

BIOCORRODIBLE MAGNESIUM ALLOY IMPLANT

The invention relates to an implant comprising a base body made of a biocorroddible magnesium alloy.

TECHNICAL FIELD AND BACKGROUND

Implants are being employed in a wide variety of forms in modern medical technology. They are used, for example, to support vessels, hollow organs and vein systems (endovascular implants, such as stents), for fastening and the temporary fixation of tissue implants and tissue transplantations, but also for orthopedic purposes, such as nails, plates or screws. A particularly frequently used form of an implant is the stent.

The implantation of stents has become established as one of the most effective therapeutic measures for the treatment of vascular diseases. Stents have the purpose of performing a stabilizing function in hollow organs of a patient. For this purpose, stents featuring conventional designs have a filigree supporting structure comprising metal braces, which is initially present in compressed form for introduction into the body and is expanded at the site of the application. One of the main application areas of such stents is to permanently or temporarily dilate and hold open vascular constrictions, particularly constrictions (stenoses) of the coronary blood vessels. In addition, aneurysm stents are also known, which are used primarily to seal the aneurysm. The support function is additionally provided.

Stents comprise a peripheral wall with sufficient load-bearing capacity to hold the constricted vessel open to the desired extent and a tubular base body through which the blood continues to flow without impairment. The peripheral wall is generally formed by a lattice-like supporting structure, which allows the stent to be introduced in a compressed state, in which it has a small outside diameter, all the way to the stenosis of the particular vessel to be treated and to be expanded there, for example by way of a balloon catheter, so that the vessel has the desired, enlarged inside diameter. As an alternative, shape memory

materials such as nitinol have the ability to self-expand when a restoring force is eliminated that keeps the implant at a small diameter. The restoring force is generally applied to the material by a protective tube.

The implant, notably the stent, has a base body made of an implant material. An implant material is a non-living material, which is used for applications in medicine and interacts with biological systems. A basic prerequisite for the use of a material as implant material, which is in contact with the body environment when used as intended, is the body friendliness thereof (biocompatibility). Biocompatibility shall be understood as the ability of a material to evoke an appropriate tissue response in a specific application. This includes an adaptation of the chemical, physical, biological, and morphological surface properties of an implant to the recipient's tissue with the aim of a clinically desired interaction. The biocompatibility of the implant material is also dependent on the temporal course of the response of the biosystem in which it is implanted. For example, irritations and inflammations occur in a relatively short time, which can lead to tissue changes. Depending on the properties of the implant material, biological systems thus react in different ways. According to the response of the biosystem, the implant materials can be divided into bioactive, bioinert and degradable or resorbable materials.

Implant materials comprise polymers, metallic materials, and ceramic materials (as coatings, for example). Biocompatible metals and metal alloys for permanent implants comprise, for example, stainless steels (such as 316L), cobalt-based alloys (such as CoCrMo cast alloys, CoCrMo forge alloys, CoCrWNi forge alloys and CoCrNiMo forge alloys), technical pure titanium and titanium alloys (such as cp titanium, TiAl6V4 or TiAl6Nb7) and gold alloys. In the field of biocorrosible stents, the use of magnesium or technical pure iron as well as biocorrosible base alloys of the elements magnesium, iron, zinc, molybdenum, and tungsten are proposed. The present invention relates to biocorrosible magnesium base alloys.

The use of biocorrosible magnesium alloys for temporary implants having filigree structures is made difficult in particular in that the degradation of the implant progresses very quickly in vivo. So as to reduce the corrosion rate, this being the degradation speed,

different approaches are being discussed. For one, it is attempted to slow the degradation on the part of the implant material by developing appropriate alloys. In addition, coatings are to bring about a temporary inhibition of the degradation. While the existing approaches are promising, none of them has so far been implemented in a commercially available product. Regardless of the efforts made so far, there is rather a continuing need for solutions that make it possible to at least temporarily reduce the in vivo corrosion of magnesium alloys.

