

Nuclei Isolation from Cell Suspensions & Tissues for Single Cell RNA Sequencing

Introduction

This protocol outlines how to isolate, wash, and count single nuclei from both single cell suspensions and neural tissue (embryonic) for use with 10x Genomics Single Cell RNA protocol. The protocols described here are expected to be compatible with many cell or tissue types. Additional optimization may be required when working with new sample types.

Additional Guidance

Consult Demonstrated Protocol – Cell Preparation Guide (Document CG000053) for Tips & Best Practices and Technical Note – Guidelines on Accurate Target Cell Counts (Document CG0000091) for more information on determining accurate cell counts.

Cells carry potentially hazardous pathogens. Follow material supplier recommendations and local laboratory procedures and regulations for the safe handling, storage and disposal of biological materials.

Preparation - Buffers

Protocol 1: Lysis Buffer for Single Cell Suspension <i>Prepare fresh, maintain at 4°C</i>	Stock	Final	10 ml
Tris-HCl (pH 7.4)	1 M	10 mM	100 µl
NaCl	5 M	10 mM	20 µl
MgCl ₂	1 M	3 mM	30 µl
Lysis Reagent	25%	0.025%	10 µl
<i>(refer to Specific Reagents & Consumables for validated options)</i>			
Use pre-diluted Lysis Reagent (25%)			
Pre-dilution: Add 250 µl of 100% Lysis Reagent to 750 µl 1X PBS			
1X PBS	-	-	9.84 ml

Protocol 2: Lysis Buffer for Embryonic Mouse Brain Tissue <i>Prepare fresh, maintain at 4°C</i>	Stock	Final	10 ml
Tris-HCl (pH 7.4)	1 M	10 mM	100 µl
NaCl	5 M	10 mM	20 µl
MgCl ₂	1 M	3 mM	30 µl
Lysis Reagent	10%	0.1%	100 µl
<i>(refer to Specific Reagents & Consumables for validated options)</i>			
Use pre-diluted Lysis Reagent (10%)			
Pre-dilution: Add 100 µl of 100% Lysis Reagent to 900 µl nuclease-free water			
Nuclease-free Water	-	-	9.75 ml

Nuclei Wash & Resuspension Buffer <i>Prepare fresh, maintain at 4°C</i>	Stock	Final	5 ml
BSA Solution	5%	1%	1 ml
RNase Inhibitor	40X	0.2X	25 µl
1X PBS	-	-	3.975 ml

Additional Buffers

LS Column Calibration Buffer (PBS + 0.5% BSA) (maintain at 4°C)
For Isolation of Nuclei from Embryonic Mouse Brain Tissue

Specific Reagents & Consumables

Vendor	Item	Part Number
Thermo	UltraPure BSA (50 mg/ml)	AM2616
Fisher Scientific	Trypan Blue Stain, 0.4%	T10282
	Countess II FL Automated Cell Counter	AMAQAF1000
	Countess II FL Automated Cell Counting Camber Slides	C10228
10x Genomics	RNase Inhibitor 40X	2001488
		Kit PN-1000887

Vendor	Item	Part Number
Millipore-Sigma	Trizma Hydrochloride Solution, pH 7.4	T2194
	Sodium Chloride Solution, 5M	59222C
	Magnesium Chloride Solution, 1M	M1028
	Nonidet P40 Substitute*	74385
	IGEPAL CO-630*	542334
	Protector RNase Inhibitor (alternative to 10x Genomics product)	3335399001
	Live/Dead Cell Double Staining Kit	04511-1KT-F
Bel-Art	Flowmi Cell Strainer, 40 µm	H13680-0040
Corning-Cellgro	Phosphate-Buffered Saline 1X without Calcium & Magnesium	21-040-CV
Miltenyi Biotech	MACS SmartStrainers, 30 µm	130-098-458
	Myelin Removal Beads II, Human, Mouse, Rat	130-096-733
	LS Columns	130-042-401
	MACS MultiStand	130-042-303
	MidiMACS Separator	130-042-302

*Use NP-40 substitute or IGEPAL CO-630 as the Lysis Reagent. This list may not include some standard laboratory equipment.

