



Facile, efficient and eco-friendly synthesis of 5-sulfenyl tetrazole derivatives of indoles and pyrroles



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ABSTRACT

A concise, two-step eco-friendly approach towards the synthesis of 5-sulfenyl tetrazole derivatives of indoles and pyrroles, is reported. The synthesis comprises the oxone-mediated thiocyanation of the starting heterocycles towards intermediate 3-thiocyanato indoles and 2-thiocyanato pyrroles, and their subsequent treatment with sodium azide in 2-propanol/water under zinc bromide promotion.

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The tetrazoles are five-membered ring 6π-heterocycles, containing four contiguous nitrogen atoms.^{1a} They are not found in Nature;^{1b} however, tetrazole derivatives possess interesting applications in agriculture, pharmacy, photography and as components of explosives. In medicinal chemistry, they are employed as metabolically-stable carboxylic acid isosteres.²

5-Substituted tetrazoles are usually prepared by a [3+2] cycloaddition reaction between organic nitriles and hydrazoic acid,³ commonly generated in situ from azides, including NaN₃,⁴ TMSN₃,^{5a,b} tin^{5c,d} and organoaluminium azides,^{5e,f} and DPPA,^{5g} and protic or Lewis acids such as I₂,^{6a} NaHSO₄/SiO₂,^{6a} TMSCl,^{6b} Et₃N·HCl,^{6c} NH₄Cl,^{7a} NH₄Cl/LiCl,^{7b} Cu₂O,^{7c} AlCl₃^{7d} and FeCl₃.^{4a} An intramolecular version has also been reported, employing an organic azide moiety.⁸

More recently, the use zinc promoters, especially ZnBr₂ in water-based solvents, has greatly simplified the synthesis.⁹ Variations including mesoporous ZnS nanospheres,^{10a} Zn/Al hydrotalcite,^{10b} Bu₂SnO^{10c} and ZnCl₂ under solventless conditions have also been reported.^{10d} Ionic liquids^{10e} and a catalyst-free method in glycerol^{10f} have been proposed as alternative media.

Thiocyanates are versatile chemical intermediates, which embody a strategically useful entry to various derivatives carrying C–S bonds.¹¹ Thiocyanation of heteroaromatics has been carried

out by reaction with inorganic thiocyanate salts under assistance by different acid catalysts or oxidants. Acids include montmorillonite K-10,^{12a} acid alumina,^{12b} TsOH^{12c} and Amberlyst-15,^{12d} while oxidants encompass HIO₃,^{13a} I₂O₅,^{13b} I₂/MeOH,^{13c} CAN,^{13d} Mn(OAc)₃,^{13e} FeCl₃,^{13f} DDQ,^{13g} H₂O₂^{13h} and Oxone[®],¹³ⁱ among others.

5-Sulfenyl tetrazoles are a small and special group of tetrazoles that can be found as a distinguished motif in active pharmaceutical ingredients, such as cefamandol and latamoxef, and other potentially bioactive molecules (Fig. 1).¹⁴

5-Sulfenyl tetrazoles have been occasionally synthesized from thiocyanates and inorganic azides during studies on 5-substituted tetrazoles.^{7a,b,9a}

In addition, 1-substituted 5-thiotetrazoles have been used as capping agents for stabilization of gold nanoparticles,^{15a} while 5-ethyl- and 5-benzyl-thio-1H-tetrazole are used as 1H-tetrazole replacements in oligonucleotide synthesis.^{15b,c} The sulfur atom of the thioether group conveys better solubility and turns the tetrazole ring more acidic than the corresponding 5-alkyl tetrazoles, improving their ability to act as activators.¹⁶

NH₄Cl^{15,17} and ZnBr₂^{4b} have been employed as promoters for the synthesis of 5-thio- and 5-seleno tetrazoles; Et₃N·HCl^{18a} and magnetic Fe₃O₄ nanoparticles have also been used recently.^{18b} Additionally, 5-alkyl(aryl)thiotetrazoles, were advantageously prepared in a toluene-water biphasic system under phase-transfer catalysis which eased work-up operations,^{17b} and further, Et₂AlN₃ was also used as a source of the azide ion.^{5e,f}

