

METHODS FOR INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF FLOW-THROUGH PROCESSES

RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 62/012,788, filed on June 16, 2014. The entire teachings of the above application is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Process-scale applications for the purification of monoclonal antibodies (MAbs) or virus filtration typically utilize bind-and-elute processes, and flow-through processes, such as anion exchange (AEX) and hydrophobic interaction (HIC) chromatography processes, to remove host cell proteins (HCP) and other impurities from a liquid sample, or feed. Typically, the operating conditions for these flow-through processes are chosen such that the target proteins (e.g., MAbs) are not retained on the chromatography surface and, as a result, flow through the chromatography device. Typically, the operating conditions for bind-and-elute processes are chosen such that the target proteins (e.g., MAbs) are retained or bound on the chromatography surface and then recovered by an elution step, wherein the bound target protein is displaced from the chromatography surface and recovered.

[0003] For traditional AEX chromatography resins, it is often necessary to dilute the feed prior to loading the chromatography device to reduce solution conductivities to levels that promote the binding of impurities. The inconvenience and time commitment required for such feed dilution has provided the impetus to develop salt-tolerant functionalities that do not require feed dilution for efficient adsorption of impurities. While the capacities for traditional AEX membranes are typically in the range of about 100-200 g MAb/mL resin, corresponding capacities for salt-tolerant membrane adsorbers are greater and range, for example, from about 4-7 kg MAb/L resin. However, for a chromatography process to be economical at a process scale, the capacity of the chromatography resin should preferably be about 10-15 kg MAb/L membrane or greater.

[0004] Thus, there is a current need to develop methods for increasing the capacity of existing chromatography resins and devices to levels that would render flow-through

processes, bind-and-elute processes, and simulated flow-through processes more economical at a process scale.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] The present invention provides, in one embodiment, a process for separating target proteins from non-target proteins in a liquid sample, comprising obtaining a liquid sample containing target proteins and non-target proteins; increasing the concentration of the target proteins and non-target proteins in the sample to produce a concentrated feed for delivery to a chromatography device; delivering the concentrated feed to the chromatography device; separating the target proteins from the non-target proteins in the chromatography device; and recovering the target proteins from the chromatography device. In a particular embodiment, the target proteins are monoclonal antibodies (MAbs).

[0006] In another embodiment, the invention relates to a process for increasing the capacity of a chromatography device for a target protein, comprising obtaining a liquid sample containing target proteins and non-target proteins; increasing the concentration of the target proteins and non-target proteins in the sample to produce a concentrated feed for delivery to a chromatography device; and delivering the concentrated feed to the chromatography device, wherein the capacity of the chromatography device for the target protein is increased. In a particular embodiment, the target proteins are monoclonal antibodies (MAbs).

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] The foregoing will be apparent from the following more particular description of example embodiments of the invention, as illustrated in the accompanying drawings in which like reference characters refer to the same parts throughout the different views. The drawings are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon illustrating embodiments of the present invention.

[0008] FIG. 1 is a graph showing host cell protein (HCP) breakthrough for two feed streams as a function of volume loaded. Aliquot 2 was approximately 1.5x more concentrated than Aliquot 1.

[0009] FIG. 2 is a graph showing a breakthrough curve of HCP removal as a function of MAb loading.

[0010] FIG. 3 is a graph plotting feed concentration in g/L against the cost of separation media in U.S. dollars/gram of media.

[0011] FIG. 4 is a graph plotting feed concentration in g/L against the cost of virus filters in U.S. dollars/gram of consumable.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0012] A description of example embodiments of the invention follows.

[0013] The present invention provides, in one embodiment, a process for separating target proteins from non-target proteins in a liquid sample. In another embodiment, the invention relates to a process for increasing the capacity of a chromatography device for a target protein. These processes are referred to collectively herein as processes of the invention.

[0014] Without wishing to be bound by any one particular theory, it is believed that increasing the concentration of both target and non-target proteins in a feed sample prior to delivery to a chromatography device will increase the capacity of the device for the target protein. As used herein, “increasing the capacity of a chromatography device” means increasing the mass loading per volume of media in the device. Preferably, the processes described herein can increase the capacity of a chromatography device to a range of at least about 10 to about 15 kg target protein/L chromatography media, or greater.

[0015] The processes of the invention generally can comprise the steps of obtaining a liquid sample containing target proteins and non-target proteins; increasing the concentration of the target proteins and non-target proteins in the sample to produce a concentrated feed for delivery to a chromatography device; and delivering the concentrated feed to the chromatography device. In some embodiments, the processes of the invention can also include the steps of separating the target proteins from the non-target proteins in the chromatography device and recovering the target proteins from the chromatography device.

