20 mM.
- 2. Add lysozyme to 1 mg/ml and incubate on ice for 30 minutes.**
- 3. Sonicate on ice.**
Use six 10 second bursts at 200-300 W with a 10 second cooling period between each burst. Use a sonicator equipped with a microtip.
- 4. (Optional) If the lysate is very viscous, add RNase A (10 µg/ml) and DNase I (5 µg/ml) and incubate on ice for 10-15 min.**
- 5. Centrifuge lysate at 10,000 x g for 20-30 minutes at 4°C to pellet the cellular debris.**
A certain proportion of the cellular protein, including the His-tag protein, may remain insoluble and will be located in the pellet.

Continue page 15

**Protocol
(continued)**

For more complete recovery of the tagged protein, this material must be solubilized using denaturing conditions.

6. **Add 5 μ l 5x SDS-PAGE sample buffer to 20 μ l supernatant and store at -20°C for SDS-PAGE analysis.**
7. **Proceed to protocols for His-tagged protein purification under native conditions (see protocols 4.1 to 4.4).**

3.2 Preparation of cleared lysate after periplasmic expression of His-tag fusion proteins

Periplasmic proteins are proteins secreted into the periplasmic space located between the outer and inner membrane of *E. coli*. Proper secretion is possible only when the protein of interest has an N-terminal signal peptide which is cleaved after translocation. In order to purify proteins secreted into the periplasmic space [11, 12] using Ni-NTA technology, the His-tag must be fused to the C-terminus of the target protein. N-terminal His-tags might be processed with the transit signal.

Recommended Buffers/Solutions	Concentration of ingredients
Sucrose buffer	30 mM Tris/HCl 20 % sucrose Adjust pH to 8.0
EDTA	500 mM solution
MgSO ₄	5 mM solution, ice-cold
Ni-NTA Lysis Buffer	50 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 300 mM NaCl 10 mM imidazole Adjust pH to 8.0

Protocol

1. **Resuspend cell pellet in sucrose buffer at 80 ml per gram wet weight.**
2. **Keep the cells on ice and add 500 mM EDTA solution dropwise to 1 mM.**
3. **Incubate the cells on ice for 5-10 minutes with gentle agitation.**
4. **Centrifuge the cell suspension at 8000 x g for 20 minutes at 4°C.**

Continue page 16



- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Protocol (continued) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Remove all the supernatant, and resuspend the pellet in the same volume of ice-cold 5 mM MgSO₄ solution. 6. Shake or stir for 10 minutes in an ice bath. 7. Centrifuge at 8000 x g for 20 minutes at 4°C.
The supernatant is the osmotic shock fluid containing periplasmic proteins. 8. Dialyse supernatant extensively against Ni-NTA Lysis Buffer before continuing with the purification. 9. Proceed to protocols for His-tag proteins purification under native conditions (see protocols 4.1 to 4.4). |
|-----------------------------|--|

3.3 Preparation of cleared lysate of His-tag proteins under denaturing conditions

Recommended Buffers/Solutions	Concentration of ingredients
5x SDS-PAGE sample buffer	0.25 M Tris/HCl 25 % glycerol 7.5 % SDS 0.25 mg/ml bromophenolblue 12.5 % v/v mercaptoethanol Adjust pH to 8.0
Buffer B	100 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 10 mM Tris/HCl 8 M urea Adjust pH to 8.0

Important notes

Cells can be lysed in either 6 M GuHCl or 8 M urea. It is preferable to lyse the cells in the milder denaturant, urea, so that the cell lysate can be analyzed directly by SDS-PAGE. GuHCl is a more efficient solubilization and cell lysis reagent, however, and may be required to solubilize some proteins.

