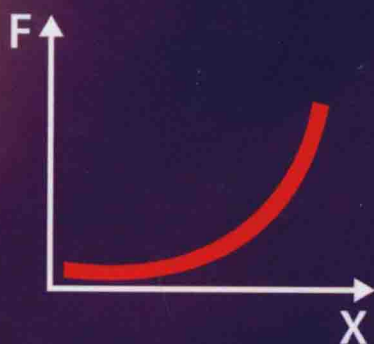


Cellular Analysis by Atomic Force Microscopy

Malgorzata Lekka



In the past two decades, cell biomechanics has become an emerging field owing to a strong link between mechanical properties and alterations observed in various pathologies. Despite substantial evidence showing the feasibility of atomic force microscopy (AFM) for identifying cells with distinct elastic and adhesive properties, the use of this technique as a complementary diagnostic method still remains controversial. This is primarily due to the relatively high complexity of the apparatus, experiment, and data analysis and the lack of a basis for the rapid verification of results.

The measurement of living cells by AFM is not an easy task, but this book facilitates AFM measurements and data analysis. It is a practical textbook that teaches in an easy-to-understand manner how to assess the mechanical characteristics of living, individual cells by AFM. Following a step-by-step approach, it introduces the methodology of measurements in both determination of elastic properties and quantification of adhesive properties.



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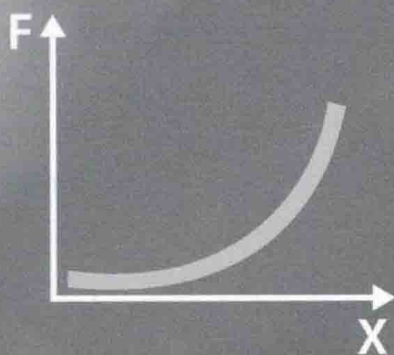
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Preface

In the recent two decades, there has been ample evidence that shows the capability of detecting pathologically changed cells basing on their mechanical properties. Such studies commenced to be attractive for biology and medicine with the development of techniques enabling the measurements at a single-cell level. One of such techniques is atomic force microscopy (AFM). Despite evidence showing the feasibility of AFM to identify cells with altered elastic and adhesive properties, the use of this technique as a complementary diagnostic method, for example, in cancer treatment, raises a lot of controversy. This is primarily due to the still high complexity of the apparatus, the complexity of the experiment and data analysis, and the lack of basis for the rapid verification of the results. In addition, there are also doubts whether a high sensitivity of the method (measuring the properties of a single cell) will be sufficient to validate the cancer cell identification at the same level as it is carried out in the analysis of aspirate composed of millions of cells at different stages of progression.

The monograph *Cellular Analysis by Atomic Force Microscopy* presents the use of the AFM as a tool for the characterization of cancerous cells by studies of cellular deformability and cells' adhesive properties. The text is organized as follows: after a brief introduction pointing out the significance of cellular deformability and adhesive properties, Chapter 2 shortly discusses the basic elements of the cell structure, on the knowledge level that facilitates understanding of the role and significance of mechanical properties in cancer. Chapter 3 is devoted to the AFM technique itself. It covers the description of the idea and the construction details of the atomic force microscope, introduces the force spectroscopy mode of its operation, and discusses the calibration issues. The next two chapters are focused on specific applications: Chapter 4 is devoted to cellular deformability measurements by the AFM and Chapter 5 introduces the technique for quantification of cellular adhesive properties. The monograph concludes with

Final Conclusions, briefly summarizing the use of atomic force microscopy in cancer research.

This monograph* is designed to be a kind of a practical textbook, presenting in a concise manner the methodology of assessing the mechanical characteristics of individual cells by AFM. It is addressed to those researchers who need some hints in cases when strange results came out from the AFM experiment. I hope that the monograph will help eliminate at least some questions.

I would like to dedicate this book to all people who helped me in different ways in my research. I am taking this moment to express my deep gratitude to all of them. In particular, I would like to mention Zbigniew Stachura (IFJ PAN), who was always ready to answer questions and give invaluable advice, and whose continuous support enabled to establish and organize the biological activity of the AFM laboratory; Piotr Laidler (CM UJ) for teaching me how to understand biological phenomena, for his help during the realization of my biological experiments, and, most important, for showing me the importance of my studies; Jan Styczeń (IFJ PAN) for his support and for encouraging me in my studies over many years during his heading of the former Department of Nuclear Spectroscopy. I would like to also acknowledge Joanna Wiltowska-Zuber (IFJ PAN) for her invaluable help with managing the AFM laboratory, especially during the time when I was writing this monograph. Finally, I would like to thank my whole family and especially my husband, Janusz, for continuous support.

