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# Efficient Transition of Human Pluripotent Stem Cell Cultures From Essential 8™ Medium Into NutriStem® hPSC XF Medium on Matrigel®

## Introduction

Establishing ideal culture methods has been a known challenge in human pluripotent stem cell (hPSC) research since the creation of the first embryonic stem cell line in the late 90s and the discovery of induced pluripotent stem cells in 2006. Traditional protocols often call for highly variable components such as cell feeder layers, due to their ability to aid cell maintenance through secretion of essential growth factors, ECM components, and cytokines including bFGF, TGF-β, laminin, and others.<sup>1</sup> However, as the need for more defined cultures becomes increasingly prevalent, carefully formulated microenvironments have since evolved for more efficient maintenance of cellular pluripotency and purity, in turn reducing the use of feeder layers. Ultimately, as standards for clinical-quality cell use in therapeutic applications are determined, media formulations and culture conditions must be refined and optimized while fully supporting proper phenotype and genetic stability.

Today, there are multiple commercially available serum-free formulations for hPSC maintenance, including Essential 8™, mTeSR™, and StemFlex™ culture media. When compared to Sartorius' NutriStem® hPSC Medium, these media contain extensive amounts of growth factors with the intention of maintaining pluripotency and preventing differentiation.<sup>2</sup>

## Adaptation Protocol

However, it has been shown that high amounts of growth factors also play a critical, and sometimes detrimental, role in regulating the downstream differentiation of hPSCs into mature cell types. For example, researchers have shown that high concentrations of bFGF can inhibit early neural differentiation of hPSCs into PAX6+ neuroectodermal cells yet are beneficial in promoting more mature neuronal differentiation of lineage committed early neural precursors.<sup>3</sup>

Considering both the positive and negative downstream effects related to daily exposure of hPSCs to high concentrations of growth factors, an ideal cell culture medium should contain low amounts of growth factors that can be controlled and supplemented to higher levels as needed, rather than subjecting cells to high amounts of growth factors that cannot be reduced.

NutriStem® hPSC Medium has been optimized with minimal amounts of bFGF while still maintaining pluripotency, allowing hPSCs to expand efficiently on a variety of substrates (Matrigel®, vitronectin, and laminin) with minimal differentiation. However, when transitioning from a high bFGF-containing medium, such as Essential 8 Medium (100 ng/mL), to a low bFGF medium like NutriStem® hPSC Medium (<10 ng/mL), users should be aware that they may notice initial differences in hPSC colony appearance and morphology (such as less compact colonies with less defined borders).

This protocol is the suggested method for adapting hPSCs originally cultured in Essential 8 Medium (E8) to NutriStem® hPSC Medium. By transitioning gradually and supplementing NutriStem® hPSC Medium with an additional 20 ng/mL of bFGF, similar E8 morphological features can be retained, while supporting higher levels of pluripotency.

Generally, there are two options for transitioning cells from one medium to another: direct or gradual adaptation. With direct adaptation active cultures are switched from the first medium directly into the next all at once, in a single medium exchange. Alternatively, with gradual adaptation, active cultures are switched from the first medium into the next in several steps. Gradual adaptation tends to be gentler on cells than direct adaptation, but its necessity should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

To minimize the morphological differences that occur when transitioning cells from E8 to NutriStem® hPSC Medium, cultures may benefit from:

