



Optimization of RNA Extraction Protocol for Rat Skeletal Muscle Samples

Stela Mirla da Silva Felipe ^a, Christina Pacheco ^b,
Jonathan Elias Rodrigues Martins ^a,
Raquel Martins de Freitas ^{a*},
Paulo Elesson Guimarães de Oliveira ^a,
Sávio Victor Diógenes Mendes ^a, Juliana Osório Alves ^c
and Vânia Marilande Ceccatto ^a

^a Instituto Superior de Ciências Biomédicas, ISCB – Universidade Estadual do Ceará, Fortaleza, Brazil.

^b Núcleo de Medicina Tropical, Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, Distrito Federal, Brazil.

^c Centro Universitário Estácio - FIC - Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Method Article

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The present study aimed to establish and characterize an optimized protocol conformation to obtain adequate RNA quality from rodents skeletal muscle samples for sequencing studies.

Place and Duration of Study: The *in vivo* experiments and analyses were performed in the Laboratory of Biochemistry and Gene Expression – LABIEX of the Superior Institute of Biomedical Science – ISCB from the State University of Ceará - UECE. Between 2017-2020.

Methodology: Were used 23 samples from male Wistar rat skeletal muscle, specifically from

*Corresponding author: E-mail: raquel.martins.rf@gmail.com;

soleus muscle. Total RNA extraction was performed using the classic TRIzol® method and commercial kit, merging steps from both. Capillary electrophoresis in the Bioanalyzer platform was used for RNA quality evaluation.

Results: (C) Analyses of adapted protocol RNA concentration, RIN and rate 28S/18S showed satisfactory results. 28S/18S Ribosomal bands appear well defined, without small traces, which indicates RNA with high integrity and without contamination of genomic DNA.

Conclusion: Obtained RNA quality and integrity data satisfied the exigencies for posterior RNA-seq.

Keywords: Sequencing; RNA extraction; soleus muscle.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ribonucleic acid (RNA) is a molecule of importance in protein synthesis mostly evolved to transcriptional and translation process, the main types of RNAs in these mechanisms are messenger RNA (mRNA), transfer RNA (tRNA), and ribosomal RNA (rRNA). Protein synthesis process regulated by many levels, such as transcriptional and epigenetic factors. Gene expression are evolved to transcriptional stage of protein synthesis, this phase is target of analyses to comprehend the effects of physiological events being useful in research studies and diagnostics [1].

Technological advances in sequencing made possible tracking changes in gene expression in different stages of cellular development, disease physiopathology, and in diverse physiological conditions. The functional genome consists in molecular activity analyses to identify functions and interactions between genes and proteins. Some techniques allow functional genomics evaluations, based on mRNA quantitative and qualitative analysis. Among them, we can cite microarray, quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR), and next-generation RNA sequencing (RNA-seq). These approach technologies generate data very useful in clinical physiological researches, treatments and diagnostics [2,3].

The RNA-seq approach was developed for transcriptome analysis, using next-generation sequencing technology (NGS). Transcriptome comprehends the set of transcripts found inside cells, tissues, and organisms, and it reflects general gene expression. Gene activation and inactivation is shown in cellular structures through transcriptome studies, in which genes have their expression levels defined. Messenger RNA (mRNA) encodes proteins, in practice transcriptome were established to embrace mRNA [4,5,6].

RNA extraction from specific cells and tissues consists of the first step for gene expression studies and transcript characterization. RNA extraction techniques are commonly used in Molecular Biology labs, and consists of cellular lysis to release nucleic acids, kept soluble, and separation from the precipitated cellular components. Sample preparation requires caution and specific protocols when the target is RNA. Besides this, NGS transcriptome studies need good quality RNA. RNA evaluation is done in the platform *Bioanalyzer* by measuring concentration, 28S/18S Ribosomal band rate, and RNA Integrity Number – RIN, the latter being of higher relevance [7].

A standard RNA extraction protocol for a diversity of tissues does not exist. Some protocols use common reagents for total RNA extraction, such as *TRIzol*®, or specific kits available in the market with diverse applications, each one with its advantages. *TRIzol*® consists of phenol and guanidine isothiocyanate monophase solution, which in extraction enables cellular lysis and retains RNA integrity [8,9]. *TRIzol*® efficiency in acquiring a good quality RNA in extraction has been demonstrated by many studies. Commercial kits are efficient in RNA isolation and purification in columns. In this context, researchers point to combined or adapted methodologies as useful to obtain a high-quality RNA sample from specific tissues or organisms [10,11].

