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1 **Biomechanical properties of human T cells in the process of activation based on**
2 **diametric compression by micromanipulation**

3

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5

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25 **Abstract**

26

27 A crucial step in enabling adoptive T cell therapy is the isolation of antigen (Ag)-specific
28 CD8⁺ T lymphocytes. Mechanical changes that accompany CD8⁺ T lymphocyte
29 activation and migration from circulating blood across endothelial cells into target tissue,
30 may be used as parameters for microfluidic sorting of activated CD8⁺ T cells. CD8⁺ T
31 cells were activated in vitro using anti-CD3 for a total of 4 days, and samples of cells
32 were mechanically tested on day 0 prior to activation and on day 2 and 4 post-activation
33 using a micromanipulation technique. The diameter of activated CD8⁺ T cells was
34 significantly larger than resting cells suggesting that activation was accompanied by an
35 increase in cell volume. While the Young's modulus value as determined by the force
36 versus displacement data up to a nominal deformation of 10% decreased after
37 activation, this may be due to the activation causing a weakening of the cell membrane
38 and cytoskeleton. However, nominal rupture tension determined by compressing single
39 cells to large deformations until rupture, decreased from day 0 to day 2, and then
40 recovered on day 4 post-activation. This may be related to the mechanical properties of
41 the cell nucleus. These novel data show unique biomechanical changes of activated
42 CD8⁺ T cells which may be further exploited for the development of new microfluidic cell
43 separation systems.

44

45 **Key words** T lymphocytes; Activation; Cell Separation; Mechanics; Micromanipulation

46

47

48 **Introduction**

49 Cell-based therapies have witnessed tremendous expansion in the past two decades,
50 from curative haematopoietic stem cell transplantation for leukemias to adoptive antigen
51 (Ag)-specific CD8⁺ T cell immunotherapies of viral infections and cancers. CD8⁺ T cells
52 for adoptive immunotherapies can be generated through *in vitro* expansion or
53 immunomagnetic isolation of pre-existing Ag-specific lymphocytes from blood or tumor-
54 infiltrating lymphocytes. The former method has the drawback of driving T cells to
55 exhaustion through repeated cycles of *in vitro* antigen stimulation and expansion, which
56 ultimately impacts on their efficacy to eliminate tumour or infected cells [1]. This is in
57 contrast to direct *ex vivo* selection which requires minimal manipulation and thus retains
58 the proliferative capacity and therapeutic functionality of the lymphocytes.

59

60 For this reason, immunomagnetic selection of fresh *ex vivo* cells has been adopted
61 in recent clinical trials where a small number of pre-existing circulating virus-specific
62 CD8⁺ T cells can be directly selected from donor blood to target viral infections and
63 tumours in stem cell transplant patients [2-4]. This method has been used to treat
64 cytomegalovirus, Epstein–Barr virus and adenovirus infections, and also lymphomas
65 such as post-transplant lymphoproliferative disorder. Immunomagnetic selection
66 systems utilize antibody or ligand-recognition of unique phenotypic markers on the cell
67 surface to separate cells. With the recent breakthrough in utilising T cells expressing
68 the CD19-specific chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) for the treatment of B cell acute
69 lymphoblastic leukaemia [5], selection of Ag-specific cells could also become a key
70 purification step in the *in vitro* expansion of immunoreceptor engineered cells.

71 However, there are limitations to immunomagnetic methods with regards to the loss of
72 low frequency cells through multiple processing steps such as washes and sub-optimal
73 purity and recovery from the selection itself, and not least, the costs of the specialized
74 GMP reagents. An alternate approach to immunomagnetic isolation, is to select cells
75 using clinical grade fluorescence-activated cell sorting (FACS) [6-8]. Though highly
76 sensitive and specific, FACS sorting of rare cells (<1%) to therapeutic quantities, is time
77 consuming and associated with the risk of reduced cell viability [9].

78

79 The biophysical properties of cells also allow different cell types to be discriminated. For
80 example, in flow cytometry the cell size determines light scattering properties, and in
81 apheresis, centrifugal forces separate blood into its constituent cellular components
82 based on physical properties. An emerging technique based on microfluidic separation
83 utilizes the biophysical properties of live cells by applying different hydrodynamic forces
84 on the target particles or by utilizing the natural biomechanical variation of the cells to
85 guide them into different flow paths [10]. Studies reporting cell sorting based on size or
86 stiffness demonstrate the potential applications of the microfluidic cell sorting technique
87 for separating tumor cells, erythrocytes as well as activated Ag-specific T cells [11-14].
88 It should therefore be possible to use natural or induced variations in biomechanical
89 properties to separate activated lymphocytes from non-activated lymphocytes and other
90 cell types.

91

92 However, before we can utilize microfluidic assays to separate lymphocytes for clinical
93 therapeutic purposes, a more precise study of their biomechanical properties is needed.

94 Parameters such as cell rigidity and deformability can be measured using several
95 techniques including atomic force microscopy (AFM), micromanipulation, magnetic
96 tweezers, micropipette aspiration, optical tweezers, shear flow, cell stretching and
97 microelectromechanical systems [15]. Powerful techniques such as AFM have
98 previously been used to measure the elastic properties of lymphocytes, but only deform
99 a portion of the cell surface (nano-indentation) and so do not measure the mechanical
100 properties of the whole cell [16]. However, circulating lymphocytes experience
101 significant repeated hydrodynamic and mechanical stresses in blood vessels, which are
102 applied along their entirety leading to large deformations in the microcirculation. These
103 are particularly seen following lymphocyte activation when they transmigrate out of
104 blood vessels into the surrounding interstitial tissue. Therefore, it is important to
105 understand the mechanical properties of lymphocytes under large, as well as small,
106 deformations. Of the techniques mentioned, micromanipulation, based on the
107 compression of single cells between two parallel surfaces, can be used to generate
108 small to large deformations of cells, including deformations where they rupture, which is
109 appropriate for the purpose [17].