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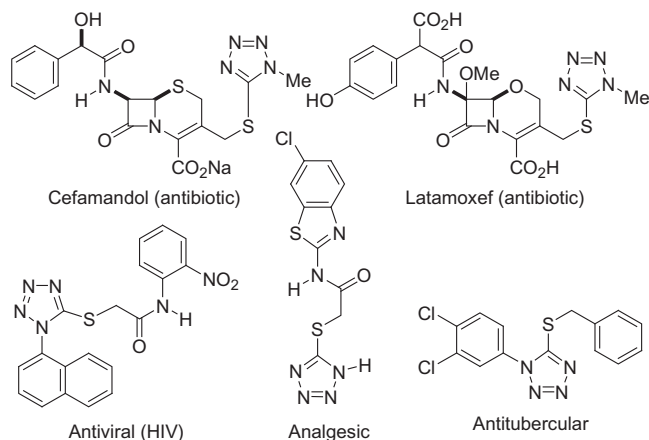
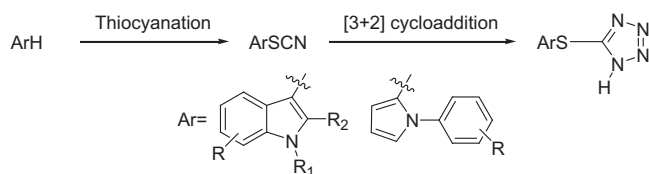


Figure 1. Examples of bioactive 5-sulfenyl tetrazoles.



Scheme 1. Proposed reaction sequence towards 5-sulfenyl tetrazoles.

Taking into account our interest in the development of new approaches to the synthesis of polysubstituted nitrogen heterocycles with potential as bioactive compounds, herein we wish to report the synthesis of 5-sulfenyl tetrazole derivatives of indoles and pyrroles in a two-step sequence involving the thiocyanation of the substituted heterocycles and the subsequent reaction of the resulting thiocyanates with NaN_3 under ZnBr_2 promotion, as shown in Scheme 1.

The different starting indoles (**1**) were synthesized according to the literature.¹⁹ The intermediate thiocyanates **3** and **4** were prepared by reaction of the indoles and *N*-phenyl pyrroles (**2**)²⁰ with

NH_4SCN , employing oxone as oxidizing agent. Following an adaptation of the work of Wu¹³ⁱ and based on our previous results,²⁰ the amount of NH_4SCN was limited to 1 mmol/mmol of heterocycle in order to avoid formation of polythiocyanated compounds.

In all cases (Table 1), the thiocyanation was efficient and furnished the expected compounds in short times and with high regioselectivity. Only 3-substituted indoles and 2-substituted pyrroles were obtained.²¹ In their infrared spectra, all compounds exhibited the typical CN stretching band of the SCN moiety at 2100–2200 cm^{-1} and a resonance at 110–113 ppm in the ^{13}C NMR spectra. The mechanism of the thiocyanation has been studied.¹³ⁱ

With the thiocyanato derivatives in hand, the next step was the [3+2] cycloaddition towards the tetrazoles. This was attempted under different conditions and later optimized, by systematically changing the solvent, amount of NaN_3 and promoter. The effects of time and reaction temperature were also studied, with the results summarized in Table 2.

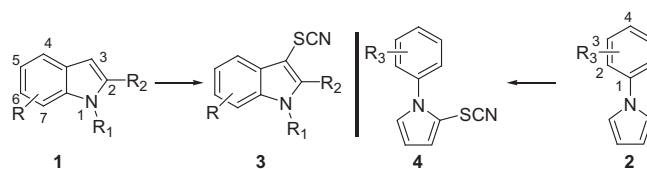
Employing the protocols of the groups of Das^{6a} (entry 1) and Hallberg,²² low product yields and incomplete consumption of the starting material were observed (entry 2). On the other hand, use of glycerol as the reaction medium without promoter (entry 3)^{10f} and water as the sole solvent^{9a} gave no product (entry 4). However, the approach reported by the group of Suresh babu^{4b} met with better luck, furnishing 89% of the expected heterocycle (entry 5). Apparently, in this case the addition of 2-propanol was a key for the success of transformation.

Based on this result, it was decided to investigate the substitution of ZnBr_2 with ZnCl_2 , observing that this caused an increase of the reaction time to 7 h, while reducing the yields to 53% (entry 6). A decrease in the amount of solvent (from 30 to 10 mL) allowed decreasing the reaction time while maintaining the yields (entry 7). Lowering the amount of NaN_3 to 1.2 equiv and further decreasing the amount of the solvent mixture to 6 mL/mmol of thiocyanate (entry 8) resulted in 94% yield of the tetrazole, after 2 h. However, reducing the amount of promoter and running the reaction at 70 °C or room temperature (entries 9–11) proved non-satisfactory.

