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# Increasing Collagen to Bioink Drives Mesenchymal Stromal Cells-Chondrogenesis from Hyaline to Calcified Layers

Océane Messaoudi, Christel Henrionnet, Edwin-Joffrey Courtial, Laurent Grossin, Didier Mainard, Laurent Galois, Damien Loeuille, Christophe Marquette, Pierre Gillet, Astrid Pinzano

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## Increasing collagen to bioink drives MSCs-chondrogenesis from hyaline to calcified layers.

Océane MESSAOUDI<sup>1</sup>, PhD, [oceane.mess.96@gmail.com](mailto:oceane.mess.96@gmail.com) (ORCID)0000-0002-0551-4014  
 5 Christel HENRIONNET<sup>1</sup>, PhD, [christel.henrionnet@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:christel.henrionnet@univ-lorraine.fr) (ORCID)0000-0001-7484-0377  
 Edwin-Joffrey COURTIAL<sup>2</sup>, PhD, [edwin.courtial@univ-lyon1.fr](mailto:edwin.courtial@univ-lyon1.fr) (ORCID) 0000-0001-7484-0377  
 Laurent GROSSIN<sup>1</sup>, PhD, [laurent.grossin@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:laurent.grossin@univ-lorraine.fr) (ORCID)0000-0001-6761-0936  
 Didier MAINARD<sup>1,3</sup>, PhD, MD, [didier.mainard@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:didier.mainard@univ-lorraine.fr) (ORCID)0000-0003-1944-1538  
 Laurent GALOIS<sup>1,3</sup>, PhD, MD, [l.galois@chru-nancy.fr](mailto:l.galois@chru-nancy.fr) (ORCID)0000-0002-0457-4189  
 10 Damien LOEUILLÉ<sup>1,4</sup>, PhD, MD, [d.loeuille@chru-nancy.fr](mailto:d.loeuille@chru-nancy.fr) (ORCID)0000-0001-8204-5701  
 Christophe MARQUETTE<sup>2</sup>, PhD, [christophe.marquette@univ-lyon1.fr](mailto:christophe.marquette@univ-lyon1.fr) (ORCID)0000-0003-3019-0696  
 Pierre GILLET<sup>1,5\*</sup>, PhD, MD, [pierre.gillet@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:pierre.gillet@univ-lorraine.fr) (ORCID)0000-0003-3019-0696  
 Astrid PINZANO<sup>1</sup>, PhD [astrid.pinzano@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:astrid.pinzano@univ-lorraine.fr) (ORCID)0000-0002-3867-2676

- 15 1. Université de Lorraine, CNRS, IMoPA, F54000 Nancy, France
2. Plateforme 3D Fab, UMR 5246 CNRS Université de Lyon, INSA, CPE-Lyon, ICBMS, 69100 Villeurbanne, France
3. Department of Orthopedic Surgery, University Hospital of Nancy, 54000, Nancy, France.
4. Department of Rheumatology, University Hospital of Nancy, 54500, Vandœuvre-Lès-Nancy, France
- 20 5. Department of Pharmacology, Toxicology & Pharmacovigilance, University Hospital of Nancy, 54500 Vandœuvre-Lès-Nancy, France.

\* Corresponding author: [pierre.gillet@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:pierre.gillet@univ-lorraine.fr)

### Running title

Type I collagen-enriched bioink for cartilage bioprinting

### 25 Keywords

Cartilage engineering, 3D bioprinting, human mesenchymal stromal cells, bio-ink, collagen.

**Abstract (200 words)**

30 The bioextrusion of mesenchymal stromal cells (MSCs) directly seeded in a bioink enables the production of 3D constructs, promoting their chondrogenic differentiation. Our study aimed to evaluate the effect of different type I collagen concentrations in the bioink on MSCs' chondrogenic differentiation. We printed 3D constructs using an alginate, gelatin, and fibrinogen-based bioink cellularized with MSCs, with four different quantities of type I collagen addition (0.0, 0.5, 1.0, and 5.0 mg per bioink syringe). We assessed the influence of the bioprinting process, the bioink composition, 35 and the growth factor (TGF- $\beta$ 1) on the MSCs' survival rate. We confirmed the biocompatibility of the process and the bioinks' cytocompatibility. We evaluated the chondrogenic effects of TGF- $\beta$ 1 and collagen addition on the MSCs' chondrogenic properties through macroscopic observation, shrinking ratio, RT-PCR, glycosaminoglycan synthesis, histology, and type II collagen immunohistochemistry. The bioink containing 0.5 mg of collagen produces the richest hyaline-like extracellular matrix, 40 presenting itself as a promising tool to recreate the superficial layer of hyaline cartilage. The bioink containing 5.0 mg of collagen enhances the synthesis of a calcified matrix, making it a good candidate for mimicking the calcified cartilaginous layer. Type I collagen thus allows the dose-dependent design of specific hyaline-cartilage layers.

**45 Impact Statement**

- 3D bioextrusion is a promising cartilage tissue engineering tool.
- We investigated different bioink type I collagen concentrations on MSC chondrogenicity.
- We used four different bioinks to print hydrogels.
- 50 • We confirmed bioink biocompatibility and cytocompatibility for MSC chondrogenicity.
- Type I collagen enables the dose-dependent design of specific hyaline-cartilage layers.

## 55 1. Introduction

Four zones of articular cartilage are distinguished by cell morphology, extracellular matrix (ECM), and collagen fiber orientation. Articular cartilage lacks nerves and blood vessels, limiting its ability to self-repair. If left untreated, hyaline joint focal lesions caused by trauma or overload degenerate into osteoarthritis (OA)<sup>1</sup>. This disease is becoming more prevalent because of aging, obesity, and genetic predispositions<sup>2</sup>. OA causes inflammation and destruction of the articular cartilage: current medical care focuses on symptom and pain relief<sup>3,4</sup>, with treatments such as abrasion, microfracture, autologous chondrocyte implantation (ACI), and mosaicplasty used to treat focal lesions<sup>5</sup>. Fibrous repair tissue is only a temporary solution<sup>6,7</sup>. Cartilage tissue engineering (TE) provides an alternative by combining a cell contingent, a scaffold, and environmental factors to produce a cartilaginous substitute that mimics native tissue<sup>8</sup>.

3D printing thrives in cartilage TE<sup>9,10</sup>. Extrusion-based bioprinting (EBB) uses a printing needle and Computer-Aided Design to deposit cellularized bioink onto support<sup>11</sup>. The bioink must be biocompatible and biodegradable, encouraging 3D cell differentiation<sup>12</sup>. Bio-extrusion produces large-volume pieces and stratified products, such as cartilaginous constructs, at a printing temperature compatible with living cells<sup>13</sup>. EBB generates a neo-tissue with physical and biochemical properties close to native tissue, making it a promising new cartilage defect repair method. The layer-by-layer construction allows the deposit of bioinks, growth factors, and cell types to mimic hyaline cartilage<sup>14,15</sup>. Nowadays, most EBB experiments aim to use triphasic stratified 3D-printed constructs to recreate three cartilaginous layers of the osteochondral interface<sup>16-19</sup>. Concerning cell sources, chondrocytes rapidly dedifferentiate and synthesize less ECM in 2D cell culture<sup>20,21</sup>. Mesenchymal stromal cells (MSCs) are promising candidates due to their high proliferation and chondrogenic properties. MSCs derived from bone marrow are the gold standard (BM-MSCs). The cellular density of MSCs used in cartilage 3D printing is high (>10M cells/mL), which is controversial for cartilage TE. Previous research has shown that a low cell density of 1M cells/mL more accurately represents cell repartition in native cartilage<sup>22</sup>.

