

# Use of Fortis HILIC stationary phases

Hydrophilic interaction liquid chromatography or HILIC is a technique that has been around for quite some time, based somewhere between reversed-phase (RP) and normalphase (NP) chromatography.

## Understanding HILIC

A highly polar stationary phase, often bare silica, is used with largely a non-polar mobile phase system (water acting as a very strong solvent in HILIC) to provide retention of polar or hydrophilic molecules.

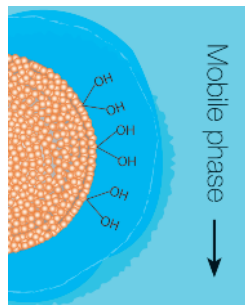


Figure 1. Water layer at the stationary phase surface

The mechanisms of HILIC are still being fully explored but it is quite well accepted now that the analyte partitions between the mobile phase and a water enriched layer at the surface of the

stationary phase. The surface of the stationary phase when underivatized forms this layer with water due to the exposed silanols. Also thought to be part of the retention mechanism is ion-exchange and hydrogen bonding dependant upon the analyte in question.

For example, basic analytes with positive charge will partition into the water layer at the surface, but will also have a cation exchange mechanism with the silanols at the phase surface.

## Method Development

Adjustment of the retention profile of hydrophilic compounds is made by several potential changes; adjustment of the organic: aqueous eluent, both ratio and organic solvent choice, concentration and type of buffer used, and the pH of the mobile phase. Generally acetonitrile is the common choice for organic, with between 2% and 40% water added in order to elute the compounds in a suitable time frame.

The steep curve of retention (figure 2) is a common theme in HILIC, where at a given point the organic:aqueous ratio is such that the compound suddenly exhibits strong retention where previously little was achieved. Figure 3.

## Advantages of HILIC

HILIC chromatography provides retention of highly polar hydrophilic analytes that are difficult to retain on RP methods using simple combinations of mobile phase and stationary

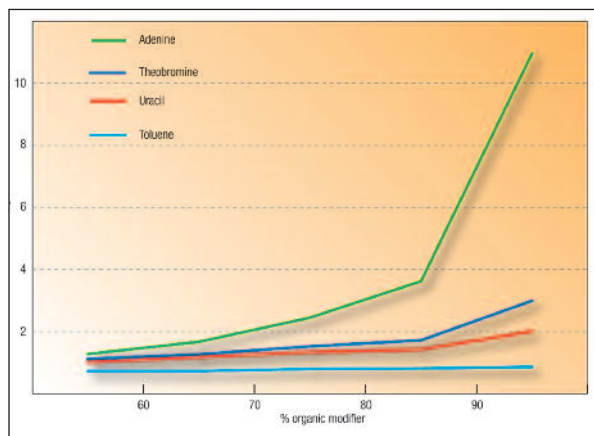


Figure 2. Role of organic modifier in HILIC

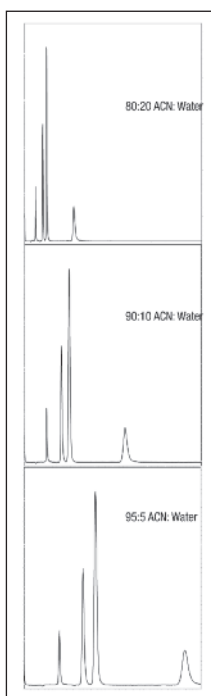


Figure 3. Role of Water as modifier in HILIC

**Column:** Fortis HILIC 100x2.1mm 3µ  
**p/n:** FHI-020503  
**Mobile Phase:** 90:10 ACN : 20mM NH<sub>4</sub>OAc  
**Flow:** 0.2ml/min  
**Temp:** 20°C  
**Wavelength:** 210nm

## Hydrophilic retention

Most HILIC applications tend to centre around the analysis of small hydrophilic molecules such as carbohydrates, nucleosides and nucleotides, amino acids and organic acids. However use has been found with diverse molecules such as the application of melamine, figure 4, when there was a worldwide baby milk scare in recent years.

Drugs of abuse, sugars, environmental herbicides/pesticides, small peptides and proteins are all

applicable to the mechanisms that HILIC offers. The range is potentially limitless for small hydrophilic molecules.

Figure 5. highlights the ability of Fortis™ HILIC to separate and resolve a mixture (>150 compounds) of peptides, organic acids, sugars, phosphosugars and amino acids within a complex metabolite sample. The Fortis HILIC column is compared with another popular HILIC stationary phase, and exhibits better peak shapes, less co-elution, full baseline resolution for species such as Leucine and Isoleucine. The amine, Spermidine proves difficult to elute with the ZICHILIC stationary phase under these gradient conditions, however the Fortis HILIC column provides good recovery and sensitivity.