These tests demonstrated the need of stoichiometric amounts of the promoter and high temperatures for satisfactory results

Table 1

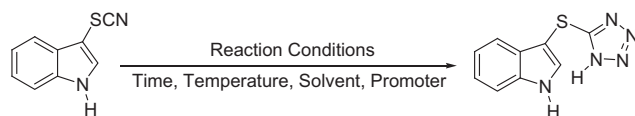
Synthesis of thiocyanates **3** and **4** by reaction of indoles **1** and pyrroles **2** with NH_4SCN and Oxone[®] in MeOH



Entry No	R	R ₁	R ₂	R ₃	Prod. No	Time (h)	Yield ^a (%)
1	H	H	H	—	3a	1	93
2	5-Br	H	H	—	3b	3	90
3	5-(<i>p</i> -Tolyl)	H	H	—	3c	4	80
4	H	H	Me	—	3d	2	91
5	H	Me	H	—	3e	2	96
6	H	<i>n</i> -C ₈ H ₁₇	H	—	3f	5	95
7	H	Ph	H	—	3g	3.5	90
8	Br	Me	H	—	3h	3	95
9	—	—	—	H	4a	2	89
10	—	—	—	4-OMe	4b	0.5	92
11	—	—	—	4-Cl	4c	1.5	92
12	—	—	—	3-Cl	4d	1.5	90
13	—	—	—	2-Cl	4e	1.5	90

^a Isolated yields after column chromatography.

Table 2
Optimization of the synthesis of the 5-sulphenyl tetrazoles



Entry No	Solvent (mL)	NaN ₃ (equiv)	Promoter (equiv)	Temp (°C)	Time (h)	Yield ^a (%)
1	DMF (1.5)	1.5	I ₂ (0.06)	120	4	76
2	DMF (1.0)	1.1	NH ₄ Cl (1.2)	160	0.25	64 ^b
3	Glycerol (20)	1.2	—	110	6	—
4	H ₂ O (10)	1.1	ZnBr ₂ (1.0)	Reflux	5	—
5	H ₂ O/2-PrOH (1:1, 30)	2.5	ZnBr ₂ (1.0)	Reflux	5	89
6	H ₂ O/2-PrOH (1:1, 10)	2.5	ZnCl ₂ (1.0)	Reflux	7	53
7	H ₂ O/2-PrOH (1:1, 10)	2.5	ZnBr ₂ (1.0)	Reflux	4	87
8	H ₂ O/2-PrOH (1:1, 6)	1.2	ZnBr ₂ (1.0)	Reflux	2	94
9	H ₂ O/2-PrOH (1:1, 6)	1.2	ZnBr ₂ (0.5)	Reflux	3	78
10	H ₂ O/2-PrOH (1:1, 6)	1.2	ZnBr ₂ (1.0)	r.t.	3	39
11	H ₂ O/2-PrOH (1:1, 6)	1.2	ZnBr ₂ (1.0)	70	3	64

^a Isolated yields after column chromatography.

^b Performed under microwave irradiation.

and defined the optimum conditions as those employed in entry 8.²³

In order to assess the scope and limitations of the transformation, the 3-thiocyanato-1H-indoles prepared as shown in Table 1 were submitted to the optimized conditions, with the results displayed in Table 3. All tetrazole products are novel. Their structures were fully characterized by ¹H and ¹³C NMR analysis, FT-IR spectroscopy and elemental analysis or HRMS.²⁴ The tetrazole carbon atoms displayed a characteristic signal in a very narrow region (δ 154–156 ppm) of the ¹³C NMR spectrum.

It was observed that the less substituted heterocycle (entry 1) reacted more rapidly than its congeners. On the other hand, substituents exert a large influence. For the *N*-substituted compounds, **3e** reacted faster than **3f** but furnished comparatively lower yields of product (entries 5 and 6). However, introduction of a 5-Br substituent improved the yields at the expense of an increase in the reaction time (entries 5 and 8), compared with the non-methylated analogue **3c** (entry 2).

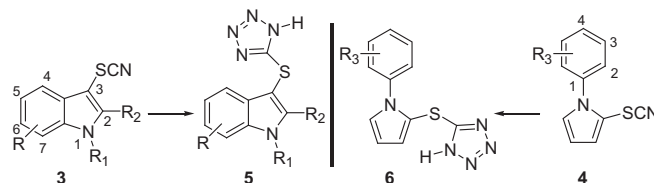
For the series of tetrazoles derived from 1-aryl-2-thiocyanato-1H-pyrroles (**4a–e**), the reaction times were generally shorter

and the yields remained good to excellent. No significant steric (entry 13) nor electronic (entries 9–11) effects were observed.