The most common bioinks for extrusion-based 3D printing are hydrogels made of natural biomaterials such as alginate, gelatin, type I collagen, hyaluronic acid, nanocellulose, or chitin<sup>12</sup>. They have numerous advantages because they are biocompatible, biodegradable, and cell-adhesive. However, hydrogels have poor mechanical strength and stability. Previous research used a patented bioink for 3D printing skin<sup>23</sup> to regenerate cartilage<sup>22</sup>. This bioink contained three cartilage tissue engineering components: alginate, gelatin, and fibrinogen. Gelatin hydrogels are non-immunogenic and biocompatible<sup>24</sup>. Gelatin-based hydrogels stimulate chondrogenic gene expression and protein synthesis in MSCs *in vitro*<sup>25</sup>. Because of its low stability, it necessitates gelation or biomaterial association; it is found in the cell walls of brown algae. Alginate is biocompatible, biodegradable, and has low cytotoxic potential<sup>26</sup>. Forming an "egg-box" structure<sup>27</sup> with a CaCl<sub>2</sub> solution gives the biomaterial a stable and compact 3D network while maintaining the chondrogenic phenotype<sup>28-30</sup>. Alginate and gelatin improve the biochemical and mechanical properties of the construct<sup>31,32</sup>. To stabilize the final construct, we added fibrin as a third component<sup>22,23,33</sup>. Thrombin converts fibrinogen into blood-clotting fibrin. Because of its reactivity with thrombin, fibrinogen can be added to bioink in 3D printing to include fibrin post-printing and improve stability<sup>34</sup>. Fibrin in gelatin-based bioink creates a more reticulated 3D network, retaining more cells in the printed substitutes and favoring the round morphology of chondrocytes<sup>35</sup>.

According to our findings, human (h) BM-MSCs seeded in alginate, gelatin, and fibrinogen-based bioink can survive *in vitro* for 56 days. The printed constructs were homogenous with type II collagen and proteoglycan synthesis on D56<sup>22</sup>. The patented bioink, initially developed for skin bioprinting<sup>23</sup>, requires a chondrogenic factor to produce a stratified construct that resembles native cartilage. This study incorporates a fourth natural biomaterial, type I collagen, into the bioink and modifies its concentration to recreate better specific hyaline cartilage layers, a challenge in cartilage TE. Unfortunately, exogenous type II collagen, naturally present in the cartilaginous matrix, may be immunogenic<sup>36</sup> and even arthritogenic in rodents<sup>37</sup> and monkeys<sup>38</sup>. In contrast, type I collagen has lower immunogenicity and is already used in the biomedical field<sup>39</sup>, especially for cartilage engineering.

In an alginate-based hydrogel, type I collagen increased mechanical strength, cell adhesion, proliferation, survival, and chondrogenic gene expression<sup>29</sup>. The concentrations of collagen in hydrogel range from 0.03 to 3.00 mg/mL<sup>40-42</sup>. Some papers<sup>43,44</sup> use 10 or 40 mg/mL [Supplementary Data 1]. This work stayed within the parameters. The effect of gelatin, fibrinogen, and alginate-based bioink enriched or not with various type I collagen concentrations on the viability and chondrogenic potential of embedded MSCs, as well as their matrix synthesis in TE constructs to make specific cartilaginous layers of hyaline cartilage tissue *in vitro*, was thus investigated.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Isolation and expansion of human bone mesenchymal stromal cells

Bone marrows of three hip OA patients were isolated during arthroplasty. After informed consent from all study participants, the Bioethics Committee and our authorization (DC 2019-3387, authorized 2019, January 14th) approved the study. Biopsies were performed on two women (75 & 81 y.o.) and a man (77 y.o.). After anonymization, bone marrow samples were placed in 1 ml of phosphate-buffered saline (PBS, D8537, Sigma) with 625 UI/ml heparin. After dilution in 30 ml PBS, nucleated cells were collected by centrifugation at 400 g for 5 min. The cells were seeded into Petri dishes (90 mm diameter) at  $4 \times 10^6$  cells/dish for monolayer expansion in Dulbecco's modified Eagle medium (DMEM-LG, 21885-025, Gibco) with low glucose (1 g/L) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS, P30-3306, Pan Biotech), 1% glutamine (35050-038, Gibco), 1% penicillin-streptomycin (15140-122, Gibco), and 1 ng/ml basic Fibroblast Growth Factor (bFGF, 130-093-837, Miltenyi France). Cells were incubated in a humidified atmosphere with 21% O<sub>2</sub> and 5% CO<sub>2</sub> incubated cells at 37°C. Twice-weekly culture medium changes were made.

Confluent (80%) MSCs were trypsinized using 0.05% trypsin-EDTA (25300-062, Gibco) and plated at  $0.5 \times 10^6$  cells/dish density, then cultured from P0 to P3. In P3, before seeding in the bioink, the medium is changed for a chondrogenic pre-differentiation medium made of DMEM (DMEM-HG, 41965-039, Gibco), with high glucose (4.5 g/L) supplemented with 10% FBS, 1% glutamine, 1% penicillin-streptomycin, 110 µg/ml sodium pyruvate (11360-39, Gibco) and chondrogenic supplements: 40 µg/ml proline (P5607, Sigma), 50 µg/ml L-ascorbic-acid-2-phosphate (A8960, Sigma), and  $10^{-7}$  M dexamethasone (D2915, Sigma) with 1 ng/mL of bFGF (130-093-837, Miltenyi France). P3 offers the best compromise between cell purity (>90%) and acquiring a sufficient cell number while maintaining excellent differentiation potentialities.

## 2.2. Bioink formulation

The authors created our lab-safe 3D printer. A push pump and heating patch keep the bio-extrusion system at 28°C. Repetier Host Software (Hot-World GmbH & Co. KG Knickelsdorf 4247877 Willich, Germany) monitors the printer and creates the construct printing pattern. The constructs were rectangular with a length of 1 cm, a width of 1 cm, and a thickness of 4 mm to deposit 4 layers. The bioink was formulated at 37°C with 1 percent (w/v) very low viscosity alginate (molecular weight: 216.121 g/mol, A18565, Alfa Aesar), 10% bovine gelatin (G1890, Sigma-Aldrich), and 2% fibrinogen (F8630, Sigma). Alginate was reconstituted in sodium chloride (NaCl 0.9 percent, 64812, Versol), and fibrinogen was diluted in cell culture media. Both solutions were placed at 37°C the day before printing for best dissolution and then filtered on a 0,22µm filters in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. The gelatin powder is already sterile; thus, it was weighted and diluted in a sterile environment, then also placed at 37°C overnight for best dissolution.

We added different amounts of soluble type I collagen (500060635, Viscofan) to bioink to test its effect. Thus, 0.0, 0.5, 1.0, and 5.0 mg of collagen per 8 ml were tested and coded as (a) Col0, (b) Col0.5, (c) Col1, and (d) Col5. The different quantities were chosen according to the Literature<sup>43,44</sup>. While reconstituting alginate with NaCl, sterile, soluble type I collagen was added to make 2 ml. The variation of each bioink rheology was too small to affect printability (**Supplementary Data 2**).

The constructs were printed layer-by-layer, following the design mentioned previously. The Petri dishes (430167, Dutscher) containing the newly printed constructs are filled with 20 ml of the gelation solution composed of 4% CaCl<sub>2</sub> (w/v) and 25 U/mL of thrombin (T4648, Sigma). The gelation of the construct takes 1 hour at 37°C under stirring (**Supplementary Data 3**). The substitutes were rinsed with a PBS solution and cultured for 28 or 56 days before harvest and evaluation. The culture medium was changed twice per week. For every bioink, the constructs were divided into two separate groups and cultured in a non-chondrogenic medium containing 1% glutamine, 1% penicillin-streptomycin, 110 µg/ml sodium pyruvate (11360-39, Gibco), 1mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, and chondrogenic supplements: 40 µg/ml proline (P5607, Sigma), 50 µg/ml L-ascorbic-acid-2-phosphate (A8960, Sigma), and 10<sup>-7</sup> M dexamethasone (D2915, Sigma). 1% ITS (354352, Corning) was added in the control media, while ITS 1% and 10 ng/ml TGF-β1 (Miltenyi) were added to the chondrogenic medium.

