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Daugan

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[45] **Date of Patent: Jan. 12, 1999**

[54] **TETRACYCLIC DERIVATIVES; PROCESS OF PREPARATION AND USE**

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[30] **Foreign Application Priority Data**

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[51] **Int. Cl.**[6] **A01N 43/58**; A01N 43/42; C07D 241/36; C07D 471/00

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **514/249**; 514/250; 514/292; 544/343; 546/81; 546/85

[58] **Field of Search** 544/343; 514/249, 514/250, 292; 546/81, 85

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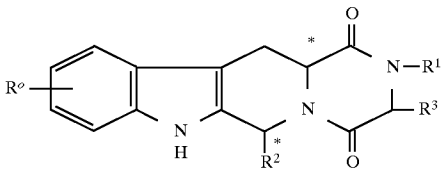
[57] **ABSTRACT**

A compound of formula (I)

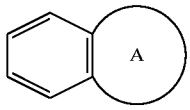


(I)

and salts and solvates thereof, in which:

R^0 represents hydrogen, halogen or C_{1-6}alkyl;

R^1 represents hydrogen, C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{2-6}alkenyl, C_{2-6}alkynyl, haloC_{1-6}alkyl, C_{3-8}cycloalkyl, C_{3-8}cycloalkylC_{1-3}alkyl, arylC_{1-3}alkyl or heteroarylC_{1-3}alkyl; R^2 represents an optionally substituted monocyclic aromatic ring selected from benzene, thiophene, furan and pyridine or an optionally substituted bicyclic ring



attached to the rest of the molecule via one of the benzene ring carbon atoms and wherein the fused ring A is a 5- or 6-membered ring which may be saturated or partially or fully unsaturated and comprises carbon atoms and optionally one or two heteroatoms selected from oxygen, sulphur and nitrogen; and

R^3 represents hydrogen or C_{1-3}alkyl, or R^1 and R^3 together represent a 3- or 4-membered alkyl or alkenyl chain.

A compound of formula (I) is a potent and selective inhibitor of cyclic guanosine 3', 5'-monophosphate specific phosphodiesterase (cGMP specific PDE) having a utility in a variety of therapeutic areas where such inhibition is beneficial, including the treatment of cardiovascular disorders.

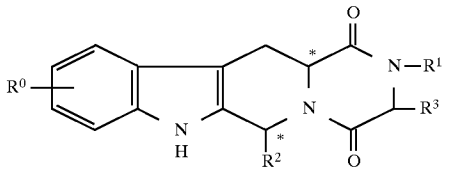
15 Claims, No Drawings

TETRACYCLIC DERIVATIVES; PROCESS OF PREPARATION AND USE

This is a 371 application of Pct/EP filed on Jan. 19, 1995.

This invention relates to a series of tetracyclic derivatives, to processes for their preparation, pharmaceutical compositions containing them, and their use as therapeutic agents. In particular, the invention relates to tetracyclic derivatives which are potent and selective inhibitors of cyclic guanosine 3',5'-monophosphate specific phosphodiesterase (cGMP specific PDE) having utility in a variety of therapeutic areas where such inhibition is thought to be beneficial, including the treatment of cardiovascular disorders.

Thus, according to a first aspect, the present invention provides compounds of formula (I)



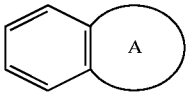
(I)

and salts and solvates (e.g. hydrates) thereof, in which:

R^0 represents hydrogen, halogen or C_{1-6}alkyl;

R^1 represents hydrogen, C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{2-6}alkenyl, C_{2-6}alkynyl, haloC_{1-6}alkyl, C_{3-8}cycloalkyl, C_{3-8}cycloalkylC_{1-3}alkyl, arylC_{1-3}alkyl or heteroarylC_{1-3}alkyl;