RNA extraction may be limited by the type of biological material. Skeletal muscle, for instance, is a very dense and fibrous tissue, making cellular lysis difficult and RNA extraction by consequence. Besides this, it is a protein-rich tissue that could contaminate RNA samples. The main objective of this work was to optimize RNA extraction protocol from rat soleus skeletal muscle tissue samples and evaluate obtained RNA quality and integrity, for RNA-seq gene expression analyses.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used 23 samples from male Wistar rats muscle soleus, obtained from Instituto Superior de Ciências Biomédicas, UECE (ISCB-UECE) vivarium. Animals had sixty days of life, weighed between 200g and 250 g, were kept in 12h/12h light/dark cycles, in an environment with a controlled temperature between 22 and 25°C, with water and food *ad libitum*.

2.1 RNA Extraction

Total RNA extraction was performed from 30 mg of soleus muscle with and without the adapted protocol, which was using TRIzol® (Thermo Fisher Scientific) and RNeasy Plus Mini Kit® (QIAGEN, Hilden, Germany) reagents, according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

2.1.1 Extraction method 1 - RNeasy plus universal mini kit (Qiagen®)

RNA extraction protocol following manufacturer recommendations using the correct equipment, RNase free.

2.1.2 Extraction method 2 - TRIzol® + RNeasy plus universal mini kit (Qiagen®)

This RNA extraction protocol was adapted with TRIzol® and RNeasy Plus Universal Mini Kit (Qiagen®) steps. The procedure included the following steps:

1. Use of 30 mg from soleus muscle stored in a 2 mL tube with 900 µL of TRIzol®.
2. Samples were homogenized and kept for 5 minutes in environmental temperature.
3. 180 µL of chloroform was added to the samples, each tube passed 5 seconds in Vortex and was maintained for 3 minutes in environmental temperature.
4. Samples were centrifuged at 1200g / 4°C / 15min. The supernatant (400µL) was transferred to a 1.5mL tube.
5. 400 µL of 70% ethanol was added
6. 700 µL of the resulting mixture was filtrated with a column kit (pink 2 ml tube), the rest of the sample was discarded.
7. Samples were centrifugated 8000g/ 4°C /15s. The material that went through the column was discarded.
8. 500 µL of RPE buffer was added to the column.

9. Samples were centrifuged at 8000g / 4°C / 15s. The material that went through the column was discarded.
10. 500 µL of RPE buffer was added to the column.
11. Samples were centrifuged at 8000g / 4°C / 15s. The material that went through the column was discarded.
12. Columns were put in a new 1.5 ml tube.
13. 40 µL of RNase free water was added.
14. Samples were centrifugated at 8000g/4°C/ 1 min.
15. Obtained RNA was stored at -80°C.

2.2 RNA Integrity and Quality Evaluation

RNA Integrity in samples was analyzed by capillary electrophoresis, with the Agilent 2100 Bioanalyzer system (Agilent Technologies®), the standard protocol for RNA. RNA quality was verified by evaluation of RNA integrity number (RIN), RNA concentration, and rate between 28S/18S Ribosomal bands.

2.3 Statistical Analyses

Results were presented as mean ± standard error of the mean. Student T-test for comparison between two groups was applied, using GraphPad Prism software, and results showing 5% occurrence probability of a null hypothesis ($p < 0.05$) were considered statistically significant.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RNA extraction adapted protocol with *Trizol®* and *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* showed better results regarding RIN (8.0083 ± 0.1379), RNA concentration (466.6667 ± 75.5048), and rate between 28S/18S Ribosomal band (1.4833 ± 0.0718) as presented in Table 1.

The *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* RNA extraction protocol yielded RNA with low quality. Hence, the extraction protocol was adapted by adding *TRIZOL®* to the samples during the incubation and homogenization first steps, followed by RNA isolation and purification steps using the *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)*.

Rat soleus muscle RNA extraction with *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* was considered unsatisfactory after the evaluation of RNA integrity and concentration. As presented in Table 2, RIN mean (4.134 ± 0.4265), RNA

concentration mean (167.7093±251.4096), and the rate between 28S/18S Ribosomal band (0.4727±1.0753). These results point to RNA degradation and possible contamination from genomic DNA. Degradation may have occurred through the presence of stable and active RNases from soleus muscle and high concentration of proteins, being the main extraction difficulty, making RNA, which already is a highly unstable molecule, be degraded faster [10].