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## UHPLC HILIC

UHPLC is the major talking point at this moment in time for most people in method development and those in chromatography with time or sample limitations. 1.7µm Fortis columns are available with two choices for UHPLC separations. Fortis HILIC an underivatized bare-silica stationary phase, and Fortis HILIC DIOL; a bonded DIOL phase chemistry to aid in the retention and resolution of steroids, proteins and metabolites especially.

The theory of basic analytes causing peak shape problems due to silanol activity is the norm in reversed phase chromatography, however in HILIC the current thought is that vastly superior peak shapes are achieved for

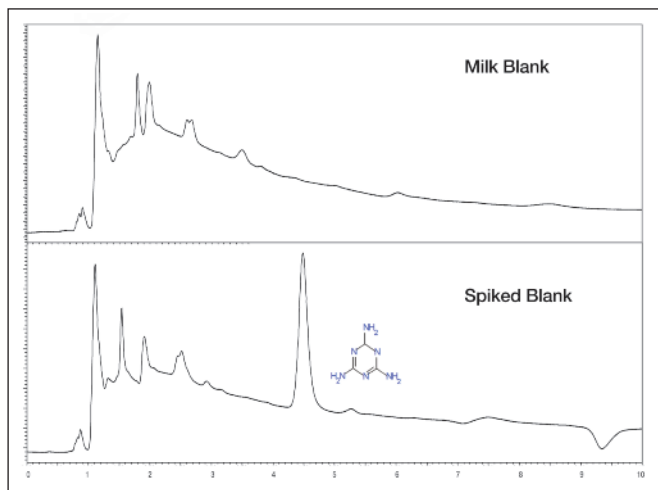


Figure 4. Melamine Contamination

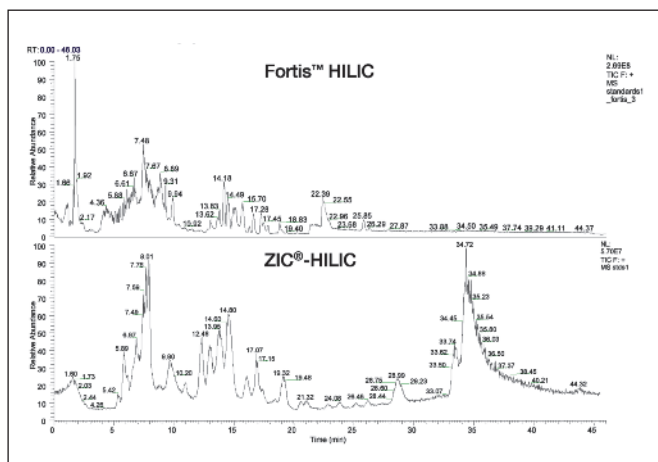


Figure 5. Selectivity of complex metabolite mixture. Data courtesy of ScotMet; Glasgow

basic analytes when the unbonded silica substrate is employed. The theory is that the silanols are now freely accessible to interact with the basic analytes instead of any steric hindrance compromising the peak shape.

This improved peak shape for basic analytes is a major advantage with HILIC silica phases, leading ultimately to an improvement in sensitivity.

The bare silica version of the Fortis particles have also recently been shown to exhibit excellent peak shape selectivity and resolution in SFC mode. This will be a major issue to those wishing to assess the suitability of “green techniques” within their laboratory.

### Conclusion

In this application note we have shown the mechanisms and considerations that are important to those requiring the HILIC method of chromatography in order to retain the more polar analytes that can cause issues in retention and separation. The correct use of a HILIC column can provide additional selectivity and resolution, especially for hydrophilic analytes. As the understanding of HILIC mechanisms increases then the ability of this technique to grow will increase as sample types dictate. This will give the capability to develop rapid methods with high resolution of analytes. In HILIC with the power of MS detection, many analyte types can be resolved and we have highlighted a sample of 150 metabolomic species in a simple HILIC gradient system. The diversity of the sample could potentially cause problems but the sharp peak shapes provided by the homogenous silica surface of the Fortis HILIC aid in the resolution achieved.

1.7µm Fortis™ is a trademark of Fortis Technologies. ZIC®-HILIC is a registered trademark of Merck Sequant AB. All columns are original manufacturers own.



## Does the choice of UHPLC or Core-Shell confuse you ?

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High Efficiency  
Lower Backpressure  
Wide Selectivity  
High Loadability  
Fully Scalable

Available as 8 phase chemistries, choose from :

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- 1.7µm H2O
- 1.7µm Diphenyl
- 1.7µm C8
- 1.7µm Cyano
- 1.7µm Amino
- 1.7µm HILIC
- 1.7µm HILIC DIOL



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