



METHOD OF PREPARING DELTA-9-TETRAHYDROCANNABINOL ESTERS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC, also known as Dronabinol) is the main biologically active component in the Cannabis plant which has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the control of nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy and, more recently, for appetite stimulation of AIDS patients suffering from the wasting syndrome.

The drug, however, shows other biological activities which lend themselves to possible therapeutic applications, such as in the treatment of glaucoma (1), migraine headaches (2,3), spasticity (4), anxiety (5), and as an analgesic (4). It is because of these-promising biological activities of THC that marijuana has been brought into a public debate relative its medicinal value. The balance between medicinal use of a drug and the abuse potential is a delicate balance. One of the main points brought by the medicinal marijuana proponents is the fact that the currently available soft gelatin capsule formulation is very expensive and lacks consistency in its effects. The latter point could be explained based on the fact that oral THC has erratic absorption from the gastrointestinal tract, is subject to the first-pass effect resulting in heavy metabolism with production of high levels of 11-OH-THC, and undesirable side effects. Another THC formulation which is currently under development is a pro-drug consisting of THC hemisuccinate formulated in a suppository base (6). This formulation appears to overcome the problems associated with the oral preparation and has been shown to produce consistent bioavailability in animal studies (7). Preliminary clinical investigations show promise for this formulation (8, 9, 10). It is anticipated that other THC formulations will be forthcoming in light of the current interest in the therapeutic activities of cannabis.

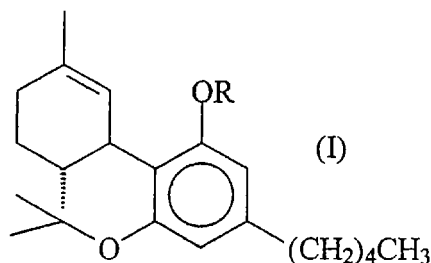


SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention comprises an economic procedure and an efficient process for converting THC to its ester.
5 The almost quantitative yield of conversion of THC to its ester distinguishes the present invention from the prior art.

Accordingly, the present invention provides a process for the preparation of a compound of the formula (I):

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in which R represents an acyl group, which process
20 comprises reacting delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol with an acid halide or acid anhydride, having R as the residue group, in the presence of a 4-amino-substituted pyridine and a further organic amine.

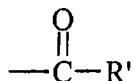
The organic amine may be, for example, an organic
25 mono, di or trialkyl amine. The esterified THC can be purified by column chromatography and/or by HPLC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

30 The process of the present invention represents an efficient and economic method for converting THC to the ester form.

In formula (I) R is typically an acyl group having a

polar side chain. Preferably R is a group of the formula



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in which R' is an alkyl group containing a carboxyl group, a salt of a carboxyl group, or an amino group. Most preferably R' has from 2 to 10 carbon atoms. In a preferred embodiment of the invention R is the hemiester of succinic acid. Another useful polar ester is the hemiester of malonic acid. It has been found that salts of the terminal carboxylic acid group of the ester, for example, the N-methyl glucamine salt as well as the sodium and potassium salts are also useful.

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The compounds are disclosed and described in U.S. Patent No. 4,933,368 and in U.S. Patent No. 5,389,375. These ester compounds are hydrolysed in the blood stream releasing THC to provide a high degree of bioavailability of the THC without regard to patient conditions and anomalies.

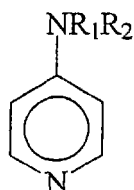
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THC obtained by any means is esterified by the reaction of THC with an organic acid halide or preferably organic acid anhydride in the presence of a 4-amino-substituted pyridine in admixture with an organic amine.

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The 4-amine-substituted pyridines can be represented by the general formula:

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in which R_1 and R_2 are each independently H, optionally substituted lower alkyl or optionally substituted aryl, or R_1 and R_2 can be taken together to form a carbocyclic or
5 heterocyclic 5- or 6-membered ring. Illustrative substituted pyridines include, for example, 4-dimethylaminopyridine and 4-pyrrolidinopyridine.

The invention will be further described in the Examples which follow.

PREPARATION OF DELTA-9-TETRAHYDROCANNABINOL
HEMISUCCINATE (THC-HS)

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLE NO. 1:

To one gram of pure THC (purity about 95%) was added one gram succinic anhydride and 30 ml pyridine and the reaction mixture was refluxed for 24 hours. The reaction mixture was poured over 100 ml iced water and extracted with ether (30 ml X 3). The ether extracts were combined, dried over anhydrous Na_2SO_4 and evaporated to dryness (TLC examination using silica gel plate, developing solvent: hexane-ether (80:20), visualizing agent: fast blue solution, showed that the yield was about 30-40%). The residue was mixed with 5 g silica gel and 5 ml ether. The dried slurry was transferred on to the top of a silica gel column (40 g silica gel, dimensions: 3 X 50 cm). Elution was carried out with hexane-ether mixtures in a manner of increasing polarities. The fractions eluted with hexane-ether (9: 1) and ether were combined and evaporated to give 0.442g of THC-HS (33% yield).