110

111 We report the first study that uses the micromanipulation technique to measure the
112 temporal biomechanical changes of CD8⁺ T cells following Ag-induced stimulation.
113 Moreover, the studies were conducted on live cells rather than fixed cells. We have
114 determined mechanical strength parameters such as rupture force, rupture deformation
115 and nominal rupture stress/tension for resting (unactivated) and activated T cells
116 compressed to rupture. We have also modeled the compression data of T cells

117 corresponding to smaller deformations to obtain a measure of the elasticity, defined as
118 the Young's modulus. This work provides important new data on the biomechanics of
119 activated CD8⁺ T cells which can be used for future development of microfluidic
120 separation of cells that have selectively responded to specific antigen stimulation.

121

122 **Materials and Methods**

123

124 **Isolation, culture and *in vitro* activation of T lymphocytes**

125

126 Peripheral blood was collected from three healthy drug-free adult donors after informed
127 consent. Peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) were isolated by Ficoll separation.
128 The contaminating erythrocytes were removed by osmotic lysis. Briefly, 1 ml of distilled
129 water was added to the cell pellet. After 30s, 14 ml of RPMI 1640 (Sigma-Aldrich, St.
130 Louis, MO, USA) was added, and the cells were washed once. Untouched CD8⁺ T
131 lymphocytes were isolated by negative immunomagnetic selection, using CD8⁺ T Cell
132 Isolation Kit and LS columns (Miltenyi Biotec, Bergisch Gladbach, Germany), following
133 the manufacturer's instructions. Cell purity was checked using a FacsCanto II flow
134 cytometer (BD, San Jose, CA, USA) and in all the cases the CD8⁺ T lymphocyte purity
135 was above 90%. Enriched CD8⁺ T lymphocytes were resuspended in RPMI 1640 plus
136 10% foetal calf serum (Sigma-Aldrich, UK). Some cells were activated by culturing in
137 the presence of 30 ng/mL anti-CD3 antibody OKT3 (BioLegend, San Diego, CA, USA)
138 plus 600 U/mL IL-2 (Chiron, Emeryville, USA). For control samples, the non-activated

139 CD8⁺ T cells were cultured in the medium for up to 4 days, and they were mechanically
140 tested on Day 0, Day 2 and Day 4.

141

142 **Micromanipulation technique**

143

144 The mechanical properties of resting and activated CD8⁺ T lymphocytes were measured
145 either immediately after harvesting (day 0) or tested 2 days or 4 days post-activation.
146 Cells were diluted with phosphate buffered saline to reduce cell density in suspension
147 and mechanical testing was completed within 3 hours using a well established
148 micromanipulation technique, the principle and details of which have been previously
149 described [17, 18]. Briefly, the technique involves compression of a single cell between
150 the flat end of a probe and the bottom of a glass chamber containing the culture
151 medium (**Figure 1**). A microscopic image of a single mammalian cell under
152 compression is presented in [18]. Suspended single cells were allowed to settle to the
153 bottom of the chamber, and images were captured with a side-view high-speed digital
154 camera. A probe with a 25 µm diameter was driven down by a stepping motor towards
155 the single cells. The probe was connected to a force transducer (406A-ER, Aurora
156 Scientific Inc. Canada) in order to collect the data of instantaneous force imposed on
157 single cells at a frequency of 50 Hz.

158

159 **Determination of activation-related changes in cell size**

160

161 The diameter of CD8⁺ T cells was directly measured from their images on a TV monitor
162 which was connected with the side view camera on the micromanipulation rig. The
163 magnification of the camera had been pre-calibrated, and the measurement of cell
164 diameter was accurate to $\pm 0.1\mu\text{m}$. The cell size was also evaluated by flow cytometry.
165 The enriched CD8⁺ T lymphocytes were stained with anti CD3/PE and 7AAD (BD). The
166 forward scatter (FSC-A) value of the 7AAD-/CD3+ cells was recorded using the
167 FacsCanto II flow cytometer (BD, San Jose, CA, USA).

168

169 **Determination of rupture force, rupture deformation, nominal rupture stress and**
170 **nominal rupture tension**

171

172 Single cells from each of the 3 donor samples were selected randomly and compressed
173 to large deformations until they ruptured using a probe at the speed of $2\mu\text{m/s}$. The
174 number of cells taken from each sample was 20 in order to give statistically
175 representative results. The force (μN) imposed on the cell was plotted against the
176 distance (μm) the probe moved towards the glass chamber (force vs displacement).
177 These graphs were then used to determine the mean rupture force and the percentage
178 (%) deformation at rupture for resting and activated cells. The % rupture deformation
179 was calculated as the ratio of the displacement value at rupture to the initial diameter of
180 the cell.

181

182 Nominal rupture stress (σ_R) was calculated as the ratio of the rupture force to the initial
183 cross-sectional area of the cell. Nominal rupture tension (T_R) was calculated as the

184 ratio of the rupture force to the initial diameter of the cell. These values provide a
185 comparable indication of the mechanical strength of cells and were calculated using
186 Equations (1) and (2) respectively, where F_R is the rupture force and d is the original
187 diameter of the single cell before compression.