## 2.3. Viability assays

We measured the supernatant lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) activity at D28 and D56 to determine cell viability in the 3D-printed constructs. The measure was made with a kit (Cytotoxicity Detection Kit<sup>PLUS</sup>, Roche). For each concentration and condition tested in construct culture wells, 100 µL of supernatant was sampled. LDH activity was measured per the manufacturer's instructions. Spectrophotometers measured absorbance at 340 nm at each time point (Multiskan Ex, Thermo Labsystems). In each condition, a construct was sacrificed to set the maximum LDH release for the 100% cellular death threshold by adding Triton (2%) in the well, and an acellular gel was used for the 0% threshold. The value was reported to that threshold for each well and withdrawn from 100 to calculate the cell survival rate. Three patients had cell survival measured for three constructs per condition (n = 9).

## 2.4. Macroscopic observation

175 Before analysis, we took macroscopic images of the constructs at the experiment's start (**Supplementary Data 3**) and end (D56). A ruler calculates the scale of the photo on a flat, sterile surface. ImageJ calculated the total surface area (n = 9). TGF- $\beta$ 1-treated products are compared to ITS constructs of the same condition. TGF- $\beta$ 1/ITS shrinking ratios are computed for each bioink.

## 2.5. Gene expression analysis by quantitative real-time PCR

180 3D-bioprinted cartilages were frozen at -80°C after 28 or 56 days of maturation until analysis.  $\beta$ -mercaptoethanol-containing lysis buffer was digested for 10 minutes. The manufacturer's instructions were followed to purify the lysate on the purification column (QIAshredder, 79656, Qiagen). RNeasy Mini Kits isolated total mRNA (Qiagen). The Omniscript RT Kit reverse-transcribed 200 ng of RNA into cDNA (Qiagen). According to Qiagen's instructions, QuantiTect™ SYBR Green PCR was used for  
 185 qRT-PCR. A standard curve was created from purified PCR products for each gene ( $10^{-3}$  to  $10^{-6}$  ng/ $\mu$ L) to determine relative quantification. Aggrecan (*ACAN*), Type 2 Collagen (*COL2A1*), its isoform IIB (*COLIIB*), SRY-Box Transcription Factor 9 (*SOX9*), Type 1 Collagen (*COL1A1*), Versican (*VCAN*), RUNT-related transcription factor 2 (*RUNX2*), Cartilage Oligomeric Matrix Protein (*COMP*), Alkaline Phosphatase (*ALPL*), Osteocalcin (*BGLAP*), Matrix Metalloproteinase 13 (*MMP13*), and Type 10  
 190 Collagen (*COL10A1*) gene expression levels were normalized to *RPS29*. This constitutive gene is expressed relatively consistently, regardless of experimental conditions. **Supplementary Data 4** shows sequences and product sizes. The measures were repeated on three patients in triplicate biological samples for each gene (n=9).

## 2.6. Biochemical assay of GlycosAminoGlycan content

195 Colorimetric quantification measured GAG content<sup>45</sup>. After 28 or 56 days of maturation, 3D-printed constructs were dried overnight and weighed. The constructs were digested overnight at 60°C in 200  $\mu$ L buffer and 10  $\mu$ L papain solution (60  $\mu$ g / 10  $\mu$ L, P4762, Sigma). Then, 10  $\mu$ L of 0.22 mol/L monoiodoacetic acid stopped the reaction (MIA, Merck). For each sample, 20  $\mu$ L of supernatant was placed in a 96-well plate, to which 250  $\mu$ L of  $9.2 \times 10^{-5}$  mol 1,9-dimethyl methylene blue (DMB, 23481-  
 200 50-7, Polysciences) was added to form a soluble GAG-DMB complex. A standard curve of shark cartilage chondroitin-6-sulfate from 0 to 100  $\mu$ g/mL was used to calculate GAG content (C6S, C4384, Sigma). A 525-nm spectrophotometer read the 96-well plate. The samples' initial dry weight normalized the GAG content (mg). Acellular constructs were dosed and subtracted from the GAG content of the cellularized hydrogels. The measures were repeated on three constructs for all three patients (n=9).

## 205 2.7. Histological analysis of cartilaginous printed constructs

Histology examined extracellular matrix synthesis 28 or 56 days after printing. The constructs were fixed in a buffer with 4% paraformaldehyde, 10 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, and 0.1 M sodium cacodylate (pH 7.4) for 24 h at room temperature, then washed at 4°C in a solution with 50 mM BaCl<sub>2</sub>. The constructs were dehydrated in ethanol, embedded in paraffin, and cut into 5  $\mu$ m cross sections. Hematoxylin-Erythrosin-Saffron (HES) staining revealed the constructs' cell morphology and matrix organization.  
 210 Alcian blue stained 3D constructs' sulfated glycosaminoglycans (GAGs) (AB, pH 1.3). Alizarin red (AR,

pH 4.2) stained calcium deposits. Light microscopy (DMD 108, Leica) was used to record the stained slides of three constructs per patient (n = 9). One photo per condition was selected.

## 2.8. Immunohistochemical staining of cartilaginous printed constructs

215 Immunohistochemistry was used to analyze extracellular matrix synthesis 28 or 56 days after printing. Type II collagen immunostaining with type II collagen antibodies (6B3, MS-306-R7, Labvision) at a dilution of 1% was used to assess MSC chondrogenic differentiation and matrix synthesis in hydrogels. Deparaffinized 5µm slides were treated with pepsin (0.4% w/v in 0.01 M HCl, pH 2.0) for 30 min at room temperature. The samples were washed and incubated with a hydrogen peroxide-blocking solution to block endogenous peroxidase. Stopping unspecific epitopes requires 2% BSA. Primary and secondary antibodies incubated the samples. DAB (LSAB + HRP kit, Dako) in the substrate-chromogen solution causes a brown residue. Sections were counterstained with hematoxylin and then mounted with resin. Light microscopy recorded stained slides (DMD 108, Leica®). Nine constructs were photographed.

## 225 2.9. Densitometry analysis of the constructs

ImageJ was used to analyze semi-quantitatively AB, AR, and type II collagen immunohistochemistry images. After measuring the constructs' total size, hue, and saturation, they were isolated from the positively stained area. The measures were repeated on three slides per patient (n=9).

## 2.10. Statistical analysis

230 Three patients per condition were tested in biological triplicate (LDH assay, macroscopic observation, gene expression, histological, immunohistochemical, and biochemical assay). TGF-β1 to control is the shrinking ratio for each situation (n = 9) vs. ITS. For gene expression standardization, results were expressed as a ratio of the mRNA level of each gene of interest over the *RPS29* gene in every bioink and presented as mean + standard error to the mean (SEM). For all other experiments, a one-way ANOVA comparison test was used to determine significance, followed by Tukey's post-hoc test for multiple comparisons to compare TGF-β1 with our control condition ITS, then the effect of the four bioinks and time. GraphPad Prism® performed the statistical analysis.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Effect of collagen addition on embedded cells viability during chondrogenesis

240 LDH dosages were measured after D28 or D56 of *in vitro* maturation in ITS or TGF-β1 conditions for the four bioinks to determine the effect of type I collagen on cell viability. **Figure 1** shows the results. LDH dosage viability ranged from 91-95 percent in all tested conditions and for the four bioinks, proving that the global printing process and bioink constitution did not affect cell viability.



### 245 3.2. Macroscopic effect of the TGF- $\beta$ 1 chondrogenic induction on the different constructs printed using the four bioinks of interest

At the end point of our experiment (D56), the bio-extruded constructs were subjected to a macroscopic observation. The pink coloration was due to the cell culture medium (**Figure 2A**). Sectioned in half for analysis, those constructs were smaller, rounder, denser, and harder to cut. The shrinkage ratio was calculated as TGF- $\beta$ 1 /ITS (**Figure 2B**). Col0.5 had a 1.3-fold higher shrinking ratio than Col0, indicating higher MEC synthesis. Col1 and Col5 inks differed 0.8 and 0.7-fold from the control ink (ITS, without TGF- $\beta$ 1).