The reaction mechanism for the synthesis of tetrazoles has been discussed elsewhere. Pioneering research by Himo et al.,^{25a} based on computational and experimental studies, demonstrated the role of Zn in the synthesis of tetrazoles. Using MeCN, MeN₃ and ZnBr₂, they were able to prove that there is a significant decrease in the activation energy of the reaction when the nitrogen of the nitrile group is coordinated to the Lewis acid. Whereas binding of Zn^{II} to the azide ion gave calculated activation energy of 34 and 36 kcal mol⁻¹ for tetrahedral and octahedral coordinating zinc ions, respectively, when Zn^{II} was connected to the nitrogen atom of the nitrile, the activation energy dropped to 25–30 kcal mol⁻¹. Activation of the nitrile substrate is also the basis of the mode of action of a new organocatalyst for the synthesis of tetrazoles.^{6b}

In conclusion, a two step synthesis of new 5-thio-tetrazoles derived from 3-thiocyanato-1H-indoles and 2-thiocyanato-1-phenyl pyrroles, is reported. The NH₄SCN/oxone reagent combination was employed for the thiocyanation stage, affording good to excellent yields of the thiocyanate intermediates. The [3+2]

Table 3
Synthesis of 5-sulphenyl tetrazoles **5** and **6** by reaction of 3-indolyl (**3**) and 2-pyrrolyl (**4**) thiocyanates



Entry No	R	R ₁	R ₂	R ₃	St. mat./prod. no	Time (h)	Yield ^a (%)
1	H	H	H	—	3a/5a	2	94
2	5-Br	H	H	—	3b/5b	3.5	92
3	5-(<i>p</i> -Tolyl)	H	H	—	3c/5c	4	87
4	H	H	Me	—	3d/5d	4	87
5	H	Me	H	—	3e/5e	3	83
6	H	<i>n</i> -C ₈ H ₁₇	H	—	3f/5f	4.5	95
7	H	Ph	H	—	3g/5g	4	90
8	5-Br	Me	H	—	3h/5h	4.5	97
9	—	—	—	H	4a/6a	2	89
10	—	—	—	4-OMe	4b/6b	3	95
11	—	—	—	4-Cl	4c/6c	3	81
12	—	—	—	3-Cl	4d/6d	2	96
13	—	—	—	2-Cl	4e/6e	2	92

^a Isolated yields after column chromatography.

(d, 1H, $J = 8.1$ Hz), 7.47 (d, 1H, $J = 7.7$ Hz), 7.27–7.23 (m, 1H), 7.16–7.12 (m, 1H), 4.22 (t, 2H, $J = 6.8$ Hz), 1.85–1.75 (m, 2H), 1.28–1.22 (m, 10H) and 0.85–0.83 (m, 3H). ^{13}C NMR δ : 155.1, 136.4, 135.5, 128.6, 122.1, 120.3, 118.1, 110.6, 93.0, 45.8, 30.9, 29.3, 28.3, 25.9, 21.7 and 13.6. EI-MS (m/z , rel int.%): 331 [(M+2)⁺, 2], 330 [(M+1)⁺, 7], 329 (M⁺, 33), 272 (57), 260 (59), 162 (100), 130 (28), 77 (8), 57 (26) and 41 (50). Anal. Calcd: C, 61.97; H, 7.04. Found: C, 61.74; H, 7.23. 3-((1H-Tetrazol-5-yl)thio)-1-phenyl-1H-indole (**5g**). Yellow solid, mp: 153.1–154.3 °C. IR (KBr, ν): 3033, 2331, 1598, 1499, 1457, 1231, 1017, 746 and 695 cm^{-1} . ^1H NMR δ : 8.22 (d, $J = 0.9$ Hz, 1H), 7.66–7.56 (m, 6H), 7.49–7.45 (m, 1H), 7.33–7.29 (m, 1H) and 7.26–7.22 (m, 1H). ^{13}C NMR δ : 154.9, 137.9, 136.0, 135.5, 129.8, 129.1, 127.3, 124.2, 123.5, 121.6, 118.6, 111.1 and 96.9. EI-MS (m/z , rel int.%): 294 [(M+1)⁺, 5], 293 (M⁺, 29), 236 (36), 224 (100), 121 (21) and 77 (40). HRMS obsd m/z : 316.0614; $\text{C}_{15}\text{H}_{11}\text{N}_5\text{SNa}$ [M+Na]⁺ requires m/z 316.0633. 3-((1H-Tetrazol-5-yl)thio)-5-bromo-1-methyl-1H-indole (**5h**). Beige solid, mp: 205.5–207.0 °C. IR (KBr, ν): 3394, 1509, 1465, 1242, 795 and 614 cm^{-1} . ^1H NMR δ : 7.87 (s, 1H), 7.62 (d, $J = 1.7$ Hz, 1H), 7.52 (d, $J = 8.7$ Hz, 1H), 7.36 (dd, $J = 8.7$ Hz, 1.8 Hz, 1H) and 3.82 (s, 3H). ^{13}C NMR δ : 155.2, 137.6, 135.8, 130.6, 124.7, 120.5, 113.2, 112.8, 94.3 and 33.0. EI-MS (m/z , rel int.%): 310 [(M+2)⁺, 35], 309 [(M+1)⁺, 5], 308 (M⁺, 35), 253 (48), 241 (97), 239 (100), 162 (24), 117 (32) and 77 (7). HRMS obsd m/z : 331.9575; $\text{C}_{10}\text{H}_8\text{BrN}_5\text{SNa}$ [M+Na]⁺ requires m/z 331.9581. 5-((1-Phenyl-1H-pyrrol-2-yl)thio)-1H-tetrazole (**6a**). Yellow solid, mp: 160.1–161.4 °C. IR (KBr, ν): 3048, 2366,