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| Protocol | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thaw the cell pellet for 15 minutes on ice and resuspend with Buffer B at 5 ml per gram wet weight. 2. Stir cells for 15-60 minutes at room temperature or lyse them by gently vortexing, taking care to avoid foaming. Lysis is complete when the solution becomes translucent. Continue page 17 |
|-----------------|--|



**Protocol,
continued**


- 3. Centrifuge lysate at 10,000 x g for 20-30 minutes at room temperature to pellet the cellular debris.**
Save supernatant (cleared lysate).
- 4. Add 5 μ l 5x SDS-PAGE sample buffer to 20 μ l supernatant and store at -20°C until SDS-PAGE analysis.**
- 5. Proceed to protocols for His-tag protein purification under denaturing conditions (see protocols 4.3 to 4.8).**

4 Purification of His-tag proteins



4.1 Batch purification of His-tag proteins under native conditions

Recommended Buffers/Solutions	Concentration of ingredients	Notes
Ni-NTA Superflow or Ni-NTA Sepharose		The binding capacity of Ni-NTA resin is protein dependent and normally lies between 5 and 10 mg/ml (300-500 nmol of a 20 kDa protein)
Ni-NTA Lysis Buffer	50 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 300 mM NaCl 10 mM imidazole Adjust pH to 8.0	The composition of lysis, wash and elution buffers can be modified to suit the particular application, e.g., by adding 0.1 % Tween, 5-10 mM β-mercaptoethanol, or 1 mM PMSF, or increasing NaCl or glycerol concentrations. For more information see table 1 on page 6.
Ni-NTA Wash Buffer	50 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 300 mM NaCl 20 mM imidazole Adjust pH to 8.0	
Ni-NTA Elution Buffer	50 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 300 mM NaCl 250 mM imidazole Adjust pH to 8.0	


Important notes

- The amount of cells required depends on the expression level of the His-tag protein and the expression system used.
- The resins are supplied as 50 % slurries.

Protocol

- 1. Add 1 ml of the 50 % Ni-NTA slurry to 4 ml cleared lysate (in Ni-NTA Lysis Buffer; see protocol 3.1 or 3.2) and mix gently by shaking (200 rpm on a rotary shaker) at 4°C for 60 min.**
10 mM (or 20mM) imidazole in Ni-NTA Lysis Buffer suppresses the binding of non-tagged contaminating proteins and leads to greater purity after fewer washing steps. If the tagged protein does not bind under these conditions, the amount of imidazole should be reduced to 1-5 mM.
- 2. Load the lysate/Ni-NTA mixture onto a column with capped bottom outlet.** Empty columns may be purchased e.g., from BioRad, Munich.

Continue page 19


**Protocol
(continued)**

3. **Remove bottom cap and collect the column flow-through.**
Save flow-through for SDS-PAGE analysis.
4. **Wash twice with 4 ml Ni-NTA Wash Buffer; collect wash fractions for SDS-PAGE analysis.**
20 mM imidazole in the Ni-NTA Wash Buffer elutes non-tagged contaminating proteins. Imidazole concentration can be reduced to 1-5 mM imidazole. This can result in loss of purity, but higher yields of recombinant protein.
5. **Elute the protein 4 times with 0.5 ml Ni-NTA Elution Buffer.**
Collect the eluate in four tubes and analyse by SDS-PAGE.

4.2 Gravity flow purification of His-tag proteins under native conditions

Recommended Buffers/Solutions	Concentration of ingredients	Notes
Ni-NTA Superflow or Ni-NTA Sepharose		The binding capacity of Ni-NTA resin is protein dependent and normally is up to 50 mg/ml (up to 2500 nmol of a 20 kDa protein)
Ni-NTA Lysis Buffer	50 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 300 mM NaCl 10 mM imidazole Adjust pH to 8.0	The composition of lysis, wash and elution buffers can be modified to suit the particular application, e.g., by adding 0.1 % Tween, 5-10 mM β-mercaptoethanol, or 1 mM PMSF, or increasing NaCl or glycerol concentrations. For more information see table 1 on page 6.
Ni-NTA Wash Buffer	50 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 300 mM NaCl 20 mM imidazole Adjust pH to 8.0	
Ni-NTA Elution Buffer	50 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 300 mM NaCl 250 mM imidazole Adjust pH to 8.0	

**Important
notes**

Generally, it is recommended to perform chromatography at 4°C. Depending on the individual equipment this is not always possible and chromatography has to be performed at room temperature. If cartridges are stored at 4°C and are transferred to room temperature air bubbles may form due to restricted solubility of air at elevated temperatures. Therefore, it is recommended to equilibrate the cartridges immediately after exposure to higher temperatures with buffer that is equilibrated at such temperatures.