### 255 3.3. Gene expressions in the 3D printed constructs

At D28, TGF- $\beta$ 1 induced chondrogenic differentiation in the embedded cells in bio-extruded constructs in all bioinks, but Col5 is less so (**Figure 3**). TGF- $\beta$ 1 supported chondrogenic differentiation by generating chondrogenic markers like *COL2A1*, *COL2B*, *COL10*, *ACAN*, *SOX9*, and *COMP*. Otherwise, *RUNX2* and *COL1A1* were also upregulated. Interestingly, *VCAN*, *ALPL*, and *BGLAP* levels remained low.

At D28, Col0.5 specifically increased *COL2A1*, *COL2B*, *COL10A1*, and *COMP* by 1.8 and 2.6-fold, respectively, compared to Col0. MSCs from all our end-stage OA patients overexpressed *COL10A1*. *COL1A1* levels were slightly higher but positively correlated with chondrogenic markers. Col1 and Col5 did not increase chondrogenic markers. Col5 also decreased *ACAN* expression and overexpressed *BGLAP* (2.7-fold), *RUNX2* (1.4-fold), and *MMP13* (238.0-fold), favoring osteogenicity. All gene expression drops to the basal level at D56.

### 265 3.4. Biochemical analysis for GAGs content

After D28 and D56 of *in vitro* culture, mature GAGs were quantified. **Figure 4** shows the results. In the chondrogenic condition, Col0 and Col0.5 bioinks synthesized significantly more GAGs in their ECMS than in the control condition (ITS). TGF- $\beta$ 1 increased synthesis in Col0.5 by 1.7-fold on D28 compared to Col0 but decreased synthesis at D56 (1.7-fold) compared to Col0. Col1 and Col5 bio-inks had folds of 0.5 and 0.7 on D28 and 0.3 and 0.4 on D56 compared to Col0. Despite maturation, TGF- $\beta$ 1 did not promote GAG synthesis in those two inks. The Col0.5 bioink constructs' GAG synthesis decreased from D28 to D56.

### 270 3.5. Histological and immunostaining analysis

The bio-extruded constructs showed that all four bioinks retained a dense, homogeneous global structure after D28 or D56, regardless of the four initially printed layers. HES staining showed homogeneous cell distribution within constructs with no embedded cell mortality (data not shown). Bio-extruded constructs in ITS conditions showed weak extracellular matrix synthesis in proteoglycans and collagen. TGF- $\beta$ 1 increased Alcian blue-stained GAG in all four bioinks at D56 (**Figures 5A and 5B**). After D56, the positively stained areas are higher than 30%, with Col0 (47%), Col1 (50%), and Col0.5 (55%).

280 Concerning Col0.5 and Col1, maturation time significantly increased proteoglycan synthesis, but not  
for Col0 and Col5 bioinks. D28 showed no type II collagen synthesis by specific staining (**Figures 5C  
and 5D**). After D56, immunostaining showed a positive effect of TGF- $\beta$ 1 for the Col0 (19%), Col0.5  
285 (34%), and Col1 (27%) bioinks, but no type II collagen synthesis in the Col5 bioink. Col0.5 bioink  
produced 1.8-fold more intense brown staining than Col0 bioink, indicating that this quantity of type I  
collagen affected type II collagen synthesis in bio-extruded constructs. Col1 bioink had similar type II  
collagen staining to Col0. Col5 synthesized 5% less than its ITS controls. The edges of the constructs  
contain higher proteoglycan and type II collagen synthesis, while the central area was less stained in  
all conditions, likely due to the gradient of media and nutrient diffusion. The constructs' two major  
hyalin MEC components were precisely co-located in histology slides.

290 Alizarin red, specifically stains construct calcium deposition. At D28, the ITS condition had the highest  
red staining on the construct edges (**Figures 5E and 5F**). After D56, TGF- $\beta$ 1 maintained less than 12%  
of the total calcified area in constructs printed with Col0, Col0.5, or Col1 bioinks, compared to ITS  
conditions. At D56, the Col5 constructs had five times more calcifications (39%) than the bioink without  
collagen (7%) in the chondrogenic environment. Unlike the edge staining of the ITS conditions, the  
295 latter had homogenous staining in the constructs' center areas.

## 4. Discussion

In this study, we aimed to use extrusion-based bioprinting of alginate, gelatin, and fibrinogen-based  
bioinks to produce functionalized cartilaginous constructs. We first confirmed that the global  
bioprinting process, as well as the collagen addition in our bioink, do not have a deleterious effect on  
300 the embedded cells' viability. Then, we showed that MSCs seeded in all tested bioinks and cultured in  
a TGF- $\beta$ 1-enriched medium differentiated into chondrogenic cells. Maturation time impacted both gene  
expression and matrix synthesis. While gene expression is higher after 28 days, a dense ECM in  
constructs requires 56 days of *in vitro* growth. Our work is in accordance with many studies already  
showing that BM-MSC-seeded bio-extruded functionalized constructs are successful in cartilage tissue  
305 engineering<sup>46</sup>. The limitation of classical tissue engineering methods that use homogenous scaffolds is  
that they make replicating and constructing the zonal organization harder. In contrast, new 3D printing  
processes make layer regeneration easier. It is well known that cell density, ink composition, and  
viscosity are all key factors that affect EBB printing. Furthermore, the construct's final ink gelation and  
reticulation directly impact the cells' environment and, thus, their ability to differentiate into the  
310 chondrogenic pathway<sup>47</sup>.

Biocompatibility, biodegradability, and cartilaginous-like structure make natural biomaterials ideal for  
cartilage TE. In this work, we based this composition on our previous work comparing three different  
bioinks. According to those previous results, we bioextruded a bioink composed of alginate, gelatin,  
and fibrinogen<sup>23,48</sup>. Gelatin can be methacrylated<sup>49-51</sup> or combined with other natural components to  
315 improve its stability. It is often used in tissue engineering for its biocompatibility, biodegradability, and  
easy gelation<sup>26,52</sup>. Its concentration affects bio-constructs' 3D network and encapsulated cell  
chondrogenesis<sup>53</sup>. Fibrin is formed by the reaction of fibrinogen and thrombin. Due to its fiber  
orientation, it promotes cell self-organization<sup>48</sup>. Fibrinogen concentration affects bioink viscosity,  
reticulation<sup>17</sup>, cell growth, and division<sup>54</sup>.

320 This study first showed that our extrusion-based bioprinting process could produce a 4 mm thick  
construct in a layer-by-layer process. Literature has already demonstrated that conical needles,  
biocompatible pressure, and extrusion speed ensured cell viability in the constructs<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore,  
collagen is known to improve cell adhesion and viability in biomaterials<sup>29,55</sup>. Our results are by those  
statements, as our printing method, bioink composition, and cell conditions do not affect cell viability,  
325 which stays excellent until 56 days of maturation. We obtained an overall survival rate above 90% in  
all tested conditions. Furthermore, similarly to what is shown in the literature, the addition of soluble  
type I collagen in our bioink does not affect the construct's global printing process<sup>22,56</sup>. We also  
demonstrated that our functionalized constructs in chondrogenic differentiation media (TGF- $\beta$ 1)  
support MSCs' chondrogenic differentiation. TGF- $\beta$ 1 promoted chondrogenesis in all four bioinks, and  
330 resulting ECM synthesis shrinks constructs macroscopically. Histological and immunohistochemical  
staining of our constructs confirms the matrix's proteoglycans and type II collagen contents in  
chondrogenic conditions.