[0016] The liquid sample, also referred to herein as a “liquid feed” or “feed sample,” can be any liquid that contains a target protein of interest (e.g., MABs) and one or more impurities (e.g., non-target proteins). Typically, the liquid sample is obtained from a source of the target protein (e.g., a hybridoma or other host cell expressing a MAb). In a particular embodiment, the target protein in the liquid sample is a monoclonal antibody (MAb) and the non-target proteins are host cell proteins (HCPs) (e.g., proteins from host hybridoma cells). Non-target

proteins are generally a heterogeneous mixture of proteins of varying sizes, hydrophobicities and charge densities.

[0017] The processes of the invention include the step of increasing the concentration of the target proteins and non-target proteins in the sample to produce a concentrated feed for delivery to a chromatography device. Concentration of the sample will generally increase the concentration of both the target protein and non-target proteins in the sample. The overall protein concentration can be increased, for example, about 1.5x, 2x, 2.5x, 5x or 10x prior to loading onto a chromatography device compared to a liquid feed that has not been subjected to a concentration step prior to loading onto a chromatography device. In certain embodiments, the concentration may be increased more than 10x, provided that the target and non-target proteins remain soluble.

[0018] A variety of methods and techniques for increasing the concentration of proteins in a sample are well known to those of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention pertains. Such methods include, but are not limited to, tangential flow filtration (TFF) processes (e.g., TFF ultrafiltration), ultrafiltration processes using centrifugal filters, ultrafiltration processes using stirred cells, lyophilization, evaporation, precipitation, crystallization, aqueous two-phase separation and dialysis. In a particular embodiment, the concentration of the target proteins and non-target proteins in the sample is increased using a tangential flow filtration (TFF) process. The TFF process can be a recirculation TFF process, a single-pass TFF (SPTFF) process where the retentate and permeate are recovered from the system in separate containers without recirculation through the TFF system, or a TFF process operated in single-pass TFF mode where the permeate and a portion of the retentate from the system are recovered in separate containers without recirculation through the TFF system, and the remainder of the retentate is recirculated through the TFF system at least once. The retentate that is being recirculated can be returned to any upstream location in or before the TFF system. In one embodiment, the retentate is recirculated to the feed tank. In another embodiment, the retentate is recirculated to the feed line near the feed pump before the feed inlet on the TFF system. "Single-pass TFF mode" refers to operating conditions for a TFF system under which all or a portion of the retentate is not recirculated through the system. Preferably, the TFF process is a SPTFF process.

[0019] TFF processes are well known. TFF is a separation process that uses membranes to separate components in a liquid solution or suspension on the basis of size, molecular weight or other differences. In traditional TFF processes, the fluid is pumped tangentially

along the membrane surface and particles or molecules which are too large to pass through the membrane are rejected and returned to a process tank for additional passes across the membrane (e.g., recirculation) until the process fluid is sufficiently concentrated or purified. The cross-flow nature of TFF minimizes membrane fouling, thus permitting high volume processing per batch. Single-Pass TFF (SPTFF) allows direct flow-through concentration of a product (e.g., protein) in the absence of recirculation, which reduces overall system size and permits continuous operation at high conversion levels.

[0020] TFF processes can further comprise performing diafiltration (e.g., to remove or lower the concentration of salts or solvents in the liquid feed, or to accomplish buffer exchange). In a preferred embodiment, the diafiltration is performed by concentrating the liquid feed (e.g., by TFF) to reduce the diafiltration volume and then restoring the feed to its starting volume by adding diafiltration solution (e.g., diafiltration buffer), a process which is known in the art as discontinuous, or batch, diafiltration. In another embodiment, the diafiltration is performed by adding the diafiltrate solution to retentate to increase the diafiltration volume followed by concentrating the sample to restore it to its original volume. In yet another embodiment, the diafiltration is performed by adding the diafiltration solution to unfiltered feed at the same rate that permeate is removed from the TFF system, a process which is known in the art as continuous, or constant-volume, diafiltration. Suitable diafiltration solutions are well known and include, for example, water and various aqueous buffer solutions.

[0021] Suitable TFF systems capable of being used in TFF processes are well known in the art to which the present invention pertains and include, but are not limited to, those described in U.S. Patent No. 5,147,542, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference in their entirety, and commercially available TFF systems from EMD Millipore Corporation (Billerica, MA) including, for example, Labscale™ TFF Systems, Cogent® M1 TFF Systems, Cogent® µScale TFF Systems, Flexware® Assemblies for TFF, ProFlux® TFF Systems, and Prostak™ TFF Systems.