188

$$189 \quad \sigma_R = \frac{4F_R}{\pi d^2} \quad (1)$$

$$190 \quad T_R = \frac{F_R}{d} \quad (2)$$

191

192 **Determination of the Young's Modulus**

193 Theoretically, the Hertz model is valid and commonly used to describe the relationship
194 between the imposed force and displacement for small deformations of an elastic
195 object, which has been successfully applied to determination of the Young's Modulus of
196 different particles including cells when compressed to a small deformation [19-21]. The
197 experimental force versus displacement data up to a nominal deformation of 10% were
198 fitted to Equation (3), similar to the approach described in [20] to determine the Young's
199 modulus of T cells, having presumed that the individual cells were homogeneous,
200 incompressible, elastic spheres and that there was no friction at the cell-substrate
201 interfaces.

202
$$F = \frac{E * \sqrt{2R}}{3(1-\nu^2)} \delta^{3/2} \quad (3)$$

203 where F is the applied force, E is the Young's modulus of the cell, R is the original cell
204 radius, ν is the Poisson's ratio of the cell and δ is the diametric compressive
205 displacement. From the model, there should be a linear relationship between F and $\delta^{3/2}$.
206 From the slope of the linear fitting, cell radius and Poisson ratio (assumed to be 0.5
207 since the cells are assumed to be incompressible), the value of Young's modulus was
208 determined - higher values indicate cells that are less deformable for a given applied
209 force and vice versa.

210

211 **Statistical analysis**

212 Values for the mechanical property parameters of the lymphocytes are presented as
213 mean \pm standard error. Paired Student t-tests were performed to determine significant
214 differences among the mechanical properties of different samples, with statistical
215 significance reported at the 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$).

216

217 **Results**

218 **Activation of CD8⁺ T lymphocytes increases their cell size**

219 The diameter of the single cells was measured from their images using the side-view
220 camera on the micromanipulator. The diameter of resting CD8+ T cells (day 0) was 6.1
221 $\pm 0.6 \mu\text{m}$. This increased significantly ($p < 0.05$) upon activation to $9.7 \pm 1.1 \mu\text{m}$ on day 2
222 post-activation and remained significantly ($p < 0.05$) greater on day 4 post-activation
223 when compared to resting cell values (**Figure 2a**). There was no significant difference
224 between the activated samples at day 2 and day 4 post-activation. Changes in cell
225 diameter are also shown by the data generated using flow cytometry (**Figure 2b**). The
226 FSC-A value of resting T cells are again significantly greater on day 2 ($p < 0.05$) and day
227 4 post-activation ($p < 0.05$) when compared to resting cell values. Interestingly, it was
228 noted that CD8+ T cells that had been activated and tested on day 2 post-activation
229 tended to 'stick' to the force transducer probe (image not shown), possibly indicating
230 some change in their adhesive nature in the early stages of activation.

231

232 **Compression curves of T cells to rupture**

233 Micromanipulation studies demonstrated that the individual CD8+ T cells tested in the
234 same sample were heterogeneous in their diameter and their force versus displacement
235 curves even for single cells of same diameter, however, all tested single cells showed
236 common characteristics in their compression curves. Typical curves showing the
237 relationship between the force and displacement during continuous diametrical
238 compression of a single lymphocyte to rupture at day 0, 2 and 4 days post-activation are
239 shown in **Figures 3a-c**. At point A, the probe started to touch the cell, and the resistant
240 force increased until point B where the cell ruptured. As a result of rupture, the force

241 decreased rapidly to point C, followed by curve CD where the force increased
242 continuously which represents the compression of cell debris until the probe touched
243 bottom of the glass chamber.

244

245 **Rupture force increases at 4 days post-activation**

246 The mean cell rupture force (μN) was determined from the force vs displacement curves
247 (y -axis value at point B). The rupture force was similar between the resting (day 0) and
248 activated cells at 2 days post-activation with mean values of $2.3 \pm 0.8 \mu\text{N}$ and 2.6 ± 0.9
249 μN respectively. However, when activated cells were analyzed at 4 days, the rupture
250 force significantly ($p < 0.05$) increased to $4.6 \pm 1.6 \mu\text{N}$ ($p < 0.05$) when compared to resting
251 cells (**Figure 4a**). The % rupture deformations of resting T lymphocytes and activated
252 lymphocytes at 2 and 4 days post-activation was not significantly different with mean
253 values of $78.3 \pm 1.3\%$, $79.7 \pm 1.6\%$ and $77.5 \pm 1.5\%$ obtained respectively (**Figure 4b**).

254

255 **Nominal rupture stress / tension decreases at 2 days post-activation**

256 The nominal rupture tension significantly ($p < 0.05$) decreased from $0.58 \pm 0.07 \text{ N/m}$ for
257 resting cells to $0.45 \pm 0.07 \text{ N/m}$ for cells at 2 days post-activation. This increased to
258 $0.62 \pm 0.10 \text{ N/m}$ on day 4 post-activation, a value not significantly different to resting
259 cells (**Figure 5**). A similar pattern was observed for nominal rupture stress (**Figure 5**).