Literature shows that RGD peptides on collagen fibers, an ECM protein, improve cell adhesion and  
chondrogenesis<sup>57</sup>. We found that adding 0.5mg of collagen I to our bioink increases explicitly gene  
335 expression of cartilaginous markers like *COL2A1*, *COL2B*, and *COMP*, which are correlated with the  
maintenance of the chondrogenic phenotype. The beneficial effect of type I collagen on cells'  
chondrogenesis and gene expression of those specific genes was already demonstrated by Yang et al.<sup>29</sup>.  
This specific collagen quantity also increases the matrix's proteoglycans and type II collagen synthesis,  
creating a dense, rich, hyaline-like ECM in the constructs. On the contrary, a higher type I collagen  
340 quantity increases hypertrophic/calcified markers like *MMP13*, *RUNX2*, and *BGLAP*<sup>41</sup>. Calcium  
deposition in the matrix is also higher. Many studies have shown that matrix reticulation is critical in  
maintaining the chondrogenic phenotype<sup>47</sup>. The final hydrogel reticulation in the construct containing  
5mg of collagen may be responsible for the construct hypertrophy. Our results suggest that collagen  
type-I enriched bio-inks can dose-dependently promote either a chondrogenic or hypertrophic/calcified  
345 phenotype, potentially providing an excellent layer-by-layer construct containing both chondral and  
osteochondral structures with a unique differentiation medium.

***In conclusion***, the Col0.5 bioink is a promising candidate to reproduce the superficial layers of hyaline  
cartilage without affecting its rheological properties. The resulting layer is a proteoglycan- and type II  
collagen-rich extracellular matrix with a more hyaline-like MSC profile and a lower  
350 hypertrophic/osteogenic profile (*BGLAP*, *RUNX2*, and *MMP13*). In contrast, Col5 bioink can mimic the  
hypertrophic/calcified area of native cartilage. These bioinks could help us to 3D print a stratified  
construct to repair articular cartilage.

## Author's-contribution

355 OM, CH, and EJC were involved in the cell culture, 3D printing process, and histological, biochemical, and statistical analyses. OM contributed to the manuscript preparation. LGr, DM, LGa, DL, and CM were involved in the intellectual contribution and editing of the manuscript. CH, PG, and AP contributed to the synthesis and editing of the manuscript. All authors have contributed substantially to the study's conception and design. All authors have revised it critically for important intellectual content. All authors have given final approval of this present version.

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## Declaration of INTEREST

375 The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Sharing of Materials

Authors will honor any reasonable request for materials, methods, or data necessary to reproduce or validate the research

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## Abbreviations

	2D: Two-Dimensional
	3D: Three-Dimensional
	AB: Alcian blue
385	ACAN: Aggrecan (gene)
	ANOVA: Analysis of variance
	AR: Alizarin red
	bFGF: basic Fibroblast Growth Factor
	<i>BGLAP</i> : Osteocalcin (gene)
390	CAD: Computer-Aided Design
	CO <sub>2</sub> : Carbon Dioxide
	<i>COL10A1</i> : Collagen type X alpha one chain (gene)
	<i>COL2A</i> : Collagen type II alpha 1 chain (gene)
	<i>COMP</i> : Cartilage Oligomeric Matrix Protein (gene)
395	DMB: 1,9-Dimethyl Methylene blue
	DMEM: Dulbecco's Modified Eagle Medium
	DO: Absorbance
	EBB: Extrusion-Based Bioprinting
	ECM: Extracellular Matrix
400	FBS: Fetal Bovine Serum
	GAG: GlycosAminoGlycan
	HES: Hematoxylin Erythrosin Saffron
	ITS: Insulin-Transferrin-Selenium
	LDH: Lactate DeHydrogenase
405	MIA: Mono Iodoacetic Acid
	<i>MMP13</i> : Matrix Metalloproteinase 13 (gene)
	MSCs: Mesenchymal Stromal Cells
	<i>OSX</i> : Osterix (gene)
	PBS: Phosphate-Buffered Saline
410	qRT-PCR: Quantitative reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction
	RNA: Ribonucleic acid
	<i>RPS29</i> : Ribosomal protein S29 (gene)
	<i>SOX9</i> : Sex-determining region-related HMG-box9 (gene)
	TE: Tissue engineering
415	

## Figures legends

**Figure 1: Cell viability was evaluated by supernatant LDH dosage measures at D28 and D56 for the Col0, Col0.5, Col1, and Col5 bioinks in ITS and TGF-β1 conditions.** Data are shown as mean + SEM. (n=9). One-way ANOVA did not show significant differences between each bioink and each situation.

420 **Figure 2: Macroscopic observation of the cartilaginous substitutes at D56** (A) Macroscopic images of cell-seeded bio-extruded constructs using Col0, Col0.5, Col1, and Col5 bioinks in both ITS (top line) and TGF-β1 (bottom line) conditions on D56. (B) The shrinking ratio between TGF-β1 and ITS conditions for every bioink. Data are shown as mean + SEM. Measures were done in triplicates. Every bioink was compared to the three others using a one-way ANOVA, followed by a Tukey's post hoc test, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001.

430 **Figure 3: Influence of growth factor TGF-β1, time, and bioink composition on gene expressions in bioprinted cartilage constructs on D28 and D56.** Chondrogenic, hypertrophic, and fibrotic marker expressions were investigated using real-time qPCR. In the first step, comparisons for each condition were performed versus their respective control condition (ITS alone) with one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's test. Data are presented as the mean + SEM. \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, and \*\*\* p < 0.001 vs. ITS. A one-way ANOVA, followed by Tukey's post hoc test, was performed to assess the influence of time in each respective condition. # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01, and ### p < 0.001. Lastly, the effect of the bioink composition was assessed between each composition within a given condition (time point and growth factor). § p < 0.05, §§ p < 0.01, and §§§ p < 0.001; ns: not significant.

435 **Figure 4: Glycosaminoglycans (GAGs) assay in the extruded constructs after 56 days of maturation under the effect of TGF-β1 or in the ITS condition normalized by using acellular constructs as control.** The results are expressed in micrograms of GAG per milligram of the dry weight of the final constructs. The numbers are shown in mean + SEM for each condition (n=9). For every bioink, TGF-β1 was compared to the ITS control using a one-way ANOVA, followed by a Tukey's post hoc test, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001. Every bioink was compared to the three others using a one-way ANOVA, # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01, ### p < 0.001, ns=not significant, and the effect of the maturation time was evaluated using 1 Factor ANOVA.

445 **Figure 5: Histological and immunohistochemical analyses of 3D-printed constructs seeded with BM-MSCs using either Col0, Col0.5, Col1, or Col5 bioink in ITS and TGF-β1 on D28 and D56 post-printing.** The proteoglycans synthesized were stained using Alcian blue staining (A), the type II collagen was observed using immunohistochemistry (brown staining) (C), and calcified deposition was stained using Alizarin red (E). Quantitative analyses of the histological and immunohistological staining with Alcian blue (B), immunohistochemical evidence of type II collagen (D), and calcifications (F) in the bio-extruded constructs were performed with ImageJ. The results are expressed as the percentage mean + SEM of the stained area (n=9). For every bioink, TGF-β1 was compared to the ITS control using a one-way ANOVA, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001, and the effect of the maturation time was evaluated using one-way ANOVA, # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01, ### p < 0.001. Every bioink was compared to the three others using a one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's test, § p < 0.05, §§ p < 0.01, §§§ p < 0.001, ns = no significant difference.