Comparing obtained RIN from the two tested protocols, an adapted *Trizol*® and *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit* (*Qiagen*®) methodology (8.008±0.03981) had a significant increase regarding the use of commercial Kit (4.134±0.4265). Regarding RNA concentration, the adapted methodology (466.7±21.8 ng/μl) also increased concerning the commercial kit (167.7±75.8 ng/μl), with p<0.05, as presented in Fig. 1.

Table 1. Results of RNA extraction with *TRizol*® and *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit* (*Qiagen*®): RIN, RNA concentration, and 28S/18S Ribosomal rate

<i>TRizol</i> ® and <i>RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit</i> (<i>Qiagen</i> ®) RNA extraction			
Sample	RIN	RNA concentration (ng/μl)	rRNA ratio [28s/18s]
12	8.1	359	1.4
13	7.8	421	1.5
14	8.1	493	1.4
15	8.0	416	1.5
16	8.0	465	1.5
17	8.0	527	1.4
18	8.3	377	1.6
19	7.8	540	1.5
20	8.0	438	1.6
21	8.0	633	1.4
22	7.9	455	1.5
23	8.1	476	1.5
Mean	8.0083	466.6667	1.4833
Standard Deviation	0.1379	75.5048	0.0718
Standard Error	0.0398	21.7963	0.0207
Variation Coefficient	2%	16%	5%

Table 2. Results of RNA extraction with *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit* (*Qiagen*®): RIN, RNA concentration and 28S/18S Ribosomal rate

RNA extraction with <i>RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit</i> (<i>Qiagen</i> ®)			
Sample	RIN	RNA concentration (ng/μL)	NA ratio [28s/18s]
1	2.6	3.75	0
2	2.6	271	0.1
3	5.5	1.33	0.1
4	3.7	1.092	0.1
5	2.6	1.239	1
6	6.0	1.204	0.1
7	5.1	1.175	0
8	5.5	1.012	3.6
9	3.0	391	0.1
10	3.2	467	0.1
11	5.7	705	0
Mean	4.1364	167.7093	0.4727
Standard Deviation	1.4144	251.4096	1.0753
Standard Error	0.4265	75.8029	0.3242
Variation Coefficient	34%	150%	227%

Capillary electrophoresis methodology with *TRIZOL*® and commercial kit showed homogeneity in intensity between 28S/18S Ribosomal bands, while electrophoresis samples of extracted RNA using only the commercial kit presented small bands with different intensity, indicating degraded RNA (Fig. 2). Thus, the adapted protocol with *TRIZOL*® and commercial kit showed good quality RNA, once 28S and 18S bands in eukaryotes are Ribosomal RNA integrity markers. RNA is considered of good quality when the 28S/18S Ribosomal bands are well defined in agarose or capillary electrophoresis (*Agilent*), without the presence of less striking small bands, and 28S peak is stronger than 18S.

Electropherograms (Fig. 3) graphically showed the intensity of ribosomal bands in capillary electrophoresis, with fluorescence by second peak (FU). Two peaks relate to RNA ribosomal bands. Electropherograms from extracted RNA samples with *TRIZOL*® and *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* satisfied the required sequencing quality parameters. Besides, samples purified with *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* did not show satisfactory results, which is observed by the absence of defined electropherograms, indicating the presence of degraded RNA, implying low-quality RNA for sequencing.