260

261 **Young's modulus decreases in activated CD8⁺ T cells**

262 The Young's modulus was calculated from data obtained corresponding to small
263 deformations of T cells. Typical force versus displacement data with a linear fit based on
264 the Hertz model for cells at day 0, 2 and 4 days post-activation are shown in **Figures**
265 **6a-c**. Mean correlation coefficient values of 0.84 ± 0.05 , 0.85 ± 0.04 and 0.85 ± 0.06 were
266 obtained for resting cells and cells at 2 days post-activation and 4 days post-activation
267 respectively. The values of Young's modulus decreased significantly at both 2 days
268 post-activation ($p<0.05$) and 4 days post-activation ($p<0.05$) when compared to resting
269 cells at day 0 (**Figure 6d**). Actual calculated mean values for the Young's Modulus
270 were 58.0 ± 6.3 kPa, 43.7 ± 5.0 kPa, and 43.0 ± 6.3 kPa for T lymphocytes at day 0, day
271 2 post-activation and day 4 post-activation respectively. There was no significant
272 difference in the mean Young's modulus between T cells activated for 2 days and 4
273 days ($p>0.05$).

274 **No change in the mechanical properties of non-activated CD8+ T cells for up to 4** 275 **days**

276 The diameter of non-activated T cells did not change significantly upon incubation on
277 day 2 and day 4 when cultured in the medium (Figure 7a). There was also no significant
278 difference in the nominal rupture tension/stress between the resting samples, as shown
279 in Figure 7b.

280 **Discussion**

281 This novel study analysed the biomechanical properties of live lymphocytes undergoing
282 activation using a micromanipulation technique, without the need for fixing the cells.

283 Mammalian cells can show heterogeneity in their biomechanical property parameters,
 284 which is reflected in the standard error of the mean, and 3 donors should give
 285 reasonably representative results [22]. An increase in cell volume was observed as a
 286 result of activation at both 2 and 4 days post-activation. An initial fall in whole cell
 287 mechanical strength was observed at 2 days post-activation as indicated by the
 288 decreased rupture stress/tension values. Thereafter, although lymphocytes remained
 289 bigger, they regained their mechanical strength at day 4 post-activation, possibly
 290 reflecting the tailing off of activation and cellular recovery. However, the Young's
 291 modulus at small deformations (up to 10%), decreased at both 2 and 4 days post-
 292 activation suggesting the outer membrane became and remained flexible. This is the
 293 first time, as far as we are aware, that a micromanipulation technique has been used to
 294 directly analyze the biomechanical properties including rupture strength of human T
 295 cells at various time points post-activation. A summary of the data obtained are
 296 provided in Table 1 below.

297

298 Table 1: Change in the mechanical properties of human T cells at 2 days and 4 days
 299 post-activation

<i>All values compared to resting cells</i>	<i>Cell size</i>	<i>Rupture force</i>	<i>% rupture deformation</i>	<i>Rupture stress and tension</i>	<i>Young's modulus</i>
2 days post-activation	↑	–	–	↓	↓
4 days post-activation	↑	↑	–	–	↓

300

301
302 The rupture force for activated cells at 4 days post-activation was significantly greater
303 than resting and activated cells at 2 days post-activation. At first glance, this suggested
304 these cells were “stronger”, thus requiring the greater force to rupture. However, this
305 data did not take into account that the size of the cells was different for the three groups
306 which could explain their differing rupture force. Increases in CD8+ T cell size at similar
307 time points have previously been described microscopically post-OKT3 activation [23,
308 24] and occurs so that activated lymphocytes can duplicate their contents and divide. To
309 make comparisons between the mechanical properties of resting and activated cells,
310 nominal rupture stress and tension was calculated, which took into account the initial
311 cross-sectional area and diameter of the cells. It should be pointed out that the initial
312 cross-sectional area may be different from the real contact area between the force
313 probe or bottom substrate and cell at rupture, and the latter depends on the deformation
314 at rupture. As Figure 3b shows, the deformation at rupture did not change significantly
315 up to 4 days, the choice of using nominal rupture stress for comparison is still valid.
316 Once corrected for size, it became apparent that resting cells and cells at 4 days post-
317 activation were equally strong but more than cells at 2 days post-activation. Hence the
318 nominal stress/tension data indicated that CD8⁺ T lymphocytes became weaker early
319 during activation, while their mechanical strength was regained 4 days later. The higher
320 mechanical strength of the resting lymphocytes is essential functionally to maintain
321 sufficient integrity and thus protect them from damage by the significant hydrodynamic
322 and mechanical stresses exerted on them in the circulation [25]. Following stimulation
323 by Ag-presenting cells *in vivo*, CD8+ T cells move out of the circulation to the site of

324 infection where they acquire cytolytic effector activity against the pathogen. Therefore,
325 the initial weakened cellular strength observed in this study may functionally correlate
326 with, and enable, the transmigration of circulating lymphocytes between endothelial
327 cells into tissue. After this event, lymphocytes regain their original form and strength for
328 mediating effector activity and this functionally correlates with the higher nominal
329 rupture stress/tension observed at 4 day post-activation than day 2.

330

331 Previous studies have shown that the nucleus of T lymphocytes is approximately 5
332 times stiffer than the cytoplasm and occupies about 80% of the cell [26]. This
333 characteristic makes T lymphocytes different from other eukaryocyte cells
334 (mesenchymal cells, endothelial cells, etc.) in which the cell nucleus only occupies
335 ~10% of the cell volume [27]. When faced with higher compressive forces, the
336 lymphocyte cell nucleus therefore plays an increasingly significant role in resisting the
337 applied force for the whole cell. The reduced nominal rupture stress / tension at 2 days
338 post-activation indicates the cell nucleus, as well as the cell membrane and
339 cytoskeleton of these larger cells, may have become less strong. However, at the later
340 stage of activation (from day 2 to day 4), these structures regained their mechanical
341 strength while cell volume remained unchanged during this time.