[0022] In certain embodiments, the sample is diluted to produce a diluted feed (e.g., to lower the conductivity of the sample) prior to increasing the concentration of the target proteins and non-target proteins in the sample. Such a feed dilution step is particularly desirable when using a chromatography device that contains a standard AEX medium that lacks a salt-tolerant membrane adsorber. The dilution can be performed in-line with a subsequent concentration of the sample (e.g., by SPTFF) prior to loading the concentrated

sample onto the chromatography device. Typically, a sample will be diluted 2-3x for most ion exchange applications.

[0023] The processes of the invention include the step of delivering a concentrated feed to a chromatography device. Suitable chromatography devices for use in the processes of the invention are well known in the art. Exemplary chromatography devices include, but are not limited to, membrane adsorbers, such as ChromaSorb™ devices, Mobius® FlexReady Solution, IsoPak® Columns, HIBAR® Columns, RoboColumns and MiniChrom columns, K-Prime® Systems, Vantage® Columns, and QuikScale® Columns, all of which are available commercially from EMD Millipore Corporation (Billerica, MA).

[0024] Typically, a chromatography device (e.g., a chromatography column, a chromatography cartridge) will be selected based on the chromatography medium. A person of ordinary skill in the art can readily determine a chromatography medium that is suitable for separation/purification of a particular target protein. Typical separation media (e.g., chromatography resins, chromatography beads, chromatography membranes, chromatography fibers) include, but are not limited to, anion-exchange (AEX) chromatography media, hydrophobic interaction chromatography (HIC) media, size-exclusion chromatography media, cation-exchange chromatography (CEX) media, affinity chromatography media (protein A affinity media, protein G affinity media, immobilized metal ion affinity media) and mixed-mode media.

[0025] In a particular embodiment, the chromatography device includes an anion-exchange (AEX) chromatography medium. Suitable AEX chromatography devices for use in the processes described herein include, for example, ChromaSorb™ devices available from EMD Millipore Corporation (Billerica, MA). An exemplary AEC medium for a chromatography device is Eshmuno® Q Resin (EMD Millipore Corporation, Billerica, MA).

[0026] In another embodiment, the chromatography device includes a hydrophobic interaction chromatography (HIC) medium. Exemplary HIC media includes, e.g., Fractogel® EMD Propyl and Phenyl resins (EMD Millipore Corporation).

[0027] In yet another embodiment, the chromatography device used in the processes of the invention includes a size-exclusion chromatography medium. An exemplary size-exclusion medium for a chromatography device Fractogel® EMD BioSEC Media (EMD Millipore Corporation, Billerica, MA)

[0028] The need for sample dilution to lower conductivity for ion exchange chromatography using traditional ion exchange resins has led to the development of

chromatography media having salt-tolerant functionalities that provide robust impurity removal over a wider conductivity range. The use of such salt-tolerant functionalities allows for the efficient adsorption of impurities without requiring dilution of the sample.

Accordingly, in another embodiment, the chromatography device used in the processes of the invention can include a salt-tolerant membrane adsorber (e.g., a ChromaSorb™ Membrane Adsorber, available from EMD Millipore Corporation).

[0029] Preferably, the chromatography device used in the processes of the invention is disposable (e.g., a single-use chromatography device). Exemplary disposable chromatography devices include, for example, ChromaSorb™ devices, available from EMD Millipore Corporation).

[0030] Example 1: Concentrating a liquid feed sample containing target MABs and host cell proteins prior to chromatographic separation increases processing capacity

[0031] A cation exchange (CEX) (Eshmuno® S Resin, EMD Millipore Corporation, Billerica, MA) elution pool of a target monoclonal antibody (MAB04) was divided into two aliquots. Aliquot 1 had a MAB04 concentration of 3.6 g/L. Aliquot 2 was concentrated using a Centriprep® 30K centrifugal filter device (30 kDA Regenerated cellulose membrane) to yield a MAB04 concentration of ~ 5.8 g/L. The host cell protein (HCP) concentrations in the two feed streams were ~ 600 ng/ml in Aliquot 1 and ~ 820 ng/ml in Aliquot 2. The HCP levels in the filtrate in the Centriprep® device were below the level of detection. The increase in HCP levels was not the same as the increase in the MAB concentration. This is most probably a reflection of the variability and sensitivity of the HCP ELISA assay. In addition, the use of ultrafiltration could also cause removal of HCP species (e.g., based on size). This may have a beneficial effect on capacity.

[0032] Each of the aliquots was then processed using a single-use membrane-based anion exchange (AEX) chromatography device (0.08 ml ChromaSorb™ Device, EMD Millipore Corporation).

[0033] The breakthrough curves at the two concentrations are very similar, as expected for linear isotherms (FIG. 1). FIG. 2 illustrates the cumulative HCP (ppm) as a function of MAB loading. This type of graph is typically generated to identify the loading on the AEX device. The typical HCP target for AEX process is 10-20 ppm. For a 10 ppm target, the loading with Aliquot 1 would be restricted to 2 kg/L. However, with the more concentrated feed in Aliquot 2, the loading capacity increases to 4 kg/L.