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLE NO. 2:

To one gram of THC (95% purity) was added 0.5 g anhydrous Na_2CO_3 , one gram succinic anhydride, and 20 ml dry benzene and the reaction mixture was refluxed for 24 hours. The reaction mixture was filtered and the filtrate was evaporated to dryness. The residue showed THC-HS content between 17-20% using HPLC analysis (C18 column using $\text{MeOH}:\text{H}_2\text{O}:\text{Acetic Acid}$ at a ratio of 80:20:0.01).

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLE NO. 3:

To one gram THC (purity 95%) was added 0.5 g succinic anhydride, 0.35 g 4-pyrrolidinopyridine and 20 ml benzene and the reaction mixture was kept at room temperature for 3 hours. TLC screening showed that the formation of THC-HS was about 20-30%. The reaction mixture was left overnight for 24 hours and TLC examined again (the % of THC-HS was about 30-50%). Then the reaction mixture was refluxed for 4 hours (% of THC-HS was 75.6%, HPLC analysis). The reaction mixture was refluxed for another 20 hours after the addition of 0.30 g of 4-pyrrolidinopyridine. HPLC analysis showed no increase in the % of THC-HS (about 75%).

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLE NO. 4:

To one gram THC (95% purity) was added 0.5 g succinic anhydride, 0.4 g NaH, and 20 ml dry benzene and the reaction mixture was left at room temperature over weekend (72 hours). TLC examination showed that the % of THC-HS was small (about 20-30%). The reaction mixture was refluxed for about 24 hours, but the TLC examination showed no increase in the yield. HPLC analysis showed that the % of THC-HS was about 14.8%.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLE NO. 5:

To one gram THC (purity about 95%) was added 0.5 g succinic anhydride, 0.8 g 4-pyrrolidinopyridine and 30 ml benzene and the reaction mixture was refluxed for 24 hours, filtered and the filtrate was TLC examined. TLC showed that the % of THC-HS was about 50-60%. HPLC analysis showed that the % of THC-HS was 60%. The reaction mixture was worked up as follows: The benzene was evaporated and the residue was chromatographed on a silica gel column (50 g silica gel, 3 X 50 cm in dimensions). Fractions eluted with hexane-ether (9: 1) and hexane-ether (85: 15) were combined and evaporated to give 0.7g of THC-HS (53% yield).

EXAMPLE NO. 1

To 1.1g THC(purity 95%) was added 0.46 g succinic anhydride, 0.66 ml triethylamine, 78 mg 4-dimethylaminopyridine and 20 ml methylene chloride. The reaction mixture was left at room temperature for 3.5 hours. TLC examination showed that all the THC had been converted to THC-HS. The reaction was worked up as follows: the solvent was distilled off and the residue was purified on a silica gel column (50 g silica gel, 3 X 50 cm in dimensions). Fractions eluted with hexane-ether (9:1) and hexane-ether (8:2) were combined and evaporated to give 1.31g of THC-HS, 95% purity using HPLC analysis. The total yield of THC-HS was 90.32%.

EXAMPLE NO. 2

To 0.5 g of pure THC (98% purity) was added 0.23 g succinic anhydride, 0.33 ml triethylamine, 39 mg 4-dimethylaminopyridine, and 10 ml methylene chloride. The reaction was left at room temperature in the dark for 24 hours. The solvent was distilled off and the residue was mixed with 1 g silica gel and 1 ml ether. The dried slurry was transferred on to the top of a silica gel column (7 g silica gel 60, dimensions: 1 X 50 cm). Fractions eluted with hexane-ether (9: 1) and hexane-ether (85:15) were combined and evaporated to give 0.59g of THC-HS (95.2% purity using HPLC analysis). The total yield of THC-HS was 88.5%.

EXAMPLE NO. 3

To 0.51 g pure THC (98% purity) was added 0.23 g succinic anhydride, 0.33 ml triethylamine, 40 mg 4-dimethylaminopyridine, and 10 ml methylene chloride. The reaction was left at room temperature in the dark for 24 hours. The reaction mixture was worked up as in Example No. 7 to give 0.61g of THC-HS (96.5% purity using HPLC analysis). The total yield of THC-HS was 89.8%.