342

343 At lower applied force, which compresses the cell to a smaller deformation, the
344 mechanical stiffness of T cells is governed primarily by the membrane which is
345 considered to be largely elastic. The Young's modulus is a measure of the intrinsic
346 stiffness of an elastic material undergoing recoverable compression. The Hertz model

347 was able to determine the Young's modulus of T lymphocytes at small deformations (up
348 to 10%), hence providing an indication of the elasticity of the outer region (cell
349 membrane and cytoskeleton) of the cell. Although the noise to signal ratio is relatively
350 big corresponding to small deformations, significant differences between samples were
351 still demonstrated from the values of Young's Modulus. The results indicate that
352 depolymerization or reorganization of cytoskeleton polymers probably happened when
353 the cells were activated, resulting in softness of the outer cortex during the 4 days. From
354 the rupture parameters at large deformation and the Young's Modulus calculated at
355 small deformation, we hypothesized that the cytoskeleton remained less stiff post-
356 activation, while the nucleus regained rigidity during the 4 days activation, which
357 remains to be validated in future. In the calculation of Young's modulus, for living cells,
358 the Poisson ratio is typically between 0.4 and 0.5, which means they are mostly or fully
359 incompressible [28]. A value of 0.5 is chosen here since the Poisson ratio of CD8⁺ T
360 lymphocytes has not been studied. Moreover, from the Hertz model (Eq. 3), it can be
361 seen that Poisson ratio (ν) has little effect on Young's modulus that increases by only
362 12% when ν varies from 0.4 to 0.5. For measuring the local Young's modulus of the cell
363 membrane with greater sensitivity, and its spatial distribution, AFM may be used which
364 can measure the forces in the order of pico-Newton to nano-Newton.

365

366 **Conclusions**

367

368 Using biomechanical properties in microfluidic cell sorting is increasingly recognized as
369 a marker-free way to separate biological cells. With the increasing interest in using
370 CD8+ T cells for therapeutic purposes, a separation method in which cells remain
371 unperturbed is important if they are to be transplanted after mechanical characterization
372 and sorting. This study utilizes the micromanipulation technique, a relatively
373 straightforward method to evaluate the mechanical property changes of activated CD8+
374 T lymphocytes. It has been found that there was no significant change in the
375 mechanical property parameters including cell size, nominal rupture stress and rupture
376 tension of non-activated CD8+ T cells in the culture medium for up to 4 days, which is in
377 clear contrast to those activated *in vitro* using anti-CD3. The activated cells showed a
378 significant increase in size and decrease in rupture stress/tension at day 2 but the
379 mechanical strength recovered at day 4. The data obtained on size and mechanical
380 properties post-activation may be utilized for developing microfluidic devices for their
381 separation. Furthermore, this work obtains complementary data for CD8+ T cells
382 circulating *in vivo* with respect to adapting to the mechanical barriers. The ability to
383 directly measure the biomechanical properties of live lymphocyte subsets not only
384 facilitates the development of a cell separation system based on defined physical
385 properties of cells but also provides a 'biomarker' for assessing the physical state of
386 lymphocytes, that could be used for assessing quality after bioprocessing of cells eg.
387 cryopreservation.

388

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390

391

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395

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472 **Figure Legends**

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474 **Figure 1.** Schematic diagram of the micromanipulation rig: (1) Force transducer; (2)
475 probe; (3) stepping motor; (4) computer with motor control and data acquisition system;
476 (5) Bottom-view microscope; (6) side-view microscope; (7) high-speed camera; (8)
477 single cells in phosphate buffered saline; (9) glass chamber.

478 **Figure 2.** Changes in the diameter of T lymphocytes was quantitated using (a) direct
479 measurement of a microscopy image generated using the side-view camera on the
480 micromanipulator and (b) flow cytometry. Both methods showed a similar significant
481 increase in cell diameter as a result of T cell activation. N=3 donor samples for each
482 group with 20 single cells, selected randomly from each sample. * $p < 0.05$ as determined
483 using a paired Student t-test.

484 **Figure 3.** Typical force-displacement curves obtained at a compression speed of $2\mu\text{m/s}$
485 for T cells to rupture on (a) day 0 prior to activation (resting cells) (b) day 2 post-
486 activation and (c) day 4 post-activation. At point A, the probe touched the cell and the
487 resistant force increased until point B where the cell ruptured. Rupture resulted in the
488 force decreasing rapidly to point C, followed by curve CD where force increased until
489 the probe touched bottom of the glass chamber. N=3 donor samples for each group
490 with 20 single cells, selected randomly from each sample. * $p < 0.05$ as determined using
491 a paired Student t-test.

492 **Figure 4.** The (a) mean rupture force and (b) mean rupture deformation of T cells on (a)
493 day 0 prior to activation (resting cells) (b) day 2 post-activation and (c) day 4 post-
494 activation. The force required to rupture cells was larger for activated cells at 4 days
495 post-activation. All cells were ruptured when they reached a % deformation close to
496 80%. N=3 donor samples for each group with 20 single cells, selected randomly from
497 each sample. *p<0.05 as determined using a paired Student t-test.