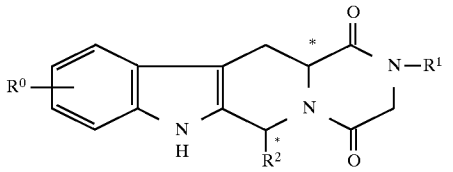
R^2 represents an optionally substituted monocyclic aromatic ring selected from benzene, thiophene, furan and pyridine or an optionally substituted bicyclic ring



attached to the rest of the molecule via one of the benzene ring carbon atoms and wherein the fused ring A is a 5- or 6-membered ring which may be saturated or partially or fully unsaturated and comprises carbon atoms and optionally one or two heteroatoms selected from oxygen, sulphur and nitrogen; and

R^3 represents hydrogen or C_{1-3}alkyl, or R^1 and R^3 together represent a 3- or 4- membered alkyl or alkenyl chain.

There is further provided by the present invention a subgroup of compounds of formula (I), the subgroup comprising compounds of formula (Ia)



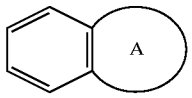
(Ia)

and salts and solvates (e.g. hydrates) thereof, in which:

R^0 represents hydrogen, halogen or C_{1-6} alkyl;

R^1 represents hydrogen, C_{1-6}alkyl, haloC_{1-6}alkyl, C_{3-8}cycloalkyl, C_{3-8}cycloalkylC_{1-3}alkyl, arylC_{1-3}alkyl or heteroarylC_{1-3}alkyl; and

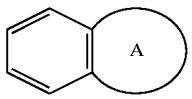
R^2 represents an optionally substituted monocyclic aromatic ring selected from benzene, thiophene, furan and pyridine or an optionally substituted bicyclic ring



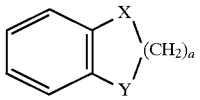
attached to the rest of the molecule via one of the benzene ring carbon atoms and wherein the fused ring A is a 5- or 6-membered ring which may be saturated or partially or fully unsaturated and comprises carbon atoms and optionally one or two heteroatoms selected from oxygen, sulphur and nitrogen.

Within R^1 above, the term "aryl" as part of an arylC_{1-3}alkyl group means phenyl or phenyl substituted by one or more (e.g. 1, 2 or 3) substituents. selected from halogen, C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{1-6}alkoxy and methylenedioxy. The term "heteroaryl" as part of a heteroarylC_{1-3}alkyl group means thienyl, furyl or pyridyl each optionally substituted by one or more (e.g. 1, 2 or 3) substituents selected from halogen, C_{1-6}alkyl and C_{1-6}alkoxy. The term "C_{3-8}cycloalkyl" as a group or part of a C_{3-8}cycloalkylC_{1-3}alkyl group means a monocyclic ring comprising three to eight carbon atoms. Examples of suitable cycloalkyl rings include the C_{3-6}cycloalkyl rings cyclopropyl, cyclobutyl, cyclopentyl and cyclohexyl.

Within R^2 above, optional benzene ring substituents are selected from one or more (e.g. 1; 2 or 3) atoms or groups comprising halogen, hydroxy, C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{1-6}alkoxy, $—CO_2R^b$, haloC_{1-6}alkyl, haloC_{1-6}alkoxy, cyano, nitro and NR^aR^b, where R^a and R^b are each hydrogen or C_{1-6}alkyl, or R^a may also represent C_{2-7}alkanoyl or C_{1-6}alkylsulphonyl. Optional substituents for the remaining ring systems are selected from one or more (e.g. 1, 2 or 3) atoms or groups comprising halogen, C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{1-6}alkoxy and arylC_{1-3}alkyl as defined above. The bicyclic ring



may, for example, represent naphthalene, a heterocycle such as benzoxazole, benzothiazole, benzisoxazole, benzimidazole, quinoline, indole, benzothiophene or benzofuran or



(where n is an integer 1 or 2 and X and Y may each represent CH_2, O, S or NH).