Tips & Best Practices

Factors Influencing Nuclei Recovery:

To recover the expected number of nuclei, maximize input cell viability, minimize cell and nuclei handling time, accurately count nuclei, and pipette the correct volume into the Single Cell Master Mix when executing 10x Genomics Single Cell protocols. Consult Technical Note Guidelines for Accurate Target Cell Counts Using 10x Genomics Single Cell Solutions (Document CG000091) for more details.

Input Cell Suspension Quality

- Input cell suspension should contain >90% viable cells.
- The presence of a high fraction of non-viable or dying cells may decrease the recovery.
- The presence of ambient RNA and cellular debris may also impact application performance.

Lysis Condition

- Centrifugation speed/time, the number of wash steps, and methods of debris removal (e.g. filtration, myelin removal, or flow cytometry) may require optimization for a specific sample type.
- Assess lysis efficacy via microscopy after incubation.
- Optimize lysis time when working with new cell/tissue types.
- Avoid over lysis as it could lead to nuclei aggregation and clumping.
- Cell lysis should be carried out on the ice and using chilled reagents.

Washing & Resuspension

- Use sufficient volumes to maintain concentrations <5000 nuclei/µl in Nuclei Wash and Resuspension Buffer when washing and resuspending nuclei. Maintaining nuclei at higher concentrations may cause aggregation and clumping.
- The recommended Nuclei Wash and Resuspension Buffer contains BSA to minimize nuclei losses and aggregation and RNase inhibitor to inhibit RNases during nuclei isolation and purification.
- The presence of BSA and RNase inhibitor in the Nuclei Wash and Resuspension Buffer results in a translucent/opaque rather than clear aqueous phase after breaking the GEMs with Recovery Agent. This is normal and will not impact downstream operations.

Pipette Tips

- Use wide-bore pipette tips to avoid cellular shearing and premature lysis. However, generating single nuclei suspensions from pellets or clumps is best achieved using a regular-bore pipette tip to break up aggregates.
- Pipette gently and slowly during resuspension steps to minimize physical damage to nuclei from shearing forces.

Aggregate & Debris Removal

- Filter lysed tissues and nuclei suspensions with an appropriate cell strainer to remove cellular debris and nuclei aggregates.

- The MACS SmartStrainer is recommended as it generally causes minimal changes to the nuclei concentration. However, a volume loss of 100 μ l or more can occur.
- For low nuclei suspension volumes, the Flowmi Tip Strainer is recommended to minimize volume losses.
- Nuclei concentrations may decrease by up to 40%, depending on suspension volume and strainer type. Measure the nuclei concentration before and after straining.
- When lysing neuronal tissue, large quantities of myelin debris are produced. Depending on the age of the tissue, reduction of myelin debris may improve the cleanliness of final nuclei preparation.
- Myelin removal can be done by using Myelin Removal Beads II (Human, Mouse, Rat) in combination with chilled reagents.

Nuclei Visualization & Counting

- Visualize nuclei suspensions to determine nuclei concentration and viability, suspension quality, and nuclei sizes prior to use in 10x Genomics Single Cell protocols.
- Use the Countess II FL Automated Cell Counter for determining nuclei concentrations for most applications. Sample types with very small nuclei or high levels of aggregation may require alternative counting methods.
- Perform two different counting and viability assays when characterizing a sample type for the first time.
- Counting & Viability Assays:
 - **Trypan Blue Staining:** Stain nuclei with trypan blue and count the nuclei concentration and viability using the Countess II FL Automated Cell Counter.
 - **Fluorescent Dye Staining:** Stain nuclei with fluorescent dyes and measure cell viability using a tissue culture microscope and automated cell counting software.
- Manual counting using a hemocytometer may be used as an additional method.