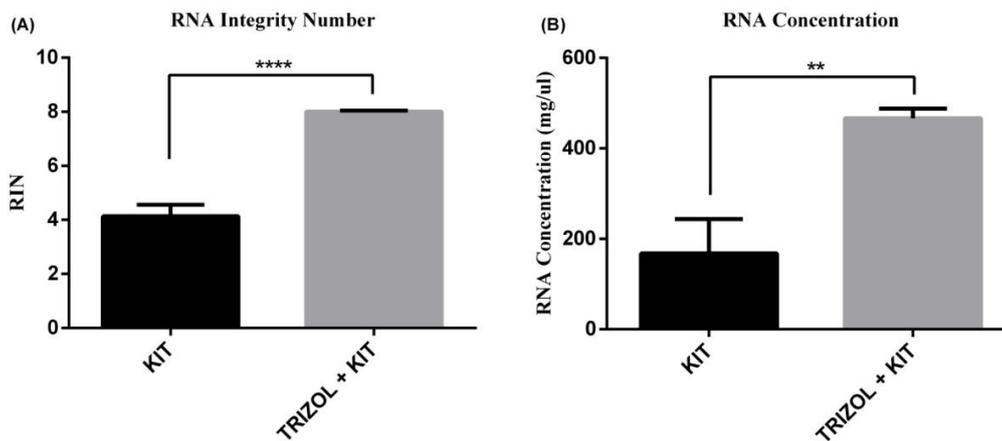


Fig. 1. a) RNA integrity number for *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* (4.134±0.4265) vs *TRIZOL*® and *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* (8.008±0.03981), p<0.0001; b) RNA extraction concentration for *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* (167.7±75.8 ng/μl) vs *TRIZOL*® and *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* (466.7±21.8 ng/μl), p<0.01

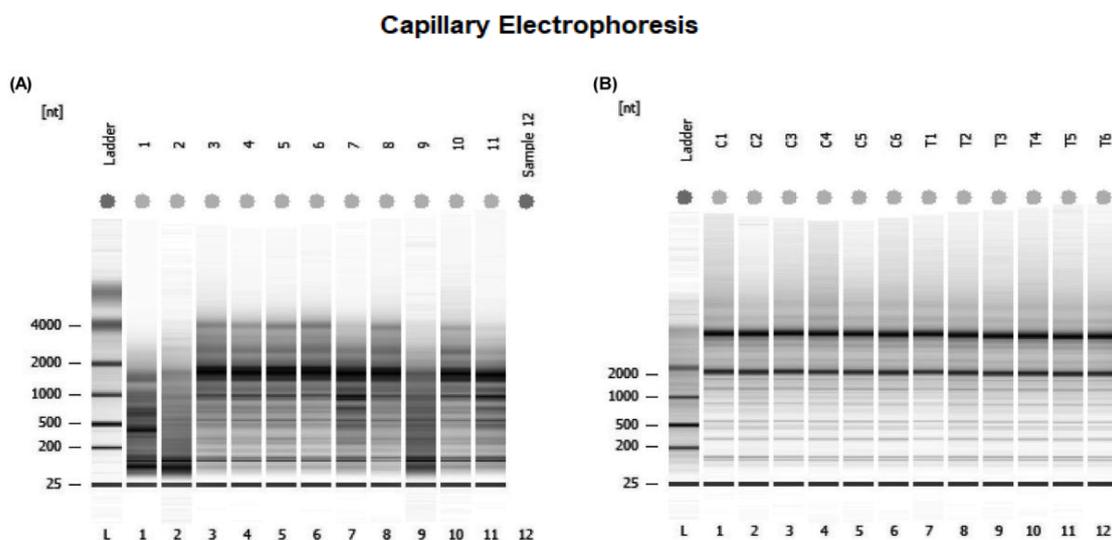


Fig. 2. Capillary Electrophoresis of RNA samples: (A) *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* (samples 1 to 11);(B) *TRIZOL*® and *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit (Qiagen®)* (samples 1 to 12)

Results indicate that the adapted protocol, with steps from the classic *TRIZO*® method added to the commercial kit for RNA extraction from rat skeletal muscle, contributed to increasing the integrity and concentration of obtained RNA. *TRIZO*® incubation provided good tissue stabilization and efficient cellular lysis. Column kits showed efficiency in RNA precipitation and purification. The combined methodology, starting with a modified protocol and after the initial steps following manufacturers' instructions, yielded better quality RNA for sequencing.

Next Generation Sequencing technologies need high concentration and quality of extracted RNA. Therefore, specific studies for certain organisms or tissues may be limited, once they do not have a standardized RNA extraction protocol for diverse types of tissues and species. Manufacturers' protocols and published methodologies combined or adapted may improve gene expression analyses from RNA extraction results.