EXAMPLE NO. 4

To 2 g of THC (purity is about 92%) was added 0.92 g succinic anhydride, 1.4 ml triethylamine, 160 mg 4-dimethylaminopyridine, and 40 ml methylene chloride. The reaction was left at room temperature for 24 hours. The reaction mixture was then worked-up as in Example No. 6. Fractions eluted with hexane-ether (9: 1) and hexane-ether (85:15) were combined and evaporated to give 2.24g of THC-HS with 98.6% purity. The total yield of THC-HS was 85%.

EXAMPLE NO. 5

To 1 g of THC (purity is about 92%) was added 0.46 g succinic anhydride, 0.7 ml triethylamine, 79 mg 4-dimethylaminopyridine and 20 ml methylene chloride and the reaction mixture was kept at room temperature in dark for 24 hours. The solvent was distilled off and the residue was mixed with 1 g silica gel and 1 ml ether. The dried slurry was chromatographed on a silica gel column (10 g silica gel, dimensions: 1 X 50 cm). Fractions eluted with hexane-ether (9:1) and hexane-ether (85:15) were combined and evaporated to give 1.17g of THC-HS, (88.7% yield). The THC-HS residue was again rechromatographed on a silica gel column (10g silica gel, dimensions 1 x 50 cm) to yield 1.03g of pure THC-HS (98% purity).

EXAMPLE NO. 6

To 1g of THC (92% purity) was added 0.46g succinic anhydride, 0.7 ml triethylamine, 80mg 4-dimethylaminopyridine and 20ml methylene chloride and the reaction mixture was kept at room temperature in dark for 24 hours. The solvent was distilled off and the residue was dissolved in 10 ml hexane and transferred on to the top of a silica gel column [10g silica gel, 230-400 mesh, lot G 42352, dimensions: 1 x 50 cm]. The column was eluted with hexane (100 ml), followed by hexane-ether (95:5) [100ml], hexane ether (90:10) [100 ml] and hexane-ether (80:20) [300 ml]. The last fraction was evaporated to give 1.2g of THC-HS (98% yield), purity was over 98% with HPLC analysis.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLE NO. 6:

To 50 mg of THC (purity is 98%) was added 25 mg succinic anhydride, 0.04 ml triethylamine and 2.5 ml methylene chloride and the reaction mixture was kept at room temperature in the dark for 24 hours. TLC examination (silica gel plate, developing system: Hexane-ether 80:20) showed that only about 30-40% of THC had been converted to THC-HS.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLE NO. 7

To 50 mg of THC (purity is 98%) was added 25mg succinic anhydride, 5 mg 4-dimethylaminopyridine and 2.5 ml methylene chloride and the reaction mixture was kept at room temperature in the dark for 24 hours. TLC examination (silica gel plate, development system: Hexane-ether 80:20) showed that a small amount of THC had been converted to THC-HS (25-30%).

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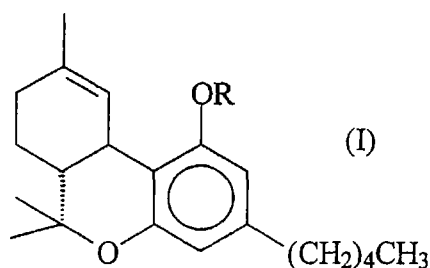
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CLAIMS:

1. A process for the preparation of a compound of the formula (I):

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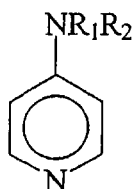


15 in which R represents an acyl group, which process comprises reacting delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol with an acid halide or acid anhydride, having R as the residue group, in the presence of a 4-amino-substituted pyridine and a further organic amine.

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2. A process according to claim 1, wherein the 4-amino-substituted pyridine is a compound of the formula:

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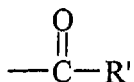


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in which R_1 and R_2 are each independently H, optionally substituted lower alkyl or

optionally substituted aryl, or R₁ or R₂ can be taken together to form a carbocyclic or heterocyclic 5-or-6 membered ring.

- 5 3. A process according to claim 1 or 2 in which R is a group of the formula:



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in which R' is an alkyl group containing a carboxyl group, a salt of a carboxyl group, or an amino group.

4. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 3
15 wherein R is the hemiester of succinic acid.

5. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein R is the hemiester of malonic acid.

- 20 6. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein the 4-substituted pyridine is a 4-dilower alkylaminopyridine.

7. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 6
25 wherein the 4-substituted pyridine is a 4-dimethylaminopyridine.

8. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein the 4-substituted pyridine is 4-
30 pyrrolidinopyridine.

9. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the organic amine is a mono-, di-, or tri-lower

alkyl amine.

10. A process according to claim 9, wherein the organic amine is triethylamine.

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11. A process according to claim 1 wherein R is the acyl residue of succinic acid, the acid anhydride is succinic anhydride and the process is conducted in the presence of 4-dimethylaminopyridine and triethylamine.

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