Nuclei Concentration for Optimal Performance

- The total number of suspended nuclei used as input to 10x Genomics Single Cell protocols is determined by the nuclei recovery target. Consult the applicable 10x Genomics Single Cell protocol to determine these relationships.
- The optimal input nuclei concentration is 700 – 1,200 nuclei/ μ l.
- If possible, bring the input nuclei suspension to a concentration that is optimal for the dynamic range of counting technique used (manual or automated), allows for 3-4 reproducible counts (where the standard deviation is <25%), and requires pipetting 2.5-15 μ l nuclei suspension into the Single Cell Master Mix. Pipetting nuclei suspension volumes <2.5 μ l increases variance due to pipetting inaccuracy, while volumes >15 μ l increases the risk of introducing unwanted debris or inhibitors.
- Use final single nuclei suspension to estimate the number of input nuclei because nuclei are inevitably lost during washing and resuspension steps.

Flow Cytometry

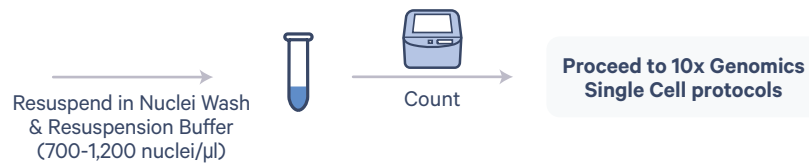
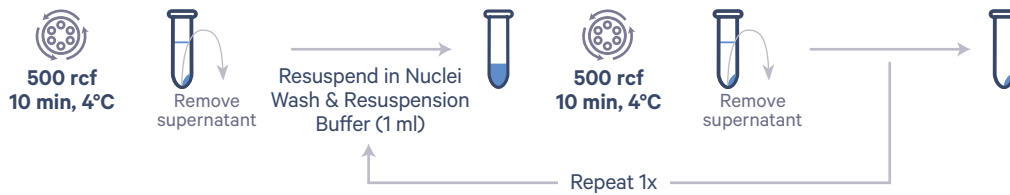
- If a sample concentration and volume allows, flow cytometry may further improve the purity of nuclei suspensions used as input for the 10x Genomics Single Cell protocols.
- Visually inspect the sorted nuclei under a microscope and re-count the nuclei suspension using a cell counter or hemocytometer prior to pipetting into the Single Cell Master Mix. Nuclei counts that are based on the flow cytometer are inaccurate.

Nuclei Control Sample

- To measure success and assess the reproducibility of these protocols, it is recommended to run a quality control sample in parallel with each experimental sample. .
- Recommended quality control samples include cultured cell lines (e.g. human HEK293T cells) that are of high quality (>90% viable) and yield a sufficient number of nuclei (i.e. >1 x 10⁶ nuclei).

Illustrative Overview: Nuclei Isolation from Single Cell Suspensions

Nuclei Isolation



*Centrifuge neuronal cells at 400 rcf for 5 min.

**Optimization of lysis time may be required. Lysis time should be empirically determined when working with new cell/tissue types.

Protocol 1: Nuclei Isolation from Single Cell Suspensions

Cell Preparation & Sourcing

Cell Type	Species	Supplier
Jurkat, Clone E6-1	Human	ATCC
293T/17 [HEK 293T/17]	Human	ATCC
NIH/3T3	Mouse	ATCC
Peripheral Blood Cells	Human	All Cells
E18 Mouse Combined Cortex, Hippocampus & ventricular Zone*	Human	Brain Bits
Dissociated Tumor Cells-Ovarian and breast cancer cells	Human	Discovery Life Sciences

*Fresh embryonic brain tissue was shipped on cold packs and used immediately upon receipt

Input single cell suspensions for this protocol were prepared, washed and counted as described in following Demonstrated Protocols:

- Single Cell Suspensions from Cultured Cell Lines for Single Cell RNA Sequencing (CG00054)
- Dissociation of Mouse Embryonic Neural Tissue for Single Cell RNA Sequencing (CG00055)
- Fresh Frozen Human-Mouse Cell Line Mixtures for Single Cell RNA Sequencing (CG00014)
- Fresh Frozen Human Peripheral Blood Mononuclear Cells for Single Cell RNA Sequencing (CG00039)
- Thawing Dissociated Tumor Cells for Single Cell RNA Sequencing (CG00233)