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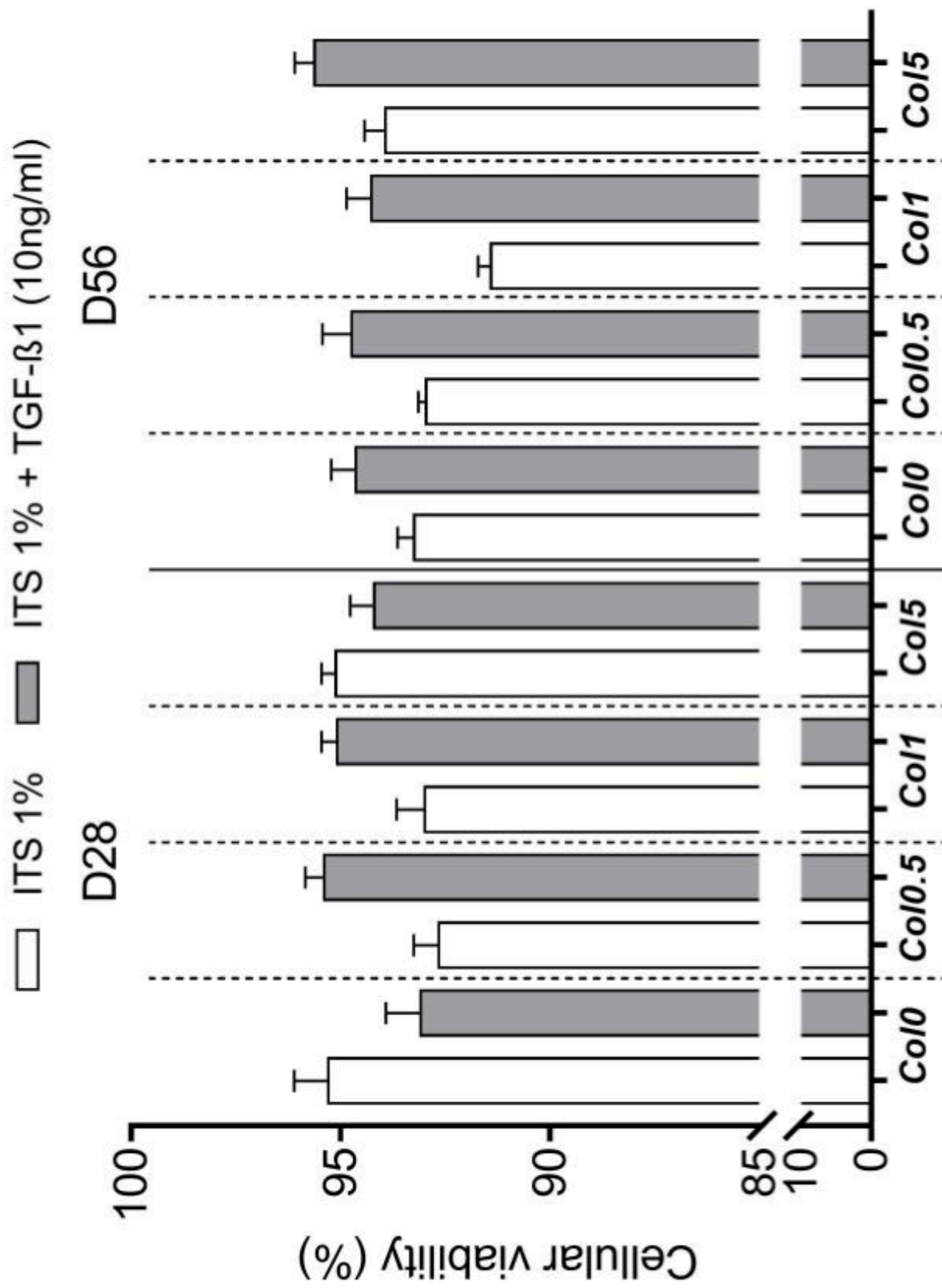
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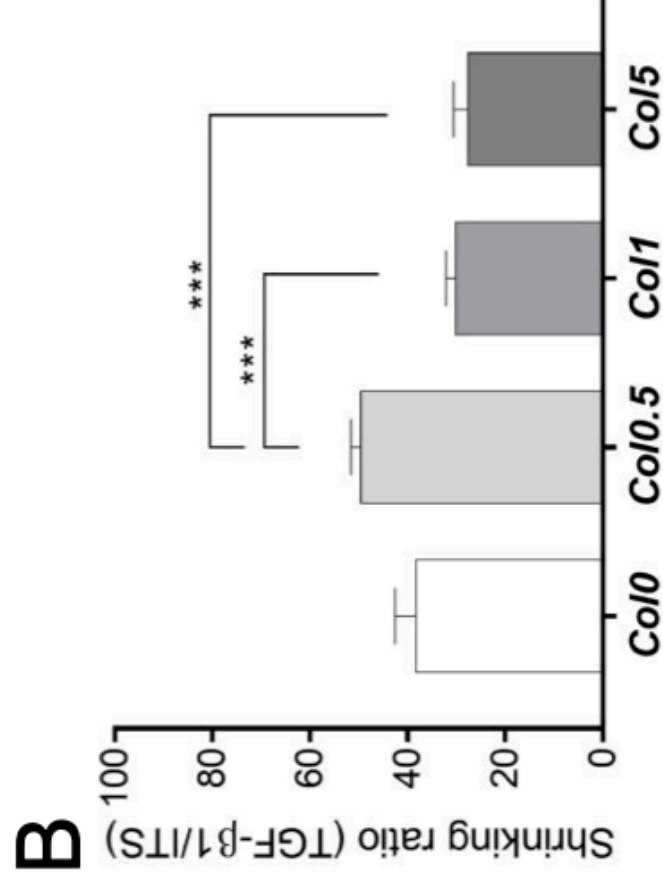
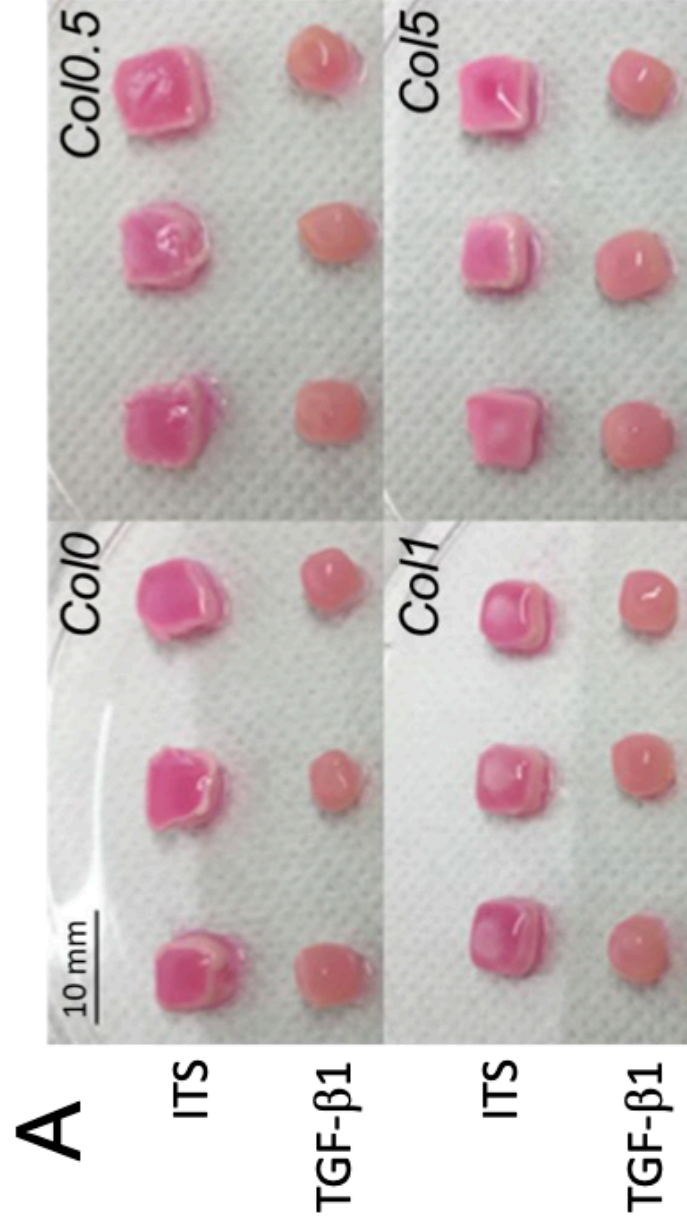
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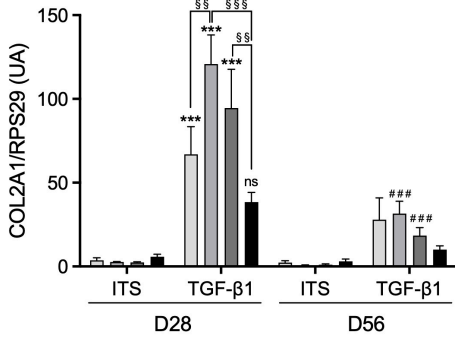
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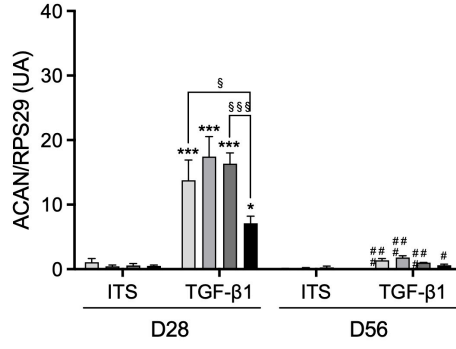