1595, 1498, 1322, 1038, 766 and 740 cm^{-1} . ^1H NMR δ : 7.45–7.34 (m, 6H), 6.82 (dd, $J = 3.6$ Hz, 1.6 Hz, 1H) and 6.40–6.38 (m, 1H). ^{13}C NMR δ : 155.0, 138.3, 128.7, 128.1, 127.7, 126.0, 121.6, 111.4 and 109.9. EI-MS (m/z , rel int.%): 244 [(M+1)⁺, 2], 243 (M⁺, 6), 242 (37), 185 (34), 174 (45), 173 (100), 172 (48), 130 (16), 115 (19), 77 (65), 70 (26) and 51 (39). HRMS obsd m/z : 266.0465; $\text{C}_{11}\text{H}_9\text{N}_5\text{SNa}$ [M+Na]⁺ requires m/z 266.0476. 5-((1-(4-Methoxyphenyl)-1H-pyrrol-2-yl)thio)-1H-tetrazole (**6b**). White solid, mp: 210.0–211.4 °C. IR (KBr, ν): 3012, 2360, 1517, 1250, 1039, 837 and 740 cm^{-1} . ^1H NMR δ : 7.27–7.24 (m, 3H), 6.96 (d, $J = 8.9$ Hz, 2H), 6.78 (dd, $J = 3.6$ Hz, 1.7 Hz, 1H), 6.39–6.35 (m, 1H) and 3.76 (s, 3H). ^{13}C NMR δ : 158.6, 155.1, 131.3, 128.4, 127.5, 121.2, 113.9, 111.5, 109.6 and 55.2. EI-MS (m/z , rel int.%): 275 [(M+2)⁺, 2], 274 [(M+1)⁺, 6], 273 (M⁺, 37), 216 (20), 204 (100), 173 (37), 92 (15) and 77 (20). Anal. Calcd: C, 52.73; H, 4.06. Found: C, 52.86; H, 4.31. 5-((1-(4-Chlorophenyl)-1H-pyrrol-2-yl)thio)-1H-tetrazole (**6c**). Orange solid, mp: 171.2–173.1 °C. IR (KBr, ν): 3129, 3010, 2362, 1494, 1311, 1094, 837 and 739 cm^{-1} . ^1H NMR δ : 7.50 (d, $J = 8.8$ Hz, 2H), 7.40 (d, $J = 8.8$, 2H), 7.35 (dd, 1H, $J = 3.0$ Hz, 1.8 Hz), 6.82 (dd, $J = 3.7$, 1.8, 1H) and 6.40 (dd, 1H, $J = 3.7$ Hz, 3.0 Hz). ^{13}C NMR δ : 155.0, 137.2, 132.4, 128.8, 128.3, 127.9, 122.0, 111.6 and 110.2. EI-MS (m/z , rel int.%): 279 [(M+2)⁺, 6], 278 [(M+1)⁺, 2], 277 (M⁺, 18), 219 (19), 173 (100), 111 (13) and 75 (19). HRMS obsd m/z : 300.0074; $\text{C}_{11}\text{H}_8\text{ClN}_5\text{SNa}$ [M+Na]⁺ requires m/z 300.0087.

25. (a) Himo, F.; Demko, Z. P.; Noodleman, L.; Sharpless, B. K. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **2003**, *125*, 9983–9987.