SUMMARY

One or more of the disadvantages of the prior art mentioned above are solved, or at least mitigated, by the implant according to the invention. The implant according to the invention comprises a base body made of a biocorrosible magnesium alloy. The magnesium alloy contains a plurality of statistically distributed particles, comprising one or more of the elements Y, Zr, Mn, Sc, Fe, Ni, Co, W, Pt and noble earths with the atomic numbers 57 to 71, or alloys, or compounds containing one or more of these elements. The mean distance of the particles from each other is smaller than the hundredfold mean particle diameter.

In the development of magnesium materials so far, the corrosion resistance has always been improved by increasing the purity of the magnesium material. Iron, nickel, chromium, and cobalt are considered to be critical elements in this context. Particles comprising intermetallic compounds, particles of a different chemical nature (oxides, hydrides) or segregations (Al₁₂Mg₁₇) in magnesium materials result in microgalvanic corrosion due to the different electrochemical potential. This results in local corrosive processes, which massively accelerate the corrosion rate of the material. For this reason, previously attempts have been made to minimize the concentration of the particles to the extent possible.

The solution according to the invention, however, takes exactly the opposite approach. In magnesium materials, in general, the corrosion that is observed attacks the material locally very inhomogeneously. In the process, cathodic processes occur, which are

accompanied by the release of hydroxide ions and the development of hydrogen, more specifically at defined centers, namely the above-mentioned particles. The anodic dissolution process of the magnesium material takes place in the surroundings of the cathodic center. The process can be divided into the following partial reactions:



The anodic process is highly dependent on the pH value. For example, the Mg corrosion is massively accelerated at $\text{pH} < 5$, while it is massively decelerated at $\text{pH} > 10$ and basically completely disrupted. Given this behavior, the release of hydroxide ions on the cathodic center leads to the protection of the direct surroundings.

The invention is based on the realization that the corrosion of implants made of biocorrosible magnesium alloys can be delayed by adding a plurality of homogeneously distributed particles to the material volume, a near-surface region, or the surface. The particles act as cathodic centers within the above-mentioned meaning, which is to say, the hydrogen overvoltage is sufficiently low and the reaction can take place at a high rate. The particles comprise one or more of the elements Y, Zr, Mn, Sc, Fe, Ni, Co, W, Pt and noble earths with the atomic numbers 57 to 71, or alloys, or compounds containing one or more of these elements. In the present invention, the term 'alloy' shall cover metallic compositions of the elements, and also compositions in which covalent bonds exist between the elements. The alloys preferably contain magnesium. Compounds comprise in particular hydrides and carbides of the above-mentioned elements.

Biocorrosible as defined by the invention denotes alloys in the physiological environment of which degradation or remodeling takes place, so that the part of the implant made of the material is no longer present in its entirety, or at least predominantly.

A magnesium alloy in the present case shall be understood as a metal structure, the main constituent of which is magnesium. The main constituent is the alloying constituent having the highest weight proportion in the alloy. The proportion of the main constituent is

preferably more than 50% by weight, particularly more than 70% by weight. The alloy is to be selected in the composition thereof such that it is biocorrosible. A possible test medium for testing the corrosion behavior of a potential alloy is synthetic plasma, as that which is required according to EN ISO 10993-15:2000 for biocorrosion analyses (composition NaCl 6.8 g/l, CaCl₂ 0.2 g/l, KCl 0.4 g/l, MgSO₄ 0.1 g/l, NaHCO₃ 2.2 g/l, Na₂HPO₄ 0.126 g/l, NaH₂PO₄ 0.026 g/l). For this purpose, a sample of the alloy to be analyzed is stored in a closed sample container with a defined quantity of the test medium at 37°C and pH 7.38. The samples are removed at intervals – which are adapted to the anticipated corrosion behavior – ranging from a few hours to several months and analyzed for traces of corrosion in the known manner. The synthetic plasma according to EN ISO 10993-15:2000 corresponds to a blood-like medium and thus is a possible medium to reproducibly simulate a physiological environment as defined by the invention.