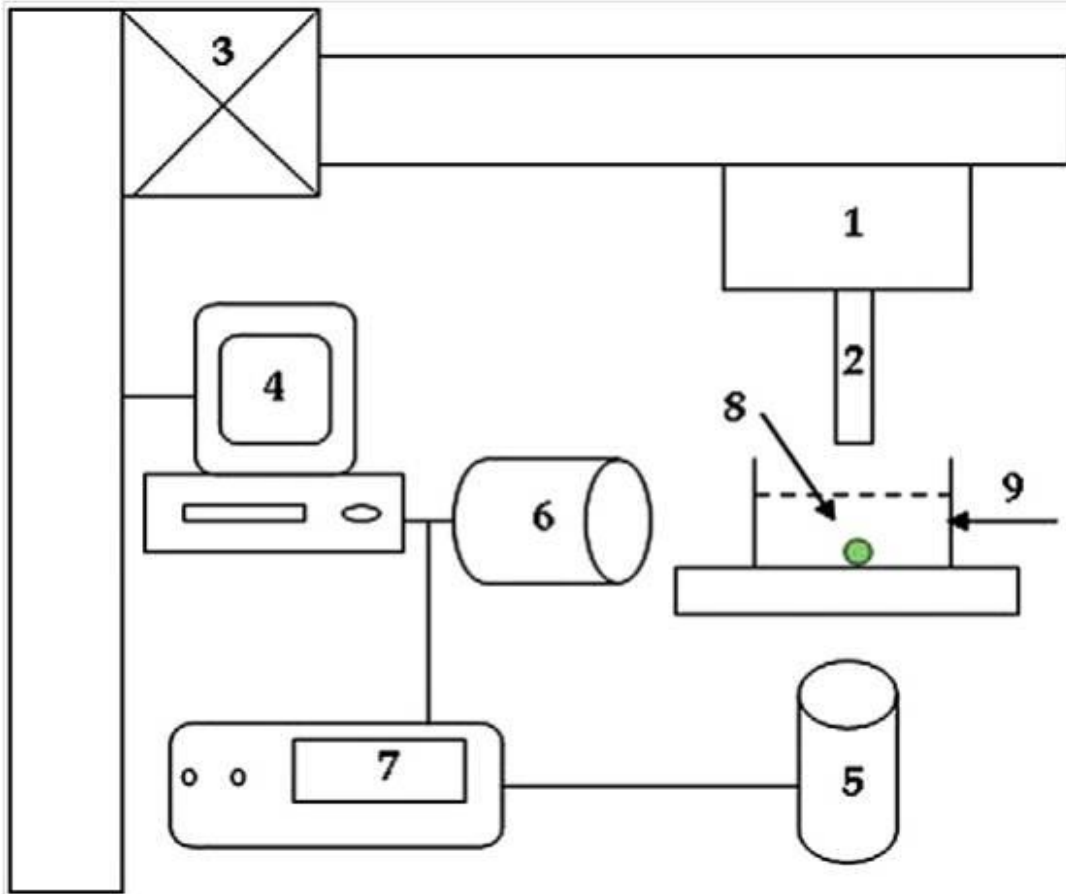
498 **Figure 5.** The nominal rupture tension and nominal rupture stress of T cells on (a) day 0
499 prior to activation (resting cells) (b) day 2 post-activation and (c) day 4 post-activation.
500 Both values significantly decreased for cells at 2 days post-activation. N=3 donor
501 samples for each group with 20 single cells, selected randomly from each sample.
502 *p<0.05 as determined using a paired Student t-test.

503 **Figure 6.** The typical linear fit (line) of the Hertz model to the obtained force-
504 displacement data (o) for T cells compressed to small deformations on (a) day 0 prior
505 to activation (resting cells) (b) day 2 post-activation and (c) day 4 post-activation. The
506 mean values of the correlation coefficient are 0.84 ± 0.05 , 0.85 ± 0.04 and 0.85 ± 0.06
507 respectively with an overall range of 0.7 to 0.9. (d) The Young's modulus was
508 calculated from these data, which decreased significantly as a results of activation. N=3
509 donor samples for each group with 20 single cells, selected randomly from each
510 sample. *p<0.05 as determined using a paired Student t-test.

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513 FIGURE 1



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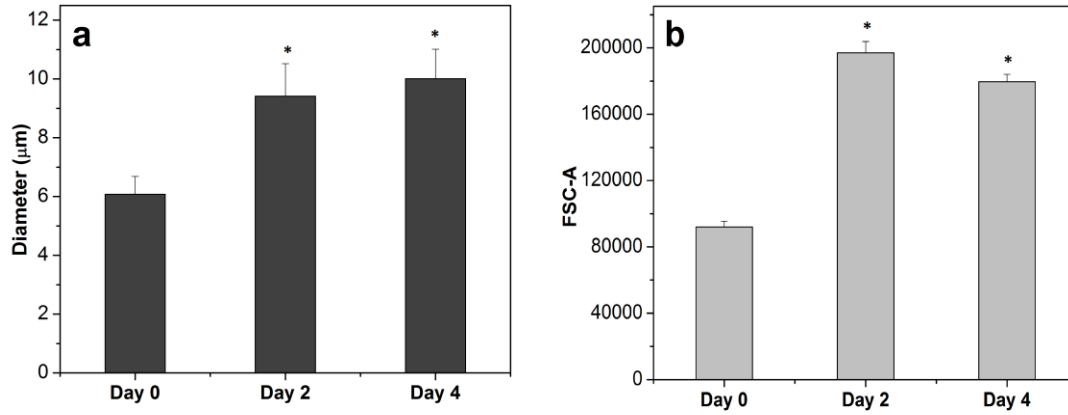
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521 FIGURE 2