In the above definitions, the term "alkyl" as a group or part of a group means a straight chain or, where available, a branched chain alkyl moiety. For example, it may represent a C_{1-4}alkyl function as represented by methyl, ethyl, n-propyl, i-propyl, n-butyl, s-butyl and t-butyl. The term 'alkenyl' as used herein includes straight-chained and branched alkenyl groups, such as vinyl and allyl, groups. The term 'alkynyl' as used herein includes straight-chained and branched alkynyl groups, suitably acetylene. The term "halogen" herein means a fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom. The term "haloC_{1-6}alkyl" means an alkyl group

as defined above comprising one to six carbon atoms substituted at one or more carbon atoms by one or more (e.g. 1, 2 or 3) halogen atoms. Similarly, a haloC_{1-6}alkoxy group is a haloC_{1-6}alkyl group as defined above linked to the R^2 benzene ring via an oxygen atom. Examples of haloC_{1-6}alkyl groups include trifluoromethyl and 2,2,2-trifluoroethyl. An example of a haloC_{1-6}alkoxy group is trifluoromethoxy. The term "C_{2-7}alkanoyl" means a C_{1-6}alkylcarbonyl group where the C_{1-6}alkyl portion is as defined above. An example of a suitable C_{2-7}alkanoyl group is the C_2alkanoyl group acetyl.

It will be appreciated that when R^0 is a halogen atom or a C_{1-6}alkyl group this substituent may be sited at any available position on the phenyl portion of the tetracyclic ring. However, a particular site of attachment is the ring 10-position.

The compounds of formula (I) may contain two or more asymmetric centres and thus can exist as enantiomers or diastereoisomers. In particular, in formula (I) above two ring chiral centres are denoted with asterisks. It is to be understood that the invention includes both mixtures and separate individual isomers of the compounds of formula (I).

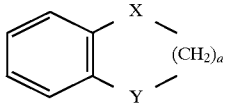
The compounds of formula (I) may also exist in tautomeric forms and the invention includes both mixtures and separate individual tautomers thereof.

The pharmaceutically acceptable salts of the compounds of formula (I) which contain a basic centre are acid addition salts formed with pharmaceutically acceptable acids. Examples include the hydrochloride, hydrobromide, sulphate or bisulphate, phosphate or hydrogen phosphate, acetate, benzoate, succinate, fumarate, maleate, lactate, citrate, tartrate, gluconate, methanesulphonate, benzenesulphonate and p-toluenesulphonate salts. Compounds of the formula (I) can also provide pharmaceutically acceptable metal salts, in particular alkali metal salts, with bases. Examples include the sodium and potassium salts.

A particular group of compounds of the invention are those compounds of formula (I) in which R^0 is hydrogen or halogen (e.g. fluorine), especially hydrogen.

Another particular group of compounds of the invention are those compounds of formula (I) in which R^1 represents hydrogen, C_{1-4}alkyl, haloC_{1-4}alkyl, C_{3-6}cycloalkyl, C_{3-6}cycloalkylmethyl, pyridylC_{1-3}alkyl, furylC_{1-3}alkyl or optionally substituted benzyl. Within this particular group of compounds, examples of C_{1-4}alkyl groups are methyl, ethyl, n-propyl, i-propyl and n-butyl. Examples of C_{3-6}cycloalkylmethyl groups are cyclopropylmethyl and cyclohexylmethyl. Examples of optionally substituted, benzyl groups include benzyl and halobenzyl (e.g. fluorobenzyl).

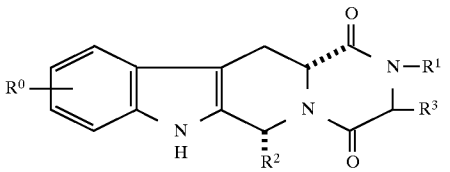
A further particular group of compounds of the invention are those compounds of formula (I) in which R^2 represents an optionally substituted benzene, thiophene, furan, pyridine or naphthalene ring or an optionally substituted bicyclic ring