Electropherograms

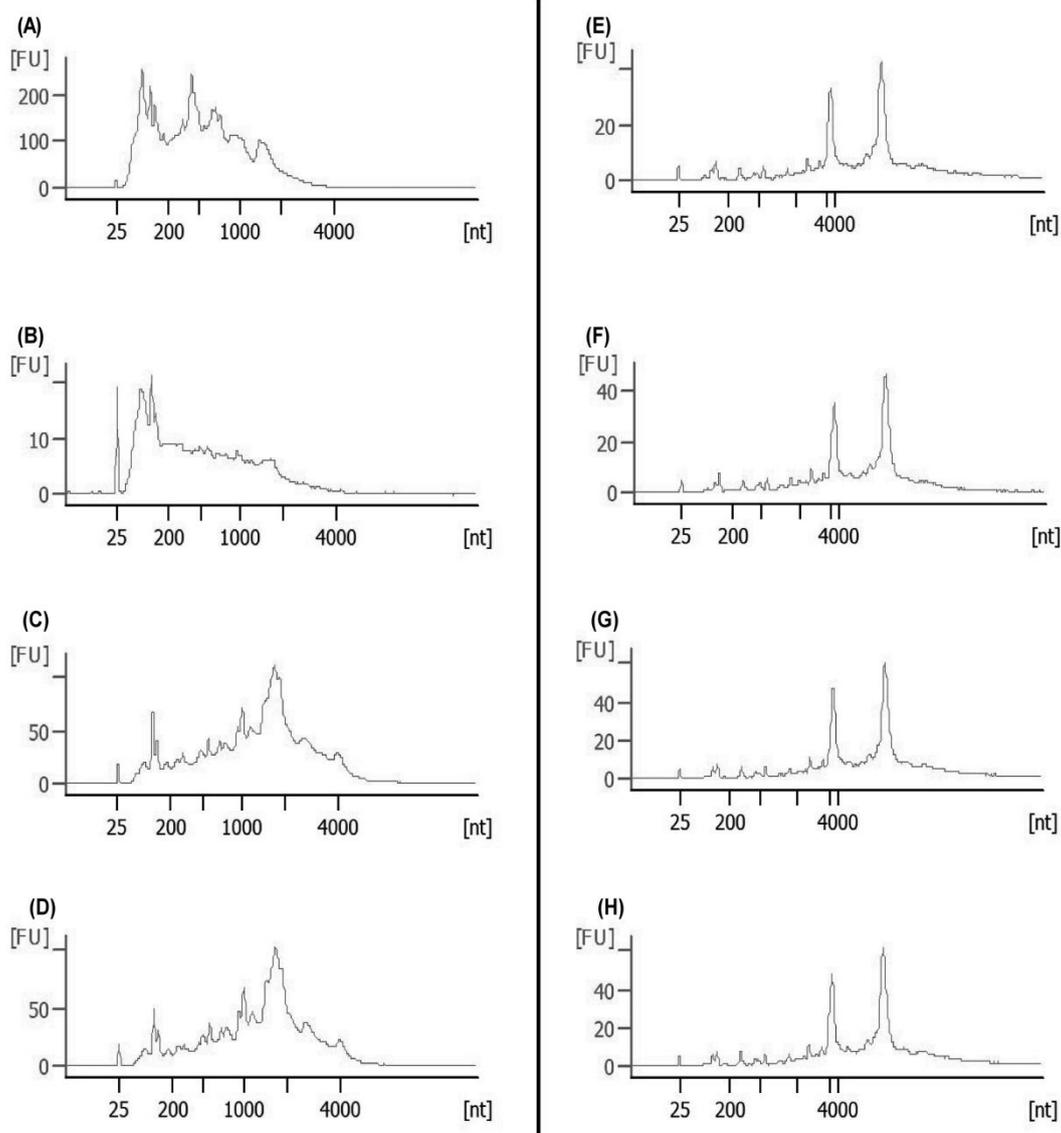


Fig. 3. Electropherograms. (A), (B), (C) and (D): RNA samples extracted with *TRIZO*® and *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit* (Qiagen®); (E), (F), (G) and (H): RNA samples extracted using only *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit* (Qiagen®)

4. CONCLUSION

A combination of the classic *TRIZo*[®] method and *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit* (Qiagen[®]) was efficient for RNA extraction from rat skeletal muscle. This methodology contributed to increased RNA integrity and concentration, ensuring sample approval for sequencing (RNA-seq). RNA extraction with *RNeasy Plus Universal Mini kit* (Qiagen[®]) did not present satisfactory results.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

All procedures of this study described were reviewed and approved by the Ethics for Animal Use Committee of the State University of Ceará – UECE, with the protocol number: 1592060/2014.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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