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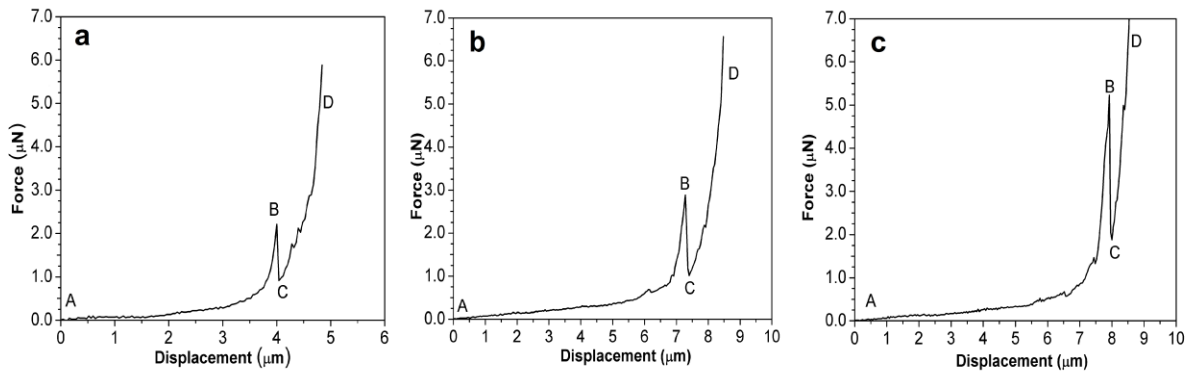
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533 FIGURE 3



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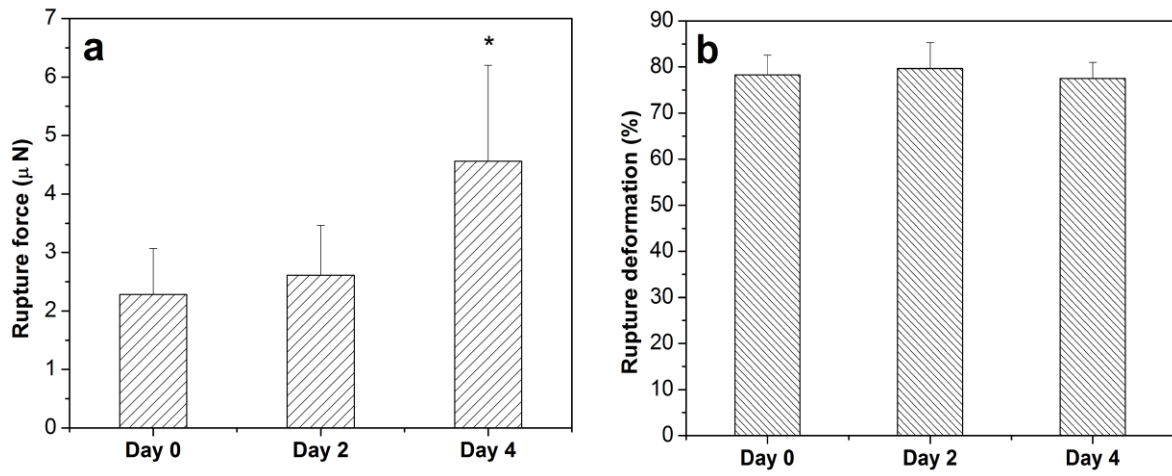
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545 FIGURE 4