The term corrosion refers in the present example to the reaction of a metallic material with the environment thereof, wherein a measurable change of the material is caused, which – when using the material in a component – results in an impairment of the function of the component. The corrosion process can be quantified by the provision of a corrosion rate. Swift degradation is associated with a high corrosion rate, and vice versa. Relative to the degradation of the entire base body, an implant that is modified as defined by the invention will result in a decrease of the corrosion rate.

The particles preferably have a mean diameter of 1 nanometer to 10 micrometers, particularly preferred 500 nanometers to 3 micrometers, and more particularly 1 to 2 micrometers.

In the surroundings of the cathodic center, protected regions develop as a result of the release of hydroxide ions. The majority of the protected region around an individual cathodic center depends on the size and composition of the particles and the surrounding matrix of the magnesium material. The size of the protected area per particle should be at least 1 square micrometer, preferably up to 100 square micrometers, with up to 10000 square micrometers being particularly preferred.

Within the material, the area of the protected regions has a size distribution that is determined by the distribution of the particles. The protective effect on the total surface of the magnesium material is dependent on the number and size distribution of the protected regions. The number of particles on the surface of the base body is preferably $1 \cdot 10^2$ to $1 \cdot 10^6$ particles per mm^2 , or the number of particles in the volume of the base body is $1 \cdot 10^3$ to $1 \cdot 10^9$ particles per mm^3 . A ratio of the mean particle diameter to the mean distance of the particles from each other preferably ranges between 1:2 and 1:100, and more particularly between 1:2 and 1:10.

The corrosion rate is quantitatively influenced by the cathodic centers as follow:

- a) The protected total area A_{protect} is obtained by assuming non-overlapping protected regions from the sum over the distribution of the areas $A_{\text{cathodic_center}}$ protected by the individual cathodic centers:

$$A_{\text{protect}} = \sum_{i=1 \dots N} A_i^{\text{cathodic center}}$$

- b) The corrosion rate R_{corr} is directly proportional to the corrosion of the accessible sample area A_{corr} , wherein A_{total} denotes the total area of the material:

$$R_{\text{corr}} \propto A_{\text{corr}} \propto A_{\text{total}} - A_{\text{protect}} \propto A_{\text{total}} \left(1 - \frac{A_{\text{protect}}}{A_{\text{total}}} \right)$$

As a result, assuming the same abrasion depth, the corrosion rate decreases as the percentage of area of the protected region decreases. The percentages of area mentioned can be determined experimentally.

A particularly high protective effect is achieved precisely when a sufficiently large number of cathodic centers is uniformly distributed in the material, and the overlap between the protected regions is as small as possible. The optimal mean distance

d_{mean} between cathodic centers without overlap can be estimated from a statistical analysis of the distribution:

$$d_{mean} = 2 \cdot \sqrt{\frac{A_{protect}}{N \cdot \pi}}$$

The protective effect can be increased both by a large number of small protected regions and by a small number of large protected regions. The mean distance of the particles preferably ranges between 200 nm and 100 μm . The mean distance is in particular smaller than 20 μm .

The protected area per cathodic center is dependent on the chemical nature of the cathodic center and the material matrix.

The claimed modification of the material can be applied not only to the entire material volume, but optionally can also be limited to the surface or the near-surface region of an implant. In this way, it is possible to deliberately introduce cathodic centers into the surface of a workpiece by means of rolling. This creates an initial corrosion barrier, and the degradation rate increases over time. The particles are preferably incorporated in the surface or the near-surface region of the base body. A relatively low corrosion rate then occurs at the beginning of the onsetting corrosive processes, said rate increasing over the course of time. This behavior is referred to as temporarily reducing the corrosion rate. In the case of coronary stents, the mechanical integrity of the structure should be maintained for a period of three to six months after implantation.