(where n is 1 or 2 and X and Y are each CH_2 or O). Within this particular group of compounds, examples of substituted benzene groups are benzene substituted by one of halogen (e.g. chlorine), hydroxy, C_{1-3}alkyl (e.g. methyl, ethyl or i-propyl), C_{1-3}alkoxy (e.g. methoxy or ethoxy), $—CO_2R^b$, halomethyl (e.g. trifluoromethyl), halomethoxy (e.g. trifluoromethoxy), cyano, nitro or NR^aR^b where R^a and R^b are each hydrogen or methyl or R^a is acetyl; or benzene substituted by dihalo (e.g. dichloro) or by C_{1-3}alkoxy (e.g. methoxy) and one of halogen (e.g. chlorine) and hydroxy. An example of a substituted thiophene ring is a halo (e.g. bromo) substituent thiophene ring.

A still further particular group of compounds of formula I are those wherein R^3 represents hydrogen or R^1 and R^3 together represent a 3-membered alkyl chain.

A preferred group of compounds of the invention are the cis isomers of formula (I) represented by formula (Ib)



(Ib)

and mixtures thereof with their cis optical enantiomers, including racemic mixtures, and salts and solvates (e.g. hydrates) of these compounds in which R^0 is hydrogen or halogen (e.g. fluorine), especially hydrogen and R^1, R^2 and R^3 are as defined previously.

The single isomers represented by formula (Ib), i.e. the 6R, 12aR isomers, are particularly preferred.

Within the above definitions R^1 may preferably represent C_{1-4}alkyl (e.g. methyl, ethyl, i-propyl and n-butyl), C_{3-6}cycloalkyl (e.g. cyclopentyl) or C_{3-6}cycloalkylmethyl (e.g. cyclopropylmethyl).

R^2 may preferably represent a substituted benzene ring such as benzene substituted by C_{1-3}alkoxy (e.g. methoxy) or by C_{1-3}alkoxy (e.g. methoxy) and halogen (e.g. chlorine), particularly 4-methoxyphenyl or 3-chloro4-methoxyphenyl, or R^2 may preferably represent 3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl.

It is to be understood that the present invention covers all appropriate combinations of particular and preferred groupings hereinabove.

Particular individual compounds of the invention include:

Cis-2,3,6,7,12,12a-hexahydro-2-(4-pyridylmethyl)-6-3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl)-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b]indole-1,4-dione;

Cis-2,3,6,7,12,12a-hexahydro6-(2,3-dihydrobenzo[b]furan-5-yl)-2-methyl-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4b]indole-1,4-dione;

Cis-2,3,6,7,12,12a-hexahydro-6-(5-bromo-2-thienyl)-2-methyl-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b]indole-1,4-dione;

Cis-2,3,6,7,12,12a-hexahydro-2-butyl-6-(4-methylphenyl)-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b]indole-1,4-dione;

(6R,12aR)-2,3,6,7,12,12a-Hexahydro-2-isopropyl-6-(3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl)-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b]indole-1,4-dione;

(6R,12aR)-2,3,6,7,12,12a-Hexahydro-2-cyclopentyl-6-(3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl)-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b]indole-1,4-dione;

(6R,12aR)-2,3,6,7,12,12a-Hexahydro-2-cyclopropylmethyl-6-(4-methoxyphenyl)-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b]indole-1,4-dione;

(6R,12aR)-2,3,6,7,12,12a-Hexahydro-6-(3-chloro4-methoxyphenyl)-2-methyl-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b]indole-1,4-dione;

(6R,12aR)-2,3,6,7,12,12a-Hexahydro-2-methyl-6-(3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl)-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b]indole-1,4-dione;

(6R,12aR)-2,3,6,7,12,12a-Hexahydro-6-(3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl)-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b]indole-1,4-dione;

(5aR,12R,14aS)-1,2,3,5,6,11,12,14a-Octahydro-12-(3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl)-pyrazino[1",2":4',5']pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b]indole-5-1,4-dione;

and physiologically acceptable salts and solvates (e.g. hydrates) thereof.

A specific compound of the invention is:

(6R,12aR)-2,3,6,7,12,12a-hexahydro-2-methyl-6-(3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl)-pyrazino[2',1':6,1]pyrido[3,4-b] indole-1,4-dione;

and physiologically acceptable salts and solvates (e.g. hydrates) thereof.