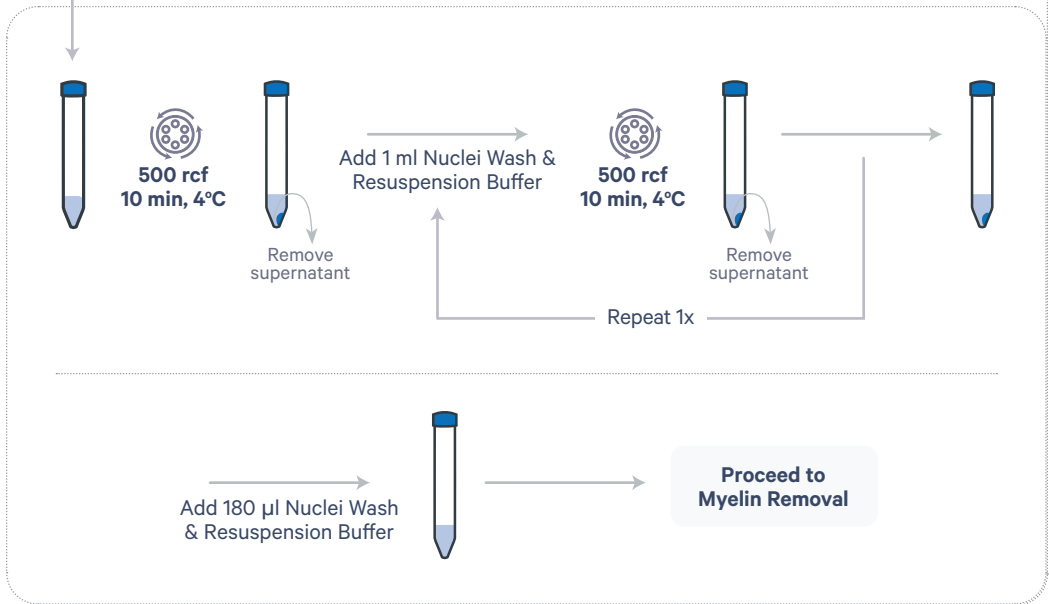
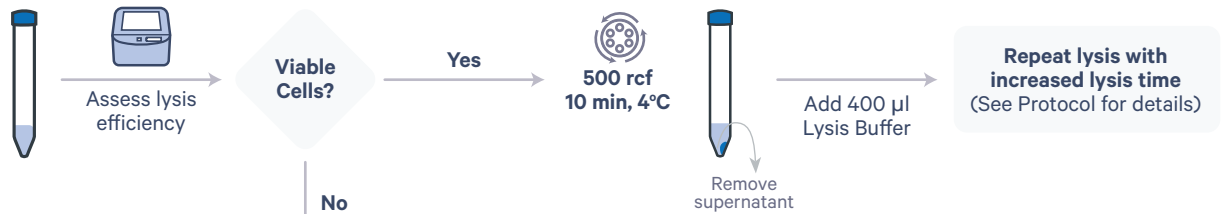
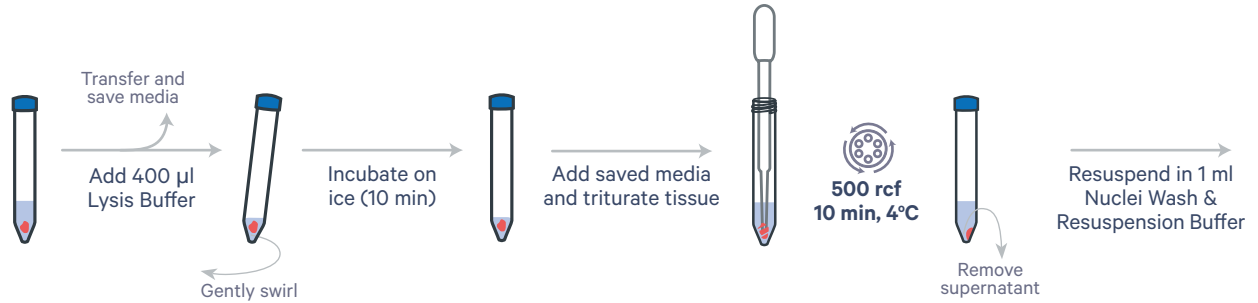
Nuclei Isolation

The optimal input concentration for this protocol is 2.5×10^6 cells. This protocol was demonstrated on $2\text{-}2.5 \times 10^6$ cells.