Implants as defined by the invention are devices introduced into the body by a surgical procedure and comprise fastening elements for bones, such as screws, plates or nails, surgical suture material, intestinal clamps, vessel clips, prostheses in the area of hard and soft tissues, and anchoring elements for electrodes, particularly for pacemakers or defibrillators. The implant is made entirely or partially of the biocorrosible material. If only a part of the implant is made of the biocorrosible material, this part is to be modified accordingly. The implant is preferably a stent.

A further concept of the invention is to provide two methods for producing an implant comprising a main body made of a biocorrosible magnesium alloy, wherein the magnesium alloy contains a plurality of statistically distributed particles having the above-mentioned composition, and the mean distance of the particles from each other is smaller than the hundredfold mean particle diameter, and the particles are incorporated in the surface or in a near-surface region of the base body.

According to a first variant, the method comprises the following steps:

- (i) providing a blank made of the biocorrosible magnesium alloy;
- (ii) applying a non-aqueous suspension of particles having the above-mentioned composition to the blank; and
- (iii) rolling the particles into the surface or into the near-surface region of the blank.

Accordingly, an oily suspension containing the particles to be incorporated is applied to the blank, from which the base body is to be shaped, and incorporated by rolling. This suspension can be used as a lubricant both during cold rolling and during hot rolling. By optimizing the volume flow of the suspension, temperature, contact pressure and speed, the incorporation of the particles in the surface of the rolled magnesium material can be optimized. The variant is suited in particular for magnesium alloys based on WE43.

According to a second variant, the method comprises the following steps:

- (i) providing a blank made of the biocorrosible magnesium alloy;
- (ii) applying particles having the above-mentioned composition to the blank; and
- (iii) melting the magnesium alloy onto the near-surface region of the blank.

According to this variant, the particles to be incorporated are applied directly onto the blank, which later forms the base body. After that, the magnesium alloy is locally melted on the surface, for example by laser treatment. After cooling, the particles are then embedded in the near-surface region of the blank.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The invention will be explained in more detail hereinafter based on embodiments.

Embodiment 1:

An iron particle-containing (chemicals for the production are available from Sigma-Aldrich, particle diameter smaller than 100 nm) suspension is applied, for example by spraying or immersion, onto a plate-shaped blank made of the magnesium alloy AZ31 so as to generate a film having a statistically homogeneous distribution of iron particles.

This suspension can be used as a lubricant both during cold rolling and during hot rolling. The particles are incorporated in the surface of the blank by the rolling process. The particles not only increase the corrosion protection, but also the wear resistance by increasing the hardness. The blank is subsequently processed into the base body of the implant.

Embodiment 2:

Tungsten particles (available from Sigma-Aldrich; particle diameter approximately 150 nm) are applied in the form of a powder onto a plate-shaped blank made of the magnesium alloy AZ31 and homogeneously distributed by shaking. When using complicated three-dimensional structures, it is also advantageous to use an adhesion-promoting polymer to coat the surface before the laser alloying process. By varying the polymer to tungsten particle ratio, it is possible to directly adjust the mean distance between tungsten particles.

The tungsten particles are incorporated into the magnesium alloy by laser alloying. To this end, the workpiece is locally melted using a high-performance laser diode under argon inert gas. The laser output is between 1.2 and 1.6 kW, and the feed rate of the laser is 0.5 to 1.0 m/min. The use of the argon prevents an oxidation of the magnesium material and of the tungsten during processing.

Using the laser alloying technology, it is possible in particular to locally protect a workpiece made of a magnesium alloy. In connection with stents, for example, sequential

fragment of the implant can be achieved by locally influencing the degradation rate, for example by providing the surfaces of the segment rings of a stent structure, but not the longitudinal connecting struts of the segment rings, with cathodic centers according to the invention, whereby the struts degrade more quickly than the segment rings. Because the connecting struts dissolve more quickly, high longitudinal flexibility is achieved quickly, wherein the load-bearing capacity of the segment rings is still maintained.