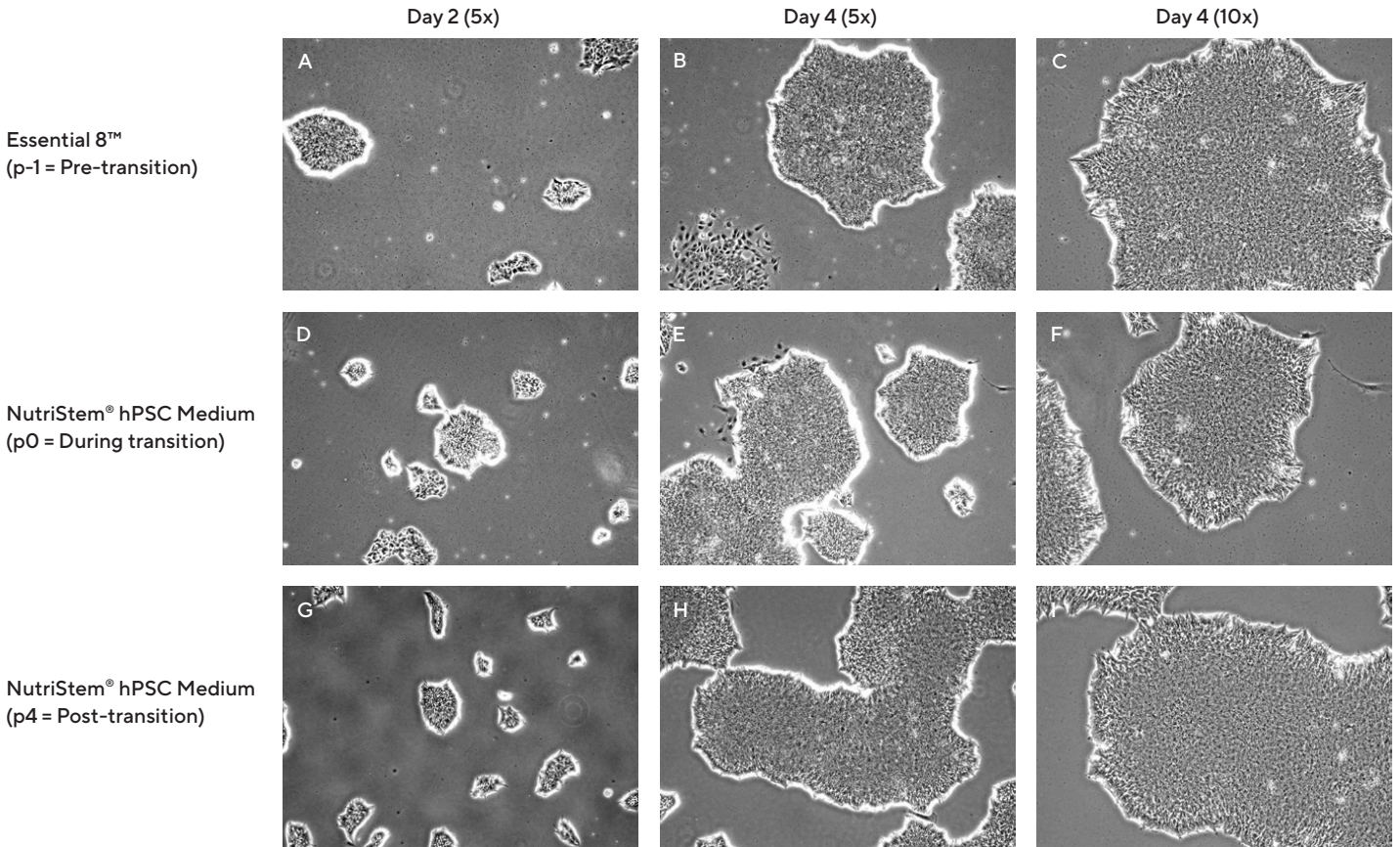
1. Supplementing NutriStem® hPSC Medium with an additional 20 ng/mL of bFGF
2. Performing a gradual adaptation into NutriStem® hPSC Medium in a step-wise manner

## Protocol

<b>Transition (7 Days)</b>	<b>Day 0</b>	Begin with active hPSC cultures
	<b>Days 1-2</b>	100% E8
	<b>Day 3</b>	75% E8 + 25% NutriStem® hPSC Medium (+20 ng/mL bFGF)
	<b>Day 4</b>	50% E8 + 50% NutriStem® hPSC Medium (+20 ng/mL bFGF)
	<b>Day 5</b>	25% E8 + 75% NutriStem® hPSC Medium (+20 ng/mL bFGF)
	<b>Day 6</b>	100% NutriStem® hPSC Medium (+20 ng/mL bFGF)
	<b>Day 7</b>	Passage hPSC cultures onto fresh Matrigel® in 100% NutriStem® hPSC Medium (+20 ng/mL bFGF)
<b>Stabilized (15-20 Days)</b>	<b>Days 7-28</b>	Passage hPSC cultures every 4-5 days during the stabilization process and feed daily with 100% NutriStem® hPSC Medium (+20 ng/mL bFGF)
	<b>Day 28+</b>	Downstream experiments (scale-up, gene editing, differentiation)

*Note.* To appropriately supplement NutriStem® hPSC Medium with added bFGF, reconstitute the bFGF as per the manufacturer's instructions, add required volume of bFGF to the medium, and gently mix before use.