Col0 Col0.5 Col1 Col5

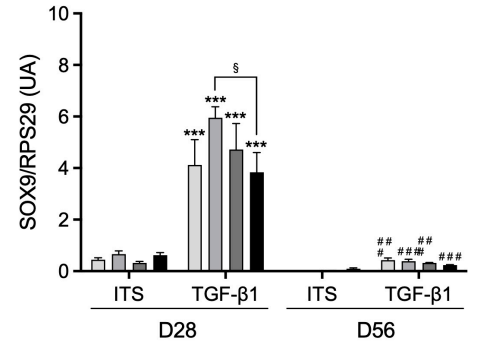
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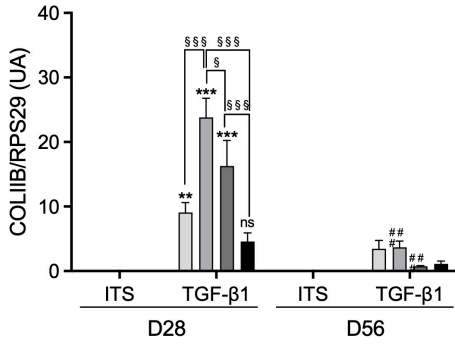
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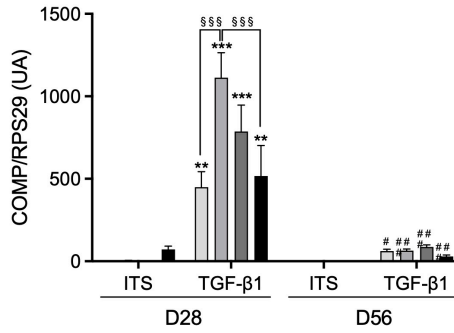
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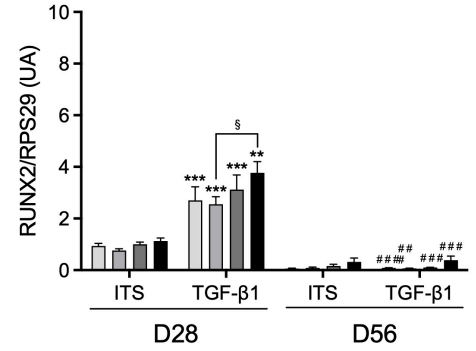
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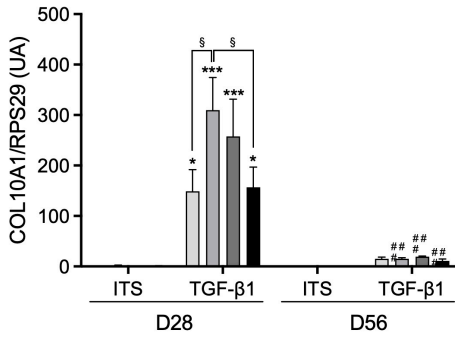
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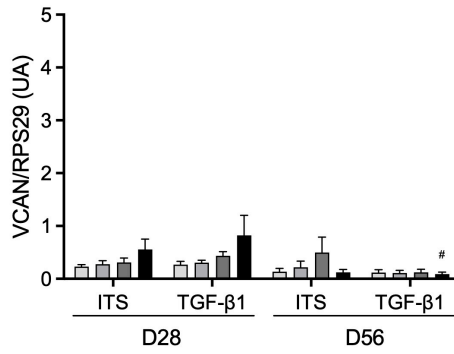
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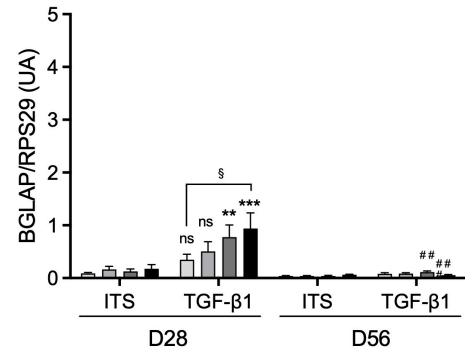
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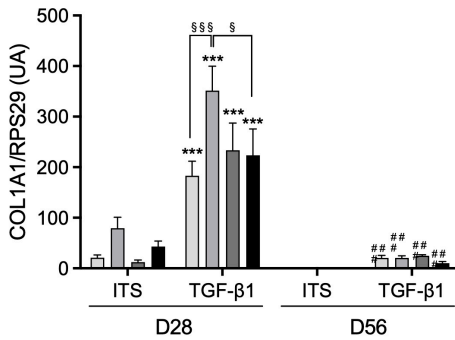
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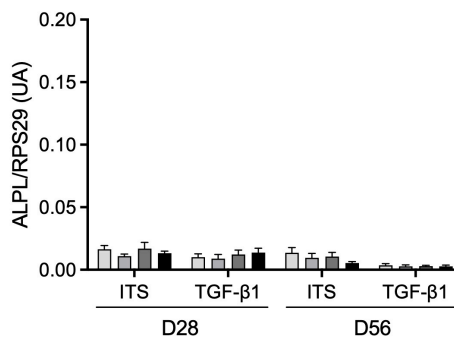
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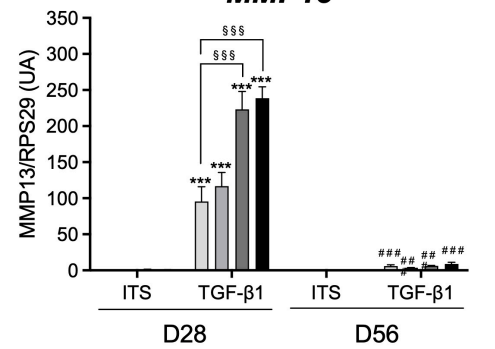
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### ALPL