It has been shown that compounds of the present invention are potent and selective inhibitors of cGMP specific PDE. Thus, compounds of formula (I) are of interest for use in therapy, specifically for the treatment of a variety of conditions where inhibition of cGMP specific PDE is thought to be beneficial.

As a consequence of the selective PDE V inhibition exhibited by compounds of the present invention, cGMP levels are elevated, which in turn can give rise to beneficial anti-platelet, anti-neutrophil, anti-vasospastic, vasodilatory, natriuretic and diuretic activities as well as potentiation of the effects of endothelium-derived relaxing factor (EDRF), nitrovasodilators, atrial natriuretic factor (ANF), brain natriuretic peptide (BNP), C-type natriuretic peptide (CNP) and endothelium-dependent relaxing agents such as bradykinin, acetylcholine and 5-HT_1. The compounds of formula (I) therefore have utility in the treatment of a number of disorders, including stable, unstable and variant (Prinzmetal) angina, hypertension, pulmonary hypertension, congestive heart failure, renal failure, atherosclerosis, conditions of reduced blood vessel patency (e.g. post-percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty), peripheral vascular disease, vascular disorders such as Raynaud's disease, inflammatory diseases, stroke, bronchitis, chronic asthma, allergic asthma, allergic rhinitis, glaucoma and diseases characterised by disorders of gut motility (e.g. irritable bowel syndrome).

It will be appreciated that references herein to treatment extend to prophylaxis as well as treatment of established conditions.

It will also be appreciated that 'a compound of formula (I),' or a physiologically acceptable salt or solvate thereof can be administered as the raw compound, or as a pharmaceutical composition containing either entity.

There is thus provided as a further aspect of the invention a compound of formula (I) for use in the treatment of stable, unstable and variant (Prinzmetal) angina, hypertension, pulmonary hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, congestive heart failure, renal failure, atherosclerosis, conditions of reduced blood vessel patency, (e.g. post-PTCA), peripheral vascular disease, vascular disorders such as Raynaud's disease, inflammatory diseases, stroke, bronchitis, chronic asthma, allergic asthma, allergic rhinitis, glaucoma or diseases characterised by disorders of gut motility (e.g. IBS).

According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided the use of a compound of formula (I) for the manufacture of a medicament for the treatment of stable, unstable and variant (Prinzmetal) angina, hypertension, pulmonary hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, congestive heart failure, renal failure, atherosclerosis, conditions of reduced blood vessel patency, (e.g. post-PTCA), peripheral vascular disease, vascular disorders such as Raynaud's disease, inflammatory diseases, stroke, bronchitis, chronic asthma, allergic asthma, allergic rhinitis, glaucoma or diseases characterised by disorders of gut motility (e.g. IBS).

In a further aspect, the invention provides a method of treating stable, unstable and variant (Prinzmetal) angina, hypertension, pulmonary hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, congestive heart failure, renal failure, atherosclerosis, conditions of reduced blood vessel patency, (e.g. post-PTCA), peripheral vascular disease, vascular disorders such as Raynaud's disease, inflammatory diseases, stroke, bronchitis, chronic asthma, allergic, asthma, allergic rhinitis, glaucoma or diseases characterised by disorders of gut motility (e.g. IBS) in a human or non-human animal body which comprises administering to said body a therapeutically effective amount of a compound with formula (I).

Compounds of the invention may be administered by any suitable route, for example by oral, buccal, sub-lingual, rectal, vaginal, nasal, topical or parenteral (including intravenous, intramuscular, subcutaneous and intracoronary) administration. Oral administration is generally preferred.