**Protocol**

- 1. Equilibrate the Ni-NTA column with 2 CV (column bed volumes) Ni-NTA Lysis Buffer.**
Storage buffer is removed. The column cannot run dry under gravity flow.
- 2. Centrifuge cleared lysate from protocol 3.1 or 3.2 (14,000 rpm, 5 minutes, 4°C, microfuge).**
Insoluble aggregates are removed which otherwise could clog the column.
- 3. Transfer supernatant to the column.**
- 4. Once the cell extract has completely entered the column, wash the column 4 times with 2 CV Ni-NTA Wash Buffer.**
Collect the eluate in 2 CV fractions and apply 2 µl of the first washing fraction and 20 µl of each subsequent fraction to an analytical SDS-PAGE.
- 5. Add 6 times 0.5 CV Ni-NTA Elution Buffer and collect the eluate in 0.5 CV fractions.**
20 µl samples of each fraction can be used for SDS-PAGE analysis.
The purified His-tag fusion protein usually elutes in the 2nd to 5th fraction.



4.3 Batch purification of His-tag proteins under denaturing conditions

Recommended Buffers/Solutions	Concentration of ingredients	Notes
Buffer B	100 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 10 mM Tris/HCl 8 M urea Adjust pH to 8.0	Cells can be lysed in either 6 M GuHCl or 8 M urea. If GuHCl is used all buffers must include 6 M GuHCl instead of 8 M urea. Due to the dissociation of urea, the pH of urea containing buffers should be adjusted immediately prior to use. Do not autoclave.
Buffer C (Wash Buffer)	100 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 10 mM Tris/HCl 8 M urea Adjust pH to 6.3	
Buffer D1 (Elution Buffer1)	100 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 10 mM Tris/HCl 8 M urea Adjust pH to 5.9	
Buffer D2 (Elution Buffer2)	100 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 10 mM Tris/HCl 8 M urea Adjust pH to 4.5	

Important notes

- The amount of cells required depends on the expression level of the His-tag protein and the expression system used.
- The binding capacity of Ni-NTA resins is protein dependent and normally is up to 50 mg/ml (up to 2500 nmol of a 20 kDa protein).

Protocol

- 1. Add 1 ml of the 50 % Ni-NTA slurry to 4 ml lysate (see protocol 3.3) and mix gently by shaking (e.g., 200 rpm on a rotary shaker) for 15-60 minutes at room temperature.**
For proteins that are expressed at very high levels (50-100 mg of His-tag protein per liter of cell culture), a 5x concentrated cell lysate (resuspend the pellet from a 20 ml culture in 4 ml Buffer B) can be used. 4 ml of a 5x concentrated cell lysate in Buffer B will contain approximately 1-2 mg of His-tag protein. For much lower expression levels (1-5 mg/liter), 200 ml of cell culture should be used for a 50x concentrated cell lysate (4 ml cell lysate = 0.2-1 mg of His-tag protein).
- 2. Load lysate-resin mixture carefully into an empty column with the bottom cap still attached.**

Continue page 25



Protocol (continued)	<p>3. Remove the bottom cap and collect the flow-through. Collect flow-through for SDS-PAGE analysis.</p> <p>4. Wash twice with 4 ml Buffer C. Keep wash fractions for SDS-PAGE analysis.</p> <p>5. Elute the recombinant protein 4 times with 0.5 ml Buffer D1, followed by 4 times with 0.5 ml Buffer D2. Collect fractions and analyze by SDS-PAGE.</p>
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4.4 Gravity flow purification of His-tag proteins under denaturing conditions

Recommended Buffers/Solutions	Concentration of ingredients	Notes
Buffer B	100 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 10 mM Tris/HCl 8 M urea Adjust pH to 8.0	Cells can be lysed in either 6 M GuHCl or 8 M urea. If GuHCl is used all buffers must include 6 M GuHCl instead of 8 M urea. Due to the dissociation of urea, the pH of urea containing buffers should be adjusted immediately prior to use. Do not autoclave.
Buffer C (Washing Buffer)	100 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 10 mM Tris/HCl 8 M urea Adjust pH to 6.3	
Buffer D1 (Elution Buffer1)	100 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 10 mM Tris/HCl 8 M urea Adjust pH to 5.9	
Buffer D2 (Elution Buffer2)	100 mM NaH ₂ PO ₄ 10 mM Tris/HCl 8 M urea Adjust pH to 4.5	

Important notes

- Ni-NTA Superflow and Ni-NTA Sepharose are available for gravity flow column chromatography.
- The binding capacity of Ni-NTA Superflow is protein dependent and normally is up to 50 mg/ml (up to 2500 nmol of a 20 kDa protein).