The topics of this book were also conceived within the networking research activity of the EU COST Action on Applications of Atomic Force Microscopy to NanoMedicine and Life Sciences (AFM4NanoMed&Bio) and the NCN project number NCN DEC-2011/01/M/ST3/00711.

Malgorzata Lekka

*A large portion of the this book has been prepared on the basis of my IFJ PAN Report, 2001/AP entitled "The use of atomic force microscopy as a technique for the identification of cancerous cells."

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	xi
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Cell Ability to Deform	2
1.1.1 Monitoring Chitosan Effect on Cancerous Cells	6
1.1.2 Mechanosensitivity of Cancerous Cells	8
1.1.3 Stiffness as Cancer Grades	10
1.2 Cell Ability to Adhere	11
1.2.1 Specific Interactions in Living Cells	12
2. Cell Structure and Functions	23
2.1 Extracellular Matrix	25
2.1.1 The ECM Proteins	26
2.1.2 Proteoglycans	28
2.1.3 Other Components of the ECM—Hyaluronan	29
2.2 Cell Membrane	29
2.2.1 Membrane Structure	30
2.2.1.1 Lipids	31
2.2.1.2 Proteins	35
2.3 Surface Receptors	37
2.3.1 Integrins	38
2.3.2 Cadherins	39
2.3.3 Selectins	42
2.3.4 Immunoglobulin Family	43
2.3.5 Glycans	44
2.4 Cytoskeleton	46
2.4.1 Actin Filaments	47

2.4.2	Microtubules	48
2.4.3	Intermediate Filaments	49
3.	Principles of Atomic Force Microscopy	53
3.1	Principles of the AFM Operation	53
3.1.1	Cantilevers	55
3.1.2	Detection System of Cantilever Deflection	58
3.1.3	Feedback Loop	60
3.1.4	Scanning and Positioning System	60
3.2	Force Spectroscopy	67
3.2.1	Calibration	69
3.2.1.1	Photodetector sensitivity	69
3.2.1.2	Correction factor κ for PSD sensitivity	71
3.2.1.3	Spring constant	72
3.2.1.4	Force versus sample-distance conversion	81
3.2.1.5	Hydrodynamic drag	83
3.2.1.6	Force detection limit	85
3.2.1.7	Scanner linearization	87
3.2.1.8	Scanner velocity determination	89
4.	Quantification of Cellular Elasticity	95
4.1	Materials Properties and Theoretical Models	95
4.1.1	Basic Terms Used in Material Mechanics	95
4.1.2	Rheological Models	98
4.1.2.1	Mechanical behavior of soft materials	99
4.1.2.2	Soft glassy model	102
4.1.2.3	Tensegrity theory	104
4.1.2.4	Classification of material properties based on indentation	106
4.2	Single-Cell Deformability Measurements	107
4.2.1	Experimental Conditions for the AFM	110
4.2.2	Criteria for Force Curve Selection	113

4.2.3	Force versus Indentation Curves	116
4.2.4	Determination of Young's Modulus	117
4.2.4.1	The final Young's modulus calculations	119
4.2.5	Depth-Sensing Analysis	121
4.2.6	Stiffness Tomography	126
4.2.7	Distinct Factors Influencing Cell's Elasticity	127
4.2.7.1	Calibration-based discrepancy	128
4.2.7.2	Variability stemming from cell-related factors	129
4.2.7.3	The influence of the AFM experimental conditions	132
4.2.7.4	Discrepancies stemming from the Hertz contact mechanics theory	134
4.2.7.5	The contact point determination and data analysis	136
4.2.7.6	Substrate properties	138
4.2.7.7	Comparing properties of human bladder cancer cells	139
5.	Adhesive Properties Studied by AFM	149
5.1	Unbinding of Molecules: Theoretical Basis	150
5.1.1	Brief Introduction to Kramer's Theory	150
5.1.2	Force-Induced Single Bond Disruption	152
5.1.3	Hierarchic Crossing through the Energy Barriers	156
5.1.4	The Energy Barrier Height	158
5.1.5	Multiple Bond Rupture	159
5.1.5.1	Sequential bond rupture: the "zipper-like" model	159
5.1.5.2	Sequential bond rupture: the "parallel-like" model	161