For administration to man in the curative or prophylactic treatment of the disorders identified above, oral dosages of a compound of formula (I) will generally be in the range of from 0.5800 mg daily for an average adult patient (70 kg). Thus for a typical adult patient, individual tablets or capsules contain from 0.2–400 mg of active compound, in a suitable pharmaceutically acceptable vehicle or carrier, for administration in single or multiple doses, once or several times per day. Dosages for intravenous, buccal or sublingual administration will typically be within the range of from 0.1–400 mg per single dose as required. In practice the physician will determine the actual dosing regimen which will be most suitable for an individual patient and it will vary with the age, weight and response of the particular patient. The above dosages are exemplary of the average case but there can be individual instances in which higher or lower dosage ranges may be merited, and such are within the scope of this invention.

For human use, a compound of the formula (I) can be administered alone, but will generally be administered in admixture with a pharmaceutical carrier selected with regard to the intended route of administration and standard pharmaceutical practice. For example, the compound may be administered orally, buccally or sublingually, in the form of tablets containing excipients such as starch or lactose, or in capsules or ovules either alone or in admixture with excipients, or in the form of elixirs or suspensions containing flavouring or colouring agents. Such liquid preparations may be prepared with pharmaceutically acceptable additives such as suspending agents (e.g. methylcellulose, a semi-synthetic glyceride such as witepsol or mixtures of glycerides such as a mixture of apricot kernel oil and PEG-6 esters or mixtures of PEG-8 and caprylictcapric glycerides). A compound may also be injected parenterally, for example intravenously, intramuscularly, subcutaneously or intracoronarily. For parenteral administration, the compound is best used in the form of a sterile aqueous solution which may contain other substances, for example salts, or monosaccharides such as mannitol or glucose, to make the solution isotonic with blood.

Thus, the invention provides in a further aspect a pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound of the formula (I) together with a pharmaceutically acceptable diluent or carrier therefor.

There is further provided by the present invention a process of preparing a pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound of formula (I), which process comprises mixing a compound of formula (I) together with a pharmaceutically acceptable diluent or carrier therefor.

A compound of formula (I) may also be used in combination with other therapeutic agents which may be useful in the treatment of the above-mentioned disease states. The

invention thus provides, in another aspect, a combination of a compound of formula (I) together with another therapeutically active agent.

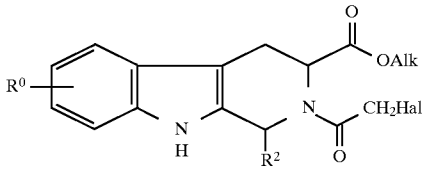
The combination referred to above may conveniently be presented for use in the form of a pharmaceutical formulation and thus pharmaceutical compositions comprising a combination as defined above together with a pharmaceutically acceptable diluent or carrier comprise a further aspect of the invention.

The individual components of such a combination may also be administered either sequentially or simultaneously in separate pharmaceutical formulations.

Appropriate doses of known therapeutic agents for use in combination with a compound of formula (I) will be readily appreciated by those skilled in the art.

Compounds of formula (I) may be prepared by any suitable method known in the art or by the following processes which form part of the present invention. In the methods below R^0, R^1 and R^2 are as defined in formula (I) above unless otherwise indicated.

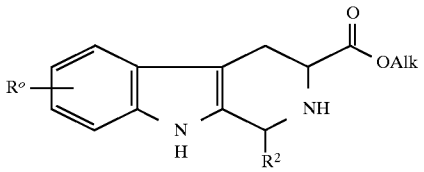
Thus, a process (A) for preparing a compound of formula (I) wherein R^3 represents hydrogen comprises treating a compound of formula (II)



(II)

(in which Alk represents C_{1-6}alkyl, e.g. methyl or ethyl and Hal is a halogen atom, e.g. chlorine) with a primary amine R^1NH_2 in a suitable solvent such as an alcohol (e.g. methanol or ethanol) or a mixture of solvents, conveniently at a temperature of from 20° C. to reflux (e.g. at about 50° C.).