The particles provide not only corrosion protection, but also increase the wear resistance against abrasion by increasing the hardness. In addition, by suitably selecting the particles and the composition thereof, polymeric substances can be effectively bonded to the surface. These polymeric substances can have a corrosion-inhibiting effect on the one hand, and on the other hand, they may contain one or more pharmacological active ingredients, or exhibit a pharmacological effect themselves.

The additional coating with a polymer can be technically implemented, for example, as follows. PLLA L214S (Boehringer Ingelheim) is dissolved in a concentration of 1.6% (w/v) in chloroform and rapamycin is added as the active substance. The active ingredient content preferably ranges between 15% and 20%, in relation to the solid matter content. The implant made of the modified magnesium alloy is immersed for 1 second into the solution using an underwater robot, pulled out, and air containing nitrogen is blown on so as to evaporate the solvent. This process is repeated until a sufficient layer thickness of approximately 5 μm has been reached.

The embodiments also apply analogously to other biocorrosible magnesium alloys and particle compositions.

It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that numerous modifications and variations of the described examples and embodiments are possible in light of the above teaching. The disclosed examples and embodiments are presented for purposes of illustration only. Other alternate embodiments may include some or all of the features disclosed herein. Therefore, it is the intent to cover all such modifications and alternate embodiments as may come within the true scope of this invention.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is

1. An implant having a base body comprising a biocorrosible magnesium alloy, wherein the magnesium alloy contains a plurality of statistically distributed particles, wherein the mean distance of the particles from each other is smaller than the hundredfold mean particle diameter, and the particles comprise one or more of the elements Y, Zr, Mn, Sc, Fe, Ni, Co, W, Pt, and noble earths with the atomic numbers 57 to 71, or alloys, or compounds containing one or more of these elements.
2. The implant according to claim 1, wherein the particles have a mean diameter of 1 nm to 10 μm .
3. The implant according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the particles are incorporated into a surface or into a near-surface region of the base body.
4. An implant according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a number of the particles on the surface of the base body ranges between $1 \cdot 10^2$ and $1 \cdot 10^6$ per mm^2 .
5. An implant according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a number of the particles in the volume of the base body ranges between $1 \cdot 10^3$ and $1 \cdot 10^9$ per mm^2 .
6. The implant according to claim 4 or 5, wherein a ratio of the mean particle diameter to the mean distance of the particles from each other ranges between 1:2 and 1:10.
7. An implant according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a mean distance of the particles ranges between 200 nm and 100 μm .
8. An implant according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the implant is a stent.

9. A method for producing an implant having a base body comprising a biocorrosible magnesium alloy, wherein the magnesium alloy contains a plurality of statistically distributed particles, wherein the mean distance of the particles from each other is smaller than the hundredfold mean particle diameter, and the particles comprise one or more of the elements Y, Zr, Mn, Sc, Fe, Ni, Co, W, Pt, and noble earths with the atomic numbers 57 to 71, or alloys, or compounds containing one or more of these elements, and the particles are incorporated into a surface or into a near-surface region of the base body, wherein the method comprises the following steps:
 - (i) providing a blank made of the biocorrosible magnesium alloy;
 - (ii) applying a non-aqueous suspension of particles having the above-mentioned composition to the blank; and
 - (iii) rolling the particles into the surface or into the near-surface region of the blank.

10. A method for producing an implant having a base body comprising a biocorrosible magnesium alloy, wherein the magnesium alloy contains a plurality of statistically distributed particles, wherein the mean distance of the particles from each other is smaller than the hundredfold mean particle diameter, and the particles comprise one or more of the elements Y, Zr, Mn, Sc, Fe, Ni, Co, W, Pt, and noble earths with the atomic numbers 57 to 71, or alloys, or compounds containing one or more of these elements, and the particles are incorporated into a surface or into a near-surface region of the base body, wherein the method comprises the following steps:
 - (i) providing a blank made of the biocorrosible magnesium alloy;
 - (ii) applying particles having the above-mentioned composition to the blank; and
 - (iii) melting the magnesium alloy in the near-surface region of the blank.