[0034] Example 2: Concentrating a liquid feed prior to protein A affinity chromatography lowers chromatography media costs

[0035] The effect of concentrating a liquid feed sample by SPTFF on the cost of chromatography media for bind-and-elute processes was calculated for ProSep® Ultra Plus (PUP) media (EMD Millipore), a protein A-based affinity chromatography media. The results show that the cost per gram of PUP media was significantly reduced by increasing the protein concentration in the liquid feed to about 5 g/L using SPTFF (FIG. 3).

[0036] Example 3: Concentrating a liquid feed prior to virus filtration lowers virus filter costs

[0037] The effect of concentrating a liquid feed sample by SPTFF on the cost of non-fouling/flux-limited filters for virus filtration processes was determined. Viresolve® Pro (VPro) viral filtration devices (EMD Millipore) were chosen as the virus filter. Concentrating the liquid feed prior to VPro filtration reduced both filter (VPro) costs per gram of consumable and total costs (SPTFF+VPro) per gram of consumable (FIG. 4). Similar results are expected for filters that are not flux-limited.

[0038] The relevant teachings of all patents, published applications and references cited herein are incorporated by reference in their entirety.

[0039] While this invention has been particularly shown and described with references to example embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and details may be made therein without departing from the scope of the invention encompassed by the appended claims.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A process for separating target proteins from non-target proteins, comprising:
 - a) obtaining a liquid sample containing target proteins and non-target proteins;
 - b) increasing concentration of the target proteins and the non-target proteins in the sample to produce a concentrated feed for delivery to a chromatography device comprising an affinity chromatography medium;
 - c) delivering the concentrated feed to the chromatography device;
 - d) separating the target proteins from the non-target proteins in the chromatography device; and
 - e) recovering the target proteins from the chromatography device.
2. The process of Claim 1, wherein the concentration of the target proteins and the non-target proteins in the sample is increased using a tangential flow filtration (TFF) process.
3. The process of Claim 2, wherein the TFF process is a single-pass TFF (SPTFF) process; a TFF process operating in a mode where at least a portion of retentate is recirculated after a first pass through the TFF system; or a recirculating TFF process.
4. The process of Claim 1 or Claim 2, wherein the sample is diluted to produce a diluted feed, prior to increasing the concentration of the target proteins and the non-target proteins in the sample in step b).
5. The process of Claim 1 or Claim 2, wherein the target proteins are monoclonal antibodies.
6. The process of Claim 1 or Claim 2, wherein the non-target proteins are host cell proteins from hybridoma cells expressing the target protein.
7. The process of Claim 1 or Claim 2, wherein the chromatography device is disposable.

8. A process for increasing a capacity of a chromatography device for a target protein, comprising:

- a) obtaining a liquid sample containing target proteins and non-target proteins;
- b) increasing concentration of the target proteins and the non-target proteins in the sample to produce a concentrated feed for delivery to a chromatography device comprising an affinity chromatography medium; and
- c) delivering the concentrated feed to the chromatography device, wherein a capacity of the chromatography device for the target protein is increased.

9. The process of Claim 8, wherein the concentration of the target proteins and the non-target proteins in the sample is increased using a tangential flow filtration (TFF) process.

10. The process of Claim 9, wherein the TFF process is a single-pass TFF (SPTFF) process, a TFF process operating in a mode where at least a portion of retentate is recirculated after a first pass through the TFF system or; a recirculating TFF process.

11. The process of Claim 8 or Claim 9, wherein the sample is diluted to produce a diluted feed, prior to increasing the concentration of the target proteins and the non-target proteins in the sample in step b).

12. The process of Claim 8 or Claim 9, wherein the target proteins are monoclonal antibodies.

13. The process of Claim 8 or Claim 9, wherein the non-target proteins are host cell proteins from hybridoma cells expressing the target protein.

14. The process of Claim 1 or 8, wherein the affinity chromatography medium is a protein A medium, a protein G medium or an immobilized metal ion medium.

15. The process of any one of Claims 2, 3, 9 or 10, wherein the TFF process comprises performing continuous diafiltration or discontinuous diafiltration.

16. A process for purifying target proteins from non-target proteins in a liquid sample, comprising:

- a) increasing a concentration of target proteins and non-target proteins in a sample by a single-pass tangential flow filtration (SPTFF) process to produce a concentrated feed;
- b) delivering the concentrated feed to a chromatography device comprising a protein A chromatography medium;
- c) separating the target proteins from the non-target proteins in the chromatography device; and
- d) recovering the target proteins from the chromatography device.

17. The process of Claim 16, wherein the SPTFF process provides direct flow-through concentration of the sample to the chromatography device.