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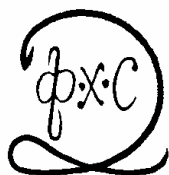
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PHYSICAL CHEMISTRY 2016

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ANTIMICROBIAL ACTIVITY OF COPPER-POLYANILINE NANOCOMPOSITE

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ABSTRACT

By combining copper nanoparticles (CuNPs) as a good antimicrobial agent with polyaniline (PANI), which also shows some degree of antimicrobial activity, we were able to synthesize a novel promising antimicrobial material – copper-polyaniline (Cu-PANI) nanocomposite. It was prepared by simple *in situ* polymerization method, when the polymer and metal nanoparticles ($d_{av} = 6$ nm) are produced simultaneously. Quantitative (antimicrobial assay) and qualitative (atomic force microscopy – AFM) analyses showed that synergistic effect of CuNPs and PANI against bacteria *E. coli* and *S. aureus*, and fungus *C. albicans*, provides its faster and higher antimicrobial activity than any component acting alone. This makes it a great candidate for fast waste water treatment.

INTRODUCTION

Microbial contamination of water presents a major threat to public health. With the emergence of strains resistant to multiple antimicrobial agents, there is increased demand for novel antimicrobial materials with superior performance for disinfection applications. Nanocomposites based on metal nanoparticles such as CuNPs and conductive PANI, that expose some antimicrobial effect, represent one of these materials [1,2]. Antimicrobial activity of metal NPs is inversely proportional to their average size as a result of large number of the low-coordinate atoms on their surface available to interact with microbial membranes or to release metal ions, while PANI chains generate electrostatic interaction with microbial functional groups, altering their function [1,2]. Combining these two components, these effects become intense making Cu-PANI nanocomposite very effective antimicrobial agent [2]. Here, we present a cheap Cu-PANI nanocomposite

EXPERIMENTAL

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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of a surface Cu electrons and characteristic peak of PANI protonated by HCl visible at 880 nm (π -polaron transition) [3]. During the polymerization of aniline, spherical CuNPs with mean diameter of about 6.0 ± 3.3 nm were formed. They are well separated and homogeneously dispersed throughout the polymer matrix (Fig. 1a). FESEM image of Cu-PANI (Fig. 1b) indicated that PANI chains form coral-like dendritic nanofibers in a large quantity and good uniformity with pores between the branches nanofibers. Such nanostructure offer great effective surface area of Cu-PANI composite. The results of quantitative antimicrobial efficiency of the Cu-PANI nanocomposite of different concentrations over 1 h incubation time with the microbes are schematically represented in Fig. 2. The stronger antimicrobial effect is achieved for the higher Cu-PANI or pure PANI concentrations.

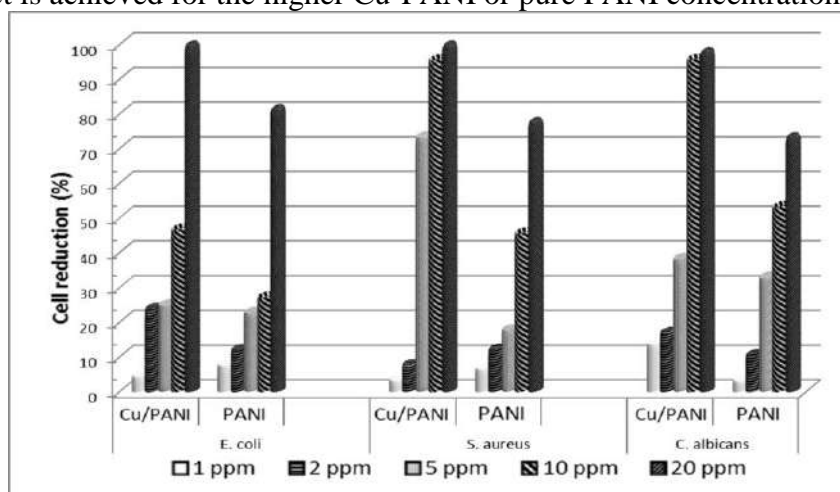


Figure 2. Concentration-dependent reduction ability of the Cu-PANI and PANI on *E. coli*, *S. aureus* and *C. albicans*, over 1 h incubation time

After 1 h, the number of strains is significantly reduced with increasing the Cu-PANI concentration, and almost complete growth inhibition was achieved (99.9 % microbial reduction) against *E. coli* and *S. aureus*, but slightly smaller fungal reduction (97.9 %) at highest composite concentration of 20 ppm. These results are much better than for pure PANI, which reduced ≤ 81.5 % of all tested strains for the same incubation time and concentrations, as well as CuNPs for higher concentrations and longer incubation time (2h), presented in the previous work [1].

Antimicrobial activity of Cu-PANI nanocomposite was also visually confirmed by AFM analysis (Fig. 3). It can clearly be seen that morphology of all tested strains is drastically changed. Smooth and compact surface of all tested strains, after 1 h contact with Cu-PANI, becomes rough, with a lot

of indentations on the cell wall, indicated by arrows. As can be seen, the effect of Cu-PANI to cells' morphology, is more intense in the case of *E. coli* (Fig. 3a) than for two other cells (Fig. 3b,c), because of the intrinsic difference in the cell wall structure. These results are in agreement with the results of antimicrobial assays. Beside synergistic effect of CuNPs and PANI in the composite, important role in the antimicrobial activity of the Cu-PANI has PANI dendrite morphology, which provides great surface area in contact with microbes, preventing the nutrient-uptake process of the microbes from the surroundings. This allows increasing of the interaction between CuNPs, cycling redox $\text{Cu}^{2+}/\text{Cu}^{+}$ reactions at the surface of the cells and their electrostatic interactions with microbes' peptidoglycans and lipids. These interactions lead to conformational changes of biomolecules, altering their biological function and finally causing cells death.

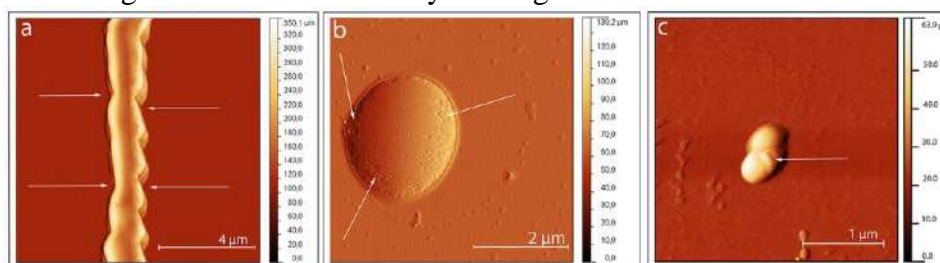


Figure 3. AFM images of treated cells *E. coli* (a), *S. aureus* (b) and *C. albicans* (c) after 1 h incubation with Cu-PANI nanocomposite

CONCLUSION

The presented Cu-PANI nanocomposite has shown excellent antimicrobial activity as a result of CuNPs and PANI synergy, after only 1 h of the strains exposure. This composite can serve as a template for the development of novel antimicrobial agent for fast control microbial infections and waste water treatment.

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