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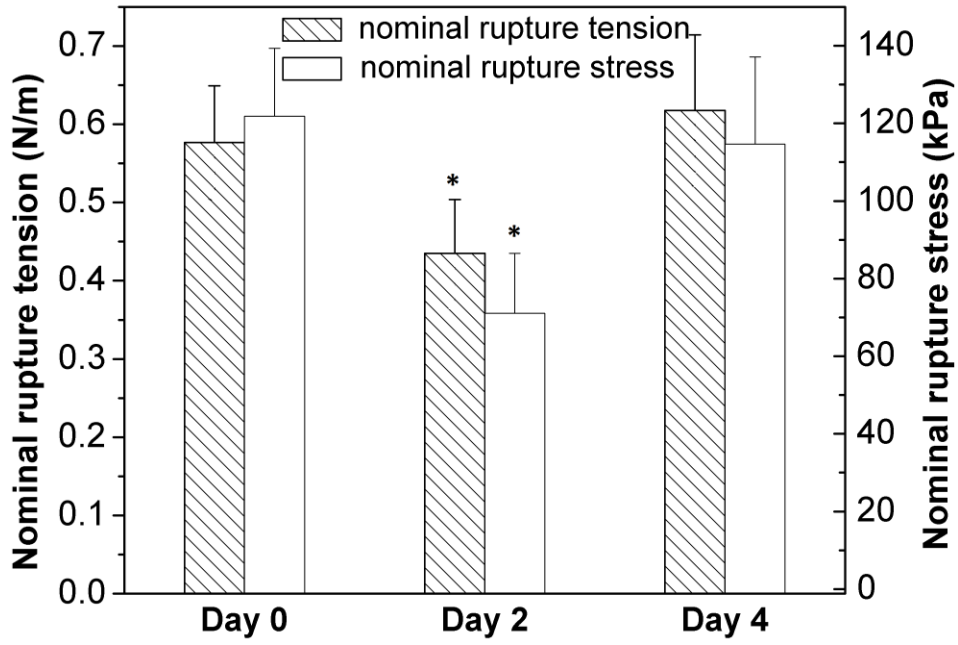
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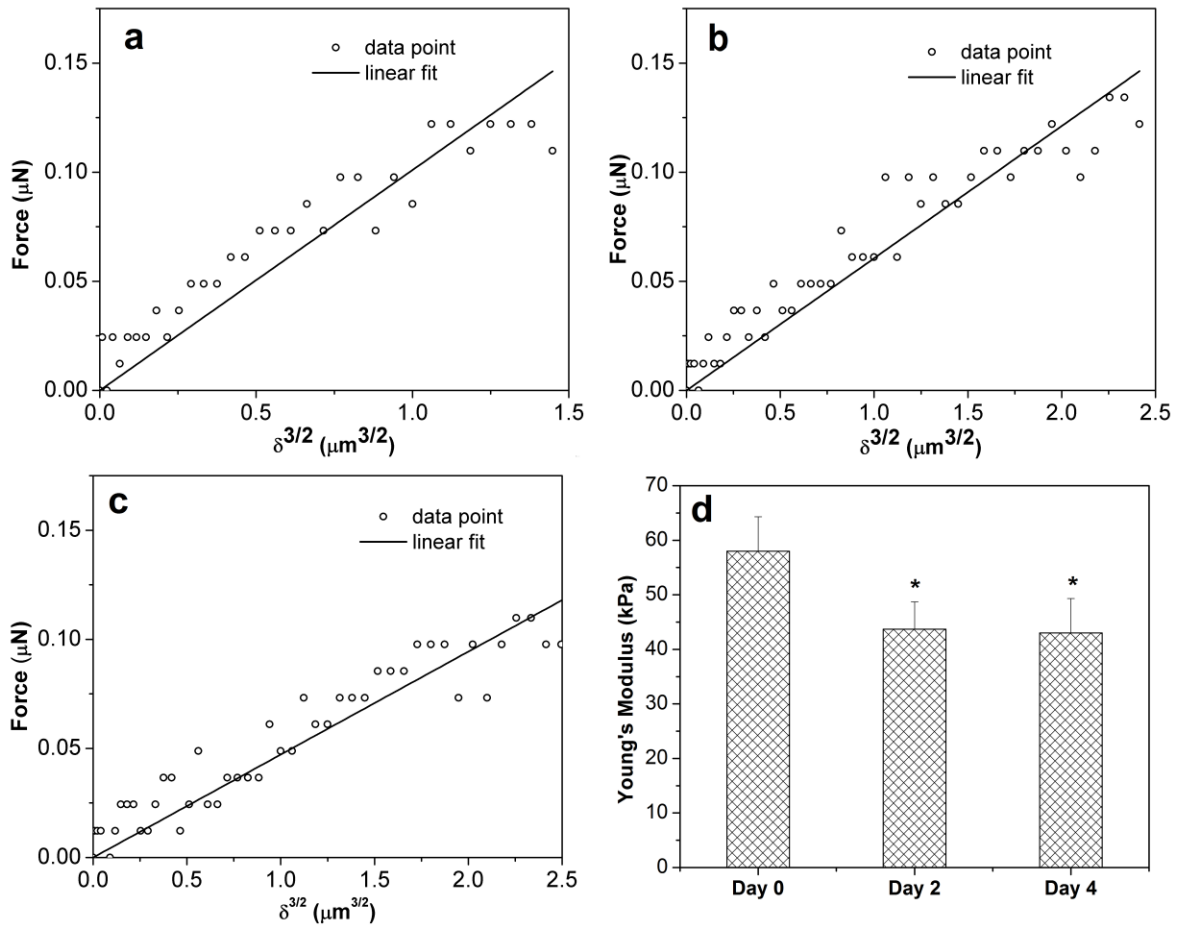
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565 FIGURE 6



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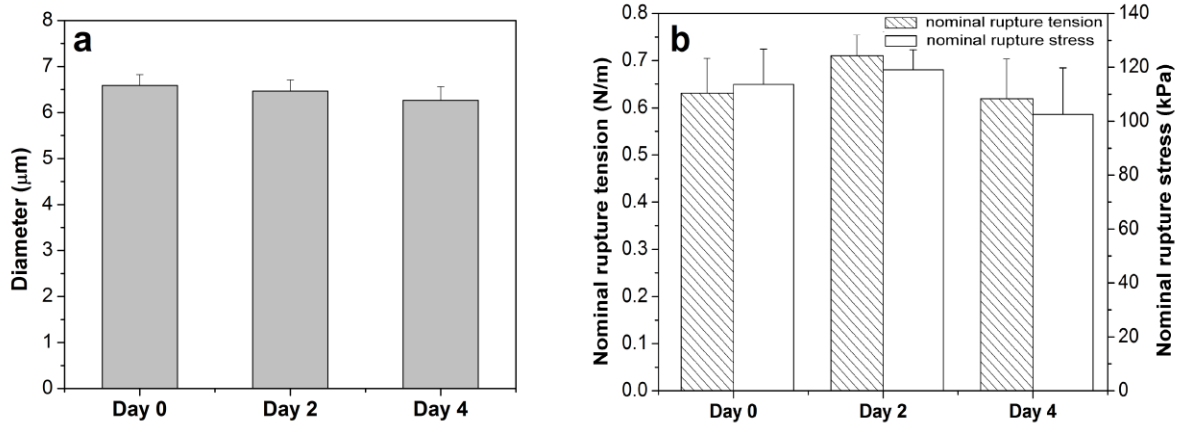
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572 FIGURE 7



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