A compound of formula (II) may conveniently be prepared by treating a compound of formula (III)



(III)

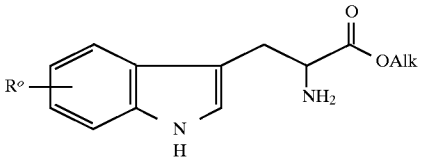
with a haloacetyl halide (e.g. chloroacetyl chloride) in a suitable solvent such as a halogenated hydrocarbon (e.g. trichloromethane or dichloromethane), or an ether (e.g. tetrahydrofuran), preferably in the presence of a base such as an organic amine (e.g. a trialkylamine such as triethylamine) or an alkali metal carbonate or bicarbonate (e.g. $NaHCO_3$). The reaction may conveniently be effected at a temperature of from −20° C. to +20° C. (e.g. at about 0° C.).

A compound of formula (I) may also be prepared from a compound of formula (III) in a two-step procedure via a compound of formula (II) isolated without purification.

Compounds of formula (I) may be prepared as individual enantiomers in two steps from the appropriate enantiomer of formula (III) or as mixtures (e.g. racemates) of either pairs of cis or trans isomers from the corresponding mixtures of either pairs of cis or trans isomers of formula (III).

Individual enantiomers of the compounds of the invention may be prepared from racemates by resolution using methods known in the art for the separation of racemic mixtures into their constituent enantiomers, for example using HPLC (high performance liquid chromatography) on a chiral column such as Hypersil naphthylurea.

A compound of formula (III) may conveniently be prepared from a tryptophan alkyl ester of formula (IV)



(IV)

(where Alk is as previously defined) or a salt thereof (e.g. the hydrochloride salt) according to either of the following procedures (a) and (b). Procedure (b) is only suitable for preparing cis isomers of formula (III) and may be particularly suitable for preparing individual cis enantiomers of formula (III) from D- or L-tryptophan alkyl esters as appropriate.

Procedure (a)

This comprises a Pictet-Spengler cyclisation between a compound of formula (IV) and an aldehyde R^2CHO. The reaction may conveniently be effected in a suitable solvent such as a halogenated hydrocarbon (e.g. dichloromethane) or an aromatic hydrocarbon (e.g. toluene) in the presence of an acid such as trifluoroacetic acid. The reaction may conveniently be carried out at a temperature of from −20° C. to reflux to provide a compound of formula (III) in one step. The reaction may also be carried out in a solvent such as an aromatic hydrocarbon (e.g. benzene or toluene) under reflux, optionally using a Dean-Stark apparatus to trap the water produced.

The reaction provides a mixture of cis and trans isomers which may be either individual enantiomers or racemates of pairs of cis or trans isomers depending upon whether racemic or enantiomerically pure tryptophan alkyl ester was used as the starting material. Individual cis or trans enantiomers may conveniently be separated from mixtures thereof by fractional crystallisation or by chromatography (e.g. flash column chromatography) using appropriate solvents and eluents. Similarly, pairs of cis and trans isomers may be separated by chromatography (e.g. flash column chromatography) using appropriate eluents. An optically pure trans isomer may also be converted to an optically pure cis isomer using suitable epimerisation procedures. One such procedure comprises treating the trans isomer or a mixture (e.g. 1:1 mixture) of cis and trans isomers with methanolic or aqueous hydrogen chloride at a temperature of from 0° C. to the refluxing temperature of the solution. The mixture may then be subjected to chromatography (e.g. flash column chromatography) to separate the resulting diastereoisomers, or in the procedure utilising aqueous hydrogen chloride the desired cis isomer precipitates out as the hydrochloride salt which may then be isolated by filtration.

Procedure (b)

This comprises a four-step procedure from a compound of formula (IV) or a salt thereof (e.g. the hydrochloride salt). The procedure is particularly suitable for preparing a 1R, 3R isomer of formula (III) from a D-tryptophan alkyl ester of formula (IV) or a salt thereof (e.g. the hydrochloride salt). Thus, a first step (i) comprises treating a compound of formula (IV) with an acid halide R^2COHal (where Hal is as previously defined) in the presence of a base, e.g. an organic base such as a trialkylamine (for example triethylamine), to provide a compound of formula (V)

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