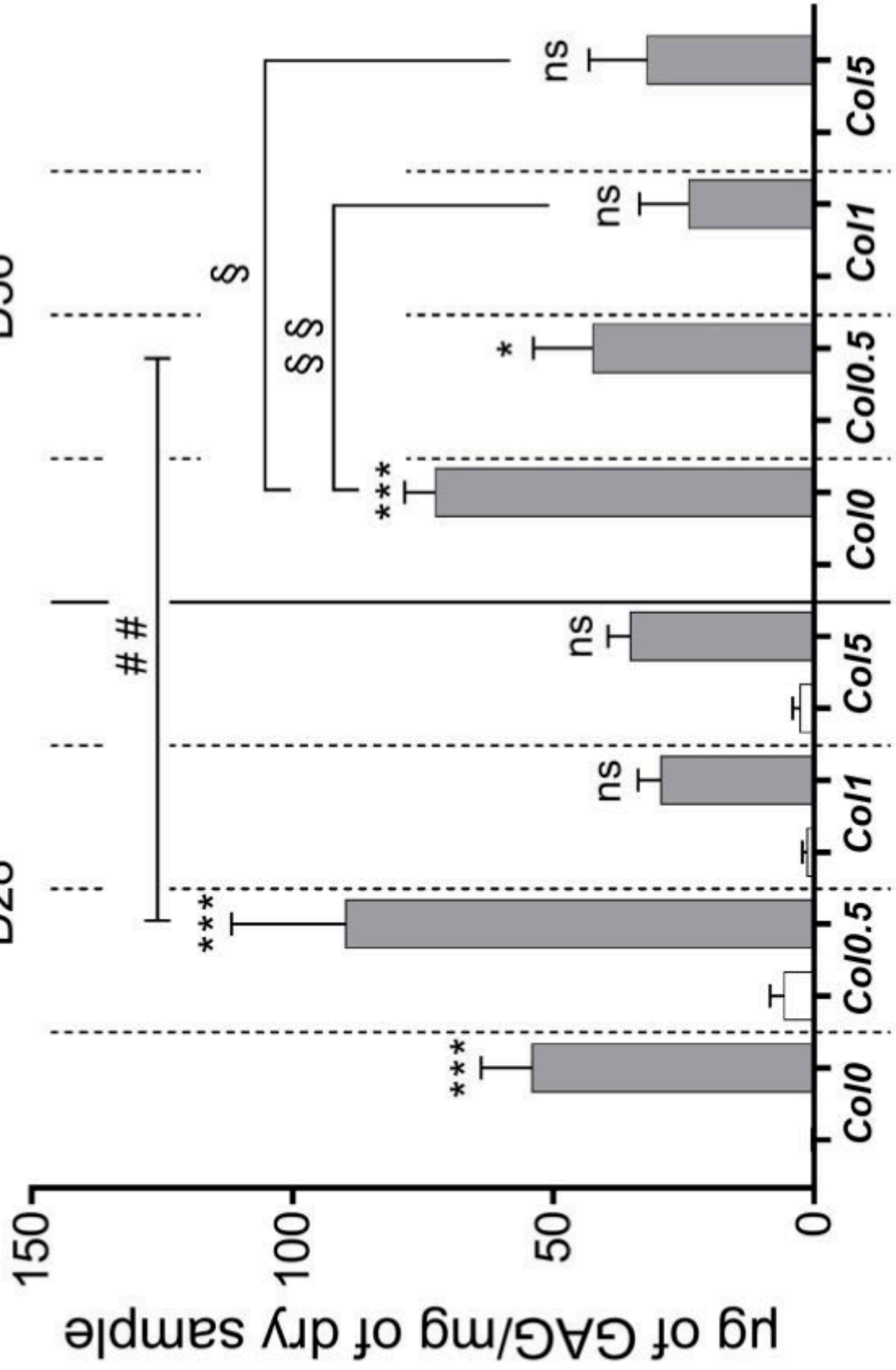
### MMP13

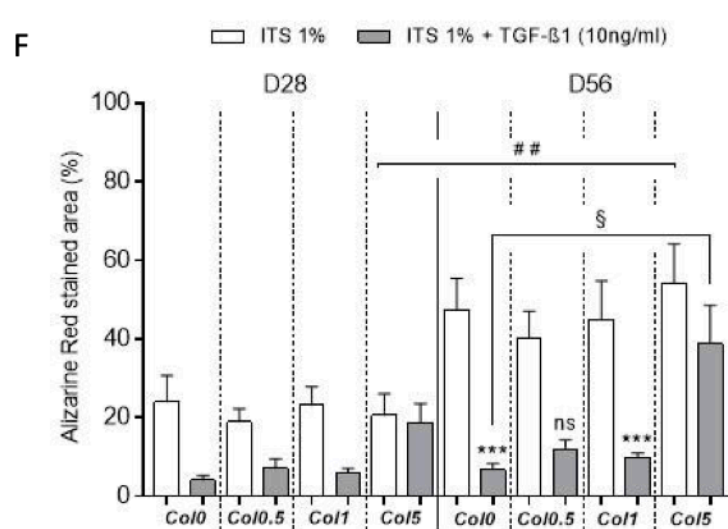
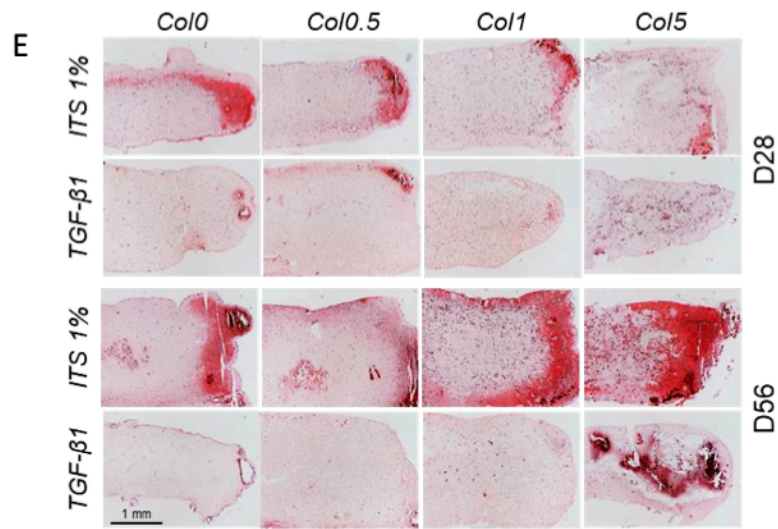
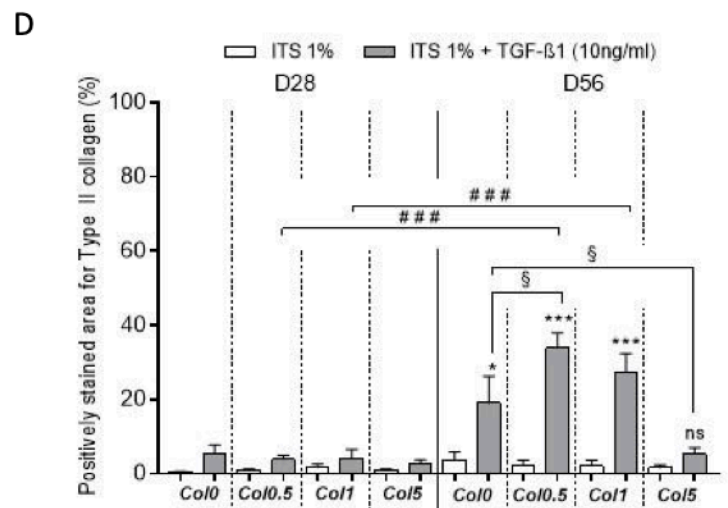
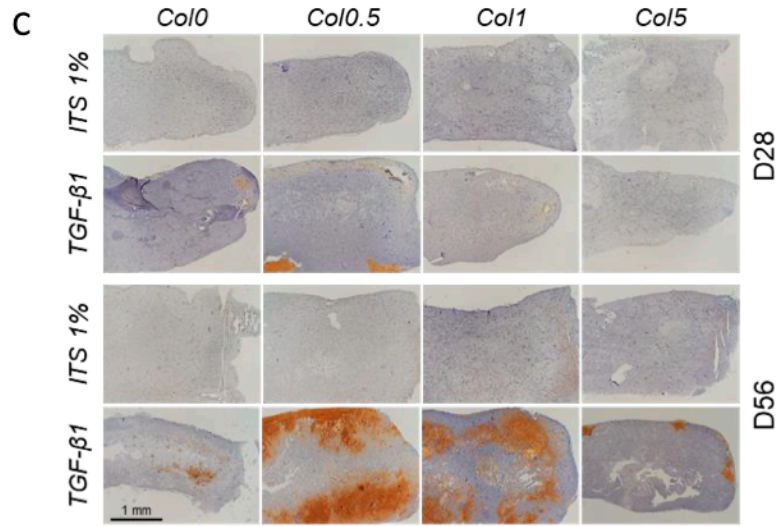
