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Composed of countless neurons, glia, and vascular cells, the nervous system innervates all parts of the body to function as a vast communication network. This complexity makes it challenging to examine neural properties at the cellular and molecular levels. Cell culture systems for specific neural cell types are thus essential for studies of their development and function. This laboratory manual provides step-by-step protocols for isolating specific cell populations from rodent tissues and culturing them under conditions that closely resemble those in vivo. The contributors describe in detail how to dissect the brain, spinal cord, and other tissues; how to separate cells using mechanical and enzymatic tissue-dissociation strategies; the use of immunopanning and fluorescence-activated cell sorting (FACS) to enrich the target cell population; and the culture conditions that optimize cell viability and growth. Retinal ganglion cells, motor neurons, dorsal root ganglion cells, astrocytes, oligodendrocytes, and Schwann cells are covered, as are vascular cells such as pericytes and endothelial cells. Myelinating cocultures of neurons and oligodendrocytes are also described.

The manual includes detailed recipes for media and reagents, tips for avoiding common pitfalls, and advice for designing new immunopanning protocols using tissues from other sources. Many of the protocols are accompanied by freely accessible online movies that demonstrate critical steps of the procedures. This is an essential laboratory companion for all neurobiologists, from the graduate student level upward.

2013, 205 pages, illus. (24 4C images and 3 B&W), index
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Contents
Introduction
Ben A. Barres

SECTION I. CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM NEURONS
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION
Purification and Culture of Retinal Ganglion Cells
Alissa Wenzler and Jack T. Wang

PROTOCOLS
1 Purification and Culture of Retinal Ganglion Cells from Rodents
Alissa Wenzler and Jack T. Wang
2 Culturing Hybridoma Cell Lines for Monoclonal Antibody Production
Alissa Wenzler and Jack T. Wang

CHAPTER 2 INTRODUCTION
Purification and Culture of Corticospinal Motor Neurons
Wim Maudsmaerk

PROTOCOLS
1 Retrograde Labeling of Corticospinal Motor Neurons from Early Postnatal Rodents
Wim Maudsmaerk
2 Immunopanning of Retrogradely Labeled Corticospinal Motor Neurons from Early Postnatal Rodents
Wim Maudsmaerk

CHAPTER 3 INTRODUCTION
Purification and Culture of Spinal Motor Neurons
David J. Graher and Brent T. Harris

PROTOCOLS
1 Purification and Culture of Spinal Motor Neurons from Rat Embryos
David J. Graher and Brent T. Harris

CHAPTER 4 INTRODUCTION
Purification and Culture of Dorsal Root Ganglion Neurons
J. Bradley Zabierek

PROTOCOLS
1 Purification of Dorsal Root Ganglion Neurons from Rat by Immunopanning
J. Bradley Zabierek

CHAPTER 5 INTRODUCTION
Purification and Culture of Astrocytes
Lynece C. Fino

PROTOCOLS
1 Purification of Rat and Mouse Astrocytes by Immunopanning
Lynece C. Fino
2 Purification of Astrocytes from Transgenic Rodents by Fluorescence-Activated Cell Sorting
Lynece C. Fino

CHAPTER 6 INTRODUCTION
Purification and Culture of Central Nervous System Pericytes
Lu Zhou, Fabien Sehet, and Richard Dwaneman

PROTOCOLS
1 Purification of Pericytes from Rodent Optic Nerve by Immunopanning
Lu Zhou, Fabien Sehet, and Richard Dwaneman

CHAPTER 7 INTRODUCTION
Purification and Culture of Central Nervous System Endothelial Cells
Lu Zhou, Fabien Sehet, and Richard Dwaneman

PROTOCOLS
1 Purification of Endothelial Cells from Rodent Brain by Immunopanning
Lu Zhou, Fabien Sehet, and Richard Dwaneman

SECTION II. ASTROCYTES AND VASCULAR CELLS
CHAPTER 8 INTRODUCTION
Purification and Culture of Oligodendrocyte Precursor Cells from Rat Cortices by Immunopanning
Jason C. Dogas and Ben Emery

PROTOCOLS
1 Purification of Oligodendrocyte Precursor Cells from Rat Cortices by Immunopanning
Jason C. Dogas and Ben Emery

2 Purification of Oligodendrocyte Lineage Cells from Mouse Cortices by Immunopanning
Ben Emery and Jason C. Dogas

CHAPTER 9 INTRODUCTION
Myelinating Cocultures of Purified Oligodendrocyte Lineage Cells and Retinal Ganglion Cells
Trent A. Watkins and Anja R. Schloës

PROTOCOLS
1 Myelinating Cocultures of Rat Retinal Ganglion Cell Reaggregates and Optic Nerve Oligodendrocyte Precursor Cells
Trent A. Watkins and Anja R. Schloës

CHAPTER 10 INTRODUCTION
Purification of Schwann Cells
Amanda Brooks Lutz

PROTOCOLS
1 Purification of Schwann Cells from the Neonatal and Adult Mouse Peripheral Nerve
Amanda Brooks Lutz

APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1
Designing and Troubleshooting Immunopanning Protocols for Purifying Neural Cells
Ben A. Barres

APPENDIX 2
General Safety and Hazardous Material Information
Index

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