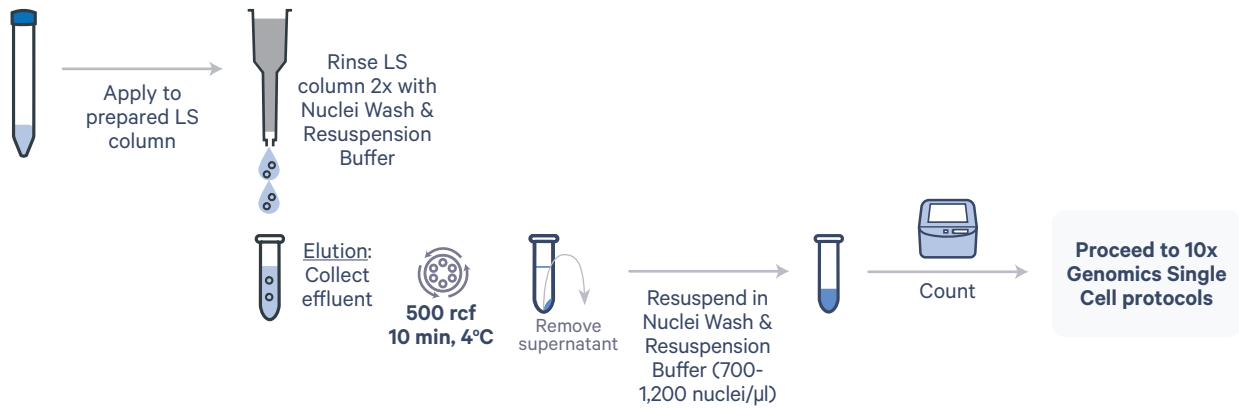
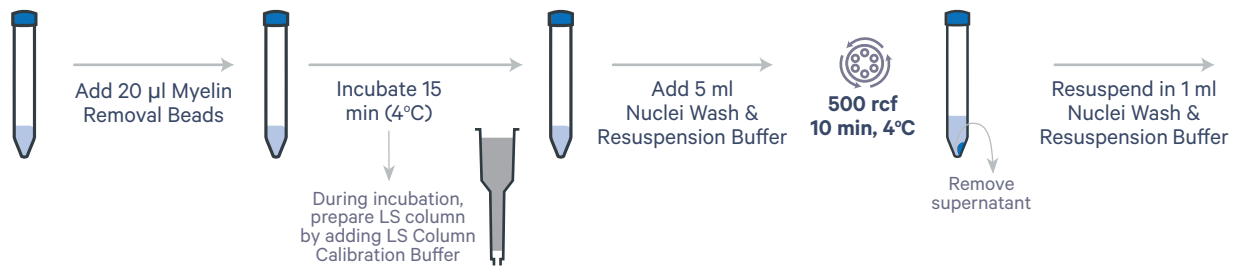
- Centrifuge cells at **300 rcf** for **5 min** at **4°C**. Centrifuge neuronal cells at **400 rcf** for **5 min** at **4°C**.
- Remove the supernatant without disturbing the cell pellet.
- Using a wide-bore pipette tip, add **200 µl** Lysis Buffer and gently pipette mix 5x or until cells are completely suspended without introducing bubbles.
- Lyse the cells on ice for **1 min**.
1 min is optimal lysis time for most cell types tested. Optimization of lysis time may be required. Lysis time should be empirically determined when working with new cell/tissue types.
- Using a regular-bore pipette tip, add **800 µl** Nuclei Wash & Resuspension Buffer. Gently pipette mix **5x**.
- Centrifuge the nuclei at **500 rcf** for **10 min** at **4°C**.
- Remove the supernatant without disrupting the pellet.
- Using a regular-bore pipette tip, add **1 ml** Nuclei Wash & Resuspension Buffer and gently pipette mix **5x**.
- Centrifuge the nuclei at **500 rcf** for **10 min** at **4°C**.
- Remove the supernatant without disrupting the pellet.
- Repeat h-j.
- Using a regular-bore pipette tip, add **1 ml** or an appropriate volume Nuclei Wash & Resuspension Buffer to achieve a target concentration of 700-1,200 nuclei/µl. Gently pipette mix **10x** or until nuclei are completely suspended.
- If cell debris and large clumps are observed, use a cell strainer for debris removal. For low volume, debris removal by passing through a 40 µm Flowmi Tip Strainer is recommended to minimize loss of sample volume.
- Determine the nuclei concentration using a Countess II FL Automated Cell Counter or hemocytometer.
- Proceed immediately with the 10x Genomics Single Cell protocol and minimize the time between nuclei preparation and chip loading.