5.1.6	Comparing Unbinding Properties of Two Single Complexes	163
5.1.7	Other Theoretical Models for Single Molecule Interactions	166
5.1.7.1	Dudko–Hummer–Szabo model	166
5.1.7.2	Friddle–Noy–De Yoreo model	167
5.2	AFM Measurements of Adhesive Properties	167
5.2.1	Attachment of Molecules to Desired Surfaces	169
5.2.1.1	AFM probe functionalization	169
5.2.1.2	Preparation of a cell probe	174
5.2.1.3	Cells preparation for the AFM measurements	176
5.2.2	Inhibition of Binding Site	176
5.2.3	The Unbinding of Molecular Complexes: Force Curves	178
5.2.4	Parameters Derived from a Single Force Curve	180
5.2.4.1	The pull-off force and force histogram	181
5.2.4.2	Relation between the unbinding force and the number of ruptured bonds	184
5.2.4.3	The rupture length and its histogram	186
5.2.4.4	The number of ruptured bonds	187
5.2.4.5	The unbinding probability	189
5.3	Single Molecule Interaction in Living Cells: A Case Study	190
5.3.1	Properties of N-Cadherin in Bladder Cancer Studied by AFM	190
5.3.1.1	Shape of the force curves for Ncad–GC4 complex	191
5.3.1.2	Unbinding force dependence on loading rate	192

5.3.1.3	Force histograms for Ncad-GC4 complex	193
5.3.1.4	Multiple unbinding in human bladder cells	195
5.3.1.5	Bell-Evans model parameters	197
5.3.1.6	Energy landscape reconstruction	198
5.3.1.7	Kinetics profiles	199
5.3.1.8	Specificity of the Ncadh-GC4 complex	200
5.3.1.9	Summary for Ncadh-CG4 complex	202
5.4	Living Cell as a Probe	203
6.	Conclusions	217
	<i>Index</i>	221

Chapter 1

Introduction

Cancer is a very complex disease, involving multiple molecular and cellular processes arising from a gradual accumulation of genetic changes in individual cells. The most apparent morphological change is visible during the transition from a benign tumor to metastatic tumors where cells alter from highly differentiated normal phenotypes to migratory and invasive ones. Around 90% of all cancer deaths are due to metastatic spread of primary tumors. The criteria utilized to detect cancerous cells have been mainly relying on biological and morphological description, additionally complemented by a variety of other techniques, including genetic, chemical, and immunological methods, applied in order to fine-tune diagnosis or therapy. Despite enormous efforts to develop better treatment protocols, our ability to cure solid tumors, such as those of the breast, prostate, cervix or colon, is still lacking sufficient detection methods [1].

The cells transformed oncogenically differ from normal ones in many ways, encompassing variations in any cellular aspects such as growth, differentiation, interactions between neighboring cells and/or with the extracellular matrix (ECM), cytoskeleton organization, and several others. Poor differentiation of the cytoskeleton can result in the larger deformability of cancerous cells. Low stiffness of cancer cells is related to a partial loss of actin filaments and/or microtubules, and therefore by lower density of

the cellular scaffold [2, 3]. Moreover, one of the key phenomena in metastasis includes adhesive interactions, maintained by distinct type of adhesion molecules present on a cell surface. Cancerous cell aptitude for invasion and migration (clinically interpreted as tumor aggressiveness) has been associated with poor differentiation of the cell and the altered adhesive interactions that characterize a vast majority of cancer cells.

It is obvious that novel techniques are in the limelight if they are able to bring more precise, local information about cancerous changes as early as possible. There are rather few methods capable to assess cell mechanical properties. Historically, the first technique was the micropipette aspiration [4, 5]. Other researchers have employed the magnetic bead rheology [6], microneedle probes [7], acoustic microscopes [8], and the manipulation of beads attached to cells with optical tweezers [9, 10]. Among these techniques, the atomic force microscopy (AFM) can detect malignant changes with a very high resolution, being applied either in imaging mode or as the technique providing information about the mechanical properties of living cells (i.e., their ability to deform and to adhere) in a quantitative manner. Its main advantage is the possibility to measure biological objects directly in their natural environment, such as buffer solutions or culture media.

Many publications in this area were devoted to the characterization of single cells' deformability and adhesiveness, presented in a broad context of biological targets, starting from cell motility, wound healing, muscle contraction or differentiation and ending up in characterization of various pathologies such as muscular dystrophies, blood diseases or cancers. Therefore, in this Chapter, the importance of cellular ability to deform and to adhere is presented with the focus on the AFM-related aspects in cancer studies.

1.1 Cell Ability to Deform

Within the past two decades, the cellular ability to deform has attracted great interest in the field of biology. This is because in human body, various cell types are continuously exposed to passive (stretch, compression) and/or active (contraction) deformations. The technological development of techniques, that