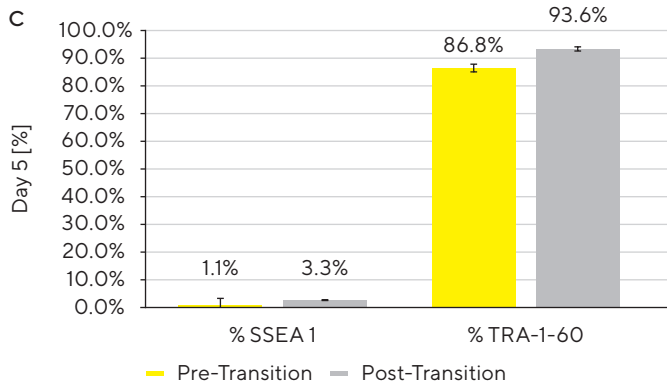
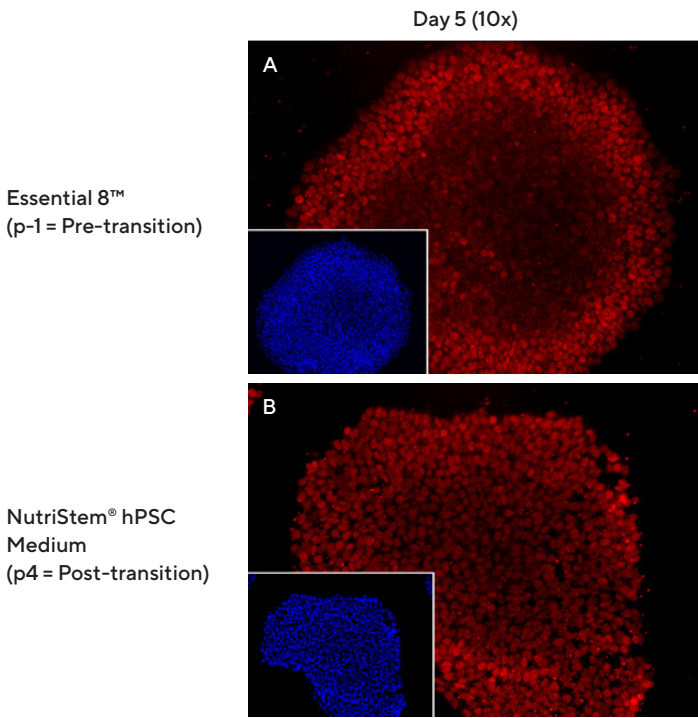
# Morphology Comparison



**Figure 1:** *hPSC Cultures Transitioned From E8 to NutriStem® hPSC Medium Exhibit Similar Morphologies.*

Note. A morphological comparison of hPSC cultures before, during, and after transition from E8 to NutriStem® hPSC Medium demonstrates colonies with defined borders and some level of spontaneous differentiation in E8 (Fig. 1, A-C), colonies with similarly defined borders upon initial transition to NutriStem® hPSC Medium (Fig. 1, D-F), and faster expanding, compact colonies with similarly tight colony borders and minimal spontaneous differentiation upon continued culture in NutriStem® hPSC Medium for 4 passages (Fig. 1, G-I). All cultures in NutriStem® hPSC Medium were supplemented with an additional 20 ng/mL of bFGF and transitioned in a gradual step-wise manner (as outlined in the Protocol).

# Pluripotency Comparison



**Figure 2:** hPSC Cultures Transitioned From E8 to NutriStem® hPSC Medium Exhibit Higher Levels of Pluripotency Marker Expression.

Note. Pluripotency was measured both pre- and post-transition from E8 to NutriStem® hPSC Medium (with additional 20 ng/ml bFGF added). Prior to the transition, active hPSC cultures in E8 were assessed via immunocytochemistry for the nuclear pluripotency marker Nanog (Fig. 2, A) as well as by flow cytometry for SSEA1 and TRA-1-60 (Fig. 2, C). Following transition of hPSCs to NutriStem® hPSC Medium, cultures were also assessed via immunocytochemistry for the nuclear pluripotency marker Nanog (Fig. 2, B) as well as by flow cytometry for SSEA1 and TRA-1-60 (Fig. 2, C) demonstrating that hPSC cultures transitioned into NutriStem® hPSC Medium result in higher levels of pluripotency (Fig. 2, C) when compared to hPSC cultures maintained in E8.

# Key Notes and Take-Aways

To adapt cells to a different medium it is important that the cultures typically are:

- High quality with a high density of cells ( $\geq 60\%$  confluent).
- Free of differentiating areas. If the cultures contain more than 10% differentiating colonies, the cells should be “cleaned up” by manually removing the differentiated cells.

While morphological differences have not been seen to negatively affect the pluripotency of cells cultured in NutriStem® hPSC Medium, these differences can be minimized by:

- Supplementing NutriStem® hPSC Medium with an additional 20 ng/mL of bFGF.
- Performing a gradual adaptation in a step-wise manner over multiple days in culture.

# General Recommendations

- Make a frozen stock of the cells in original media prior to adaptation.
- Maintain a set of cell cultures in each of their original media when starting the next level of adaptation as a fallback if the cells do not survive in the next passage.

# References

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**Germany**


Sartorius Stedim Biotech GmbH  
August-Spindler-Strasse 11  
37079 Goettingen  
Phone +49 551 308 0

**USA**

Sartorius Stedim North America Inc.  
565 Johnson Avenue  
Bohemia, NY 11716  
Toll-Free +1 800 368 7178

**Israel**

Biological Industries Israel Beit  
Haemek Ltd.  
2511500 Kibbutz Beit Haemek  
Phone: 972 4 9960595

 For further contacts, visit  
[www.sartorius.com](http://www.sartorius.com)