Illustrative Overview: Nuclei Isolation from Embryonic Mouse Brain Tissue

Tissue Lysis & Nuclei Washing



Myelin Removal



Protocol 2: Nuclei Isolation from Embryonic Mouse Brain Tissue

Cell Preparation & Sourcing

This protocol was demonstrated using fresh neuronal tissue (Combine Cortex, Hippocampus and Ventricular Zone) from E18 Mouse. Fresh embryonic brain tissue was shipped on cold packs and used immediately upon receipt.

2.1 Tissue Lysis & Washing of Nuclei

- a. Using a 1000 μ l wide-bore pipette tip, gently transfer the tissue along with the Hibernate E/B27/GlutaMAX (HEB) medium to a new 15-ml centrifuge tube.
- b. Transfer the HEB medium from the tissue to a new 15-ml tube, leaving only enough medium to cover the tissue. Keep the HEB medium on ice for step d.
- c. Add **400 μ l** chilled Lysis Buffer to the tissue and lyse the tissue on ice for **10 min**. Gently swirl to mix, repeat **2x** during incubation.
- d. Add the HEB medium saved from step b back to the lysed tissue.
- e. Triturate the tissue: Aspirate the tissue with the medium into a fire polished silanized Pasteur pipette and immediately dispense the contents back into the tube. Repeat **5-7x**.
- f. Centrifuge the nuclei at **500 rcf** for **10 min** at **4°C**.
- g. Remove the supernatant without disrupting the nuclei pellet.
- h. Using a regular-bore pipette tip, add **1 ml** Nuclei Wash and Resuspension Buffer and gently pipette mix **10x**.
- i. Assess lysis efficiency and viability by staining the cells with trypan blue and by using the Countess II FL Automated Cell Counter/microscopy.
If a high fraction of viable cells is still present:
 - Centrifuge at **500 rcf** for **10 min** at **4°C**.
 - Add **400 μ l** chilled Lysis Buffer and incrementally increase the lysis time, monitoring efficacy via microscopy.
 - After optimal lysis, repeat steps f - h.
- j. Use a 40 μ m Flowmi Cell Strainer to remove cell debris and large clumps.

- k. Centrifuge at **500 rcf** for **10 min** at **4°C**.
- l. Remove the supernatant without disrupting the pellet.
- m. Using a regular-bore pipette tip, add **1 ml** Nuclei Wash and Resuspension Buffer and gently pipette mix **10x**.
- n. Centrifuge at **500 rcf** for **10 min** at **4°C**.
- o. Remove the supernatant without disrupting the pellet.
- p. Repeat steps m - o.
- q. Using a regular-bore pipette tip, add **180 μ l** Nuclei Wash and Resuspension Buffer and gently pipette mix **10x**.
- r. Proceed directly to Myelin Removal.

2.2 Myelin Removal

This protocol was demonstrated using sample sizes compatible with Myelin Removal Beads II and a single LS Column. The volumes of buffer, Myelin Removal Beads II, and number of LS columns depend on the age and mass of the tissue and should be adjusted according to the manufacturer's instructions.

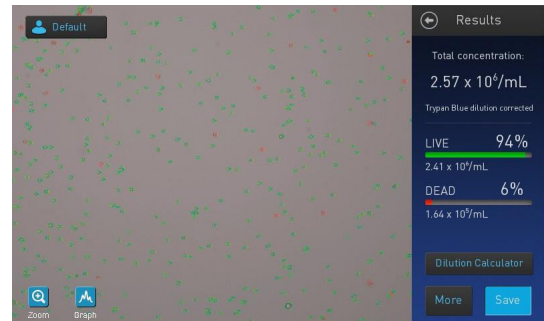
- a. Add **20 μ l** Myelin Removal Beads II to the resuspended nuclei from step 2.1q. Mix thoroughly with a wide-bore pipette tip. DO NOT vortex.
- b. Incubate for **15 min** at **4°C**.
- c. During incubation, prepare an LS column with **3 ml** LS Column Calibration Buffer.
- d. After incubation is complete, dilute the nuclei suspension (containing Myelin Removal Beads II) with **5 ml** Nuclei Wash and Resuspension Buffer (using a 10 ml serological pipette) and gently pipette mix **5x**.
- e. Centrifuge the nuclei at **500 rcf** for **10 min** at **4°C**.
- f. Remove the supernatant without disrupting the nuclei pellet.
- g. Resuspend the pelleted nuclei in **1 ml** Nuclei Wash and Resuspension Buffer.
- h. Apply the nuclei suspension to the LS column.
- i. Wash the column twice with **1 ml** Nuclei Wash and Resuspension Buffer.

- j. Collect the effluent into one 5-ml tube.
- k. Centrifuge the nuclei at **500 rcf** for **5 min** at **4°C**.
- l. Remove the supernatant without disrupting the nuclei pellet.
- m. Using a regular-bore pipette tip, add **500 μ l** Nuclei Wash and Resuspension Buffer or an appropriate volume to the nuclei pellet to achieve the target nuclei concentration of 700-1,200 nuclei/ μ l. Gently pipette mix **10x** or until nuclei are completely suspended.
- n. Use a cell strainer to remove cell debris and large clumps. For low volume, a 40 μ m FlowmiTip Strainer is recommended to minimize sample loss.
- o. Determine the nuclei concentration using a Countess II FL Automated Cell Counter or hemocytometer.
- p. Proceed immediately with the 10x Genomics Single Cell Protocol and minimize the time between nuclei preparation and chip loading.

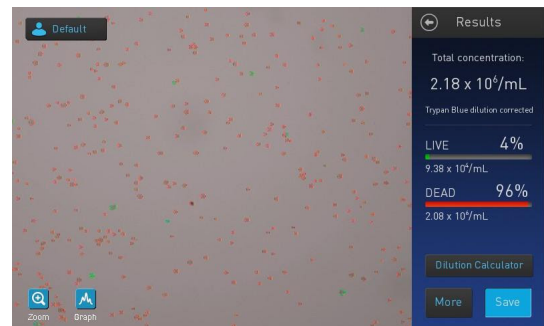
Results

Representative Staining Images

Pre Lysis



Post Lysis



Troubleshooting

Problem	Possible Solution
High fraction of non-viable cells in input material prior to starting nuclei isolation	Optimize cell thawing to enhance sample quality
	Reduce fraction of dead cells. Refer to Demonstrated Protocol Removal of Dead Cells from Single Cell Suspensions for Single Cell RNA Sequencing (CG000093)
	Sort cells using flow cytometry
High fraction of viable cells post cell lysis	Gently handle cell suspensions by following best practices and reduce cell processing times
	Incrementally increase the lysis time and monitor lysis efficacy microscopically
Low nuclei recovery	Use a swing bucket rotor for centrifugation steps.
Nuclei aggregation & clumping	Optimize the lysis time and avoid over-lysis
	Maintain concentrations <5,000 nuclei/ μ l when washing and resuspending nuclei
	Filter nuclei suspensions with an appropriate cell strainer

Document Revision Summary

Document Number	CG000124
Title	Nuclei isolation from Single Cell Suspensions & Tissues for Single Cell RNA Sequencing
Revision	Rev F to Rev G
Revision Date	April 2025
Description of Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added 10x Genomics RNase Inhibitor (PN-2001488) on page 1 Updated nuclei wash & resuspension buffer total volume to 5 ml on page 1 Updated template along with updates for general minor consistency of language and terms throughout

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