Protocol	<p>1. Equilibrate the Ni-NTA column with 2 CVs (column bed volumes) of Buffer B. Storage buffer is removed. The column cannot run dry under gravity flow.</p>
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Continue page 26



**Protocol
(continued)**

- 2. Centrifuge cleared lysate from protocol 3.3 (14,000 rpm, 5 minutes, 4°C, microfuge).**
Insoluble aggregates which can clog the column are removed.
- 3. Add cleared lysate supernatant to the column.**
- 4. After the cell extract has completely entered the column, wash the column 8 times with 1 CV Buffer C.**
Collect the eluate in 1 CV fractions and apply 2 µl of the first fraction and 20 µl of each subsequent fraction to an analytical SDS-PAGE.
- 5. Add 6 times 0.5 CVs Buffer D1 and collect the eluate in 0.5 CV fractions.**
Samples of each fraction can be used for SDS-PAGE analysis.
If elution is incomplete with Buffer D1, Buffer D2 should be used.

4.5 Troubleshooting



4.5.1 “Protein does not bind to Ni-NTA”

His-tag is not present.	Sequence ligation junctions to ensure that the reading frame is correct. Check for possible internal translation starts (N-terminal tag) or premature termination sites (C-terminal).
His-tag is inaccessible.	Purify protein under denaturing conditions. Move tag to the other terminus of the protein.
His-tag has been degraded.	Check that the His-tag is not associated with a portion of the protein that is processed.
Binding conditions incorrect.	Check pH and compositions of all buffers and solutions. Dissociation of urea often causes a shift in pH. The pH values should be checked immediately prior to use. Ensure that there are no chelating or reducing agents present, and that the concentration of imidazole is not too high.

4.5.2 “Protein elutes in the Ni-NTA Wash Buffer”

Wash stringency is too high.	Lower the concentration of imidazole or increase the pH slightly.
His-tag is partially hidden.	Reduce washing stringency. Purify under denaturing conditions.
Buffer conditions incorrect.	Check pH and composition of Ni-NTA Wash Buffer. Ensure that there are no chelating or reducing agents present.

4.5.3 “Protein precipitates during purification”

Temperature is too low.	Perform purification at room temperature.
Protein forms aggregates.	Try adding solubilization reagents such as 0.1 % Triton X-100 or Tween-20, up to 20 mM β -mercaptoethanol, up to 2 M NaCl, or stabilizing cofactors such as Mg^{2+} . These may be necessary in all buffers to maintain protein solubility.



4.5.4 “Protein does not elute”

Elution conditions are too mild (protein may be in an aggregate or multimer form).	Elute with a pH or imidazole step-gradient to determine the optimal elution conditions.
Protein has precipitated in the column.	Elute under denaturing conditions. Perform binding and elution in batch format to avoid high local protein concentrations.

4.5.5 “Protein elutes with contaminants”

Binding and washing conditions are not stringent enough.	Include 10-20 mM imidazole in the binding and wash buffers.
Column is too large.	Reduce the amount of Ni-NTA resin.
Contaminants are associated with tagged protein.	Add β -mercaptoethanol to a maximum of 20 mM to reduce disulfide bonds. Increase salt and/or detergent concentrations in the Wash Buffer to disrupt nonspecific interactions.
Contaminants are truncated forms of the tagged protein.	Check for possible internal translation starts (C-terminal tag) or premature termination sites (N-terminal tag). Prevent protein degradation during purification by working at 4°C or by including protease inhibitors. Fuse a Strep-tag to the other terminus of the protein to select for full length proteins by a two-step purification by means of both tags.

4.5.6 “Discoloration of resin”

Nickel ions are removed or reduced.	Ensure that there are no chelating compounds (resin color turns white) or reducing agents (resin color turns brown) present in all buffers.
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5 References

5 References



For up-to-date references see www.iba-lifesciences.com

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This manual can be downloaded under www.iba-lifesciences.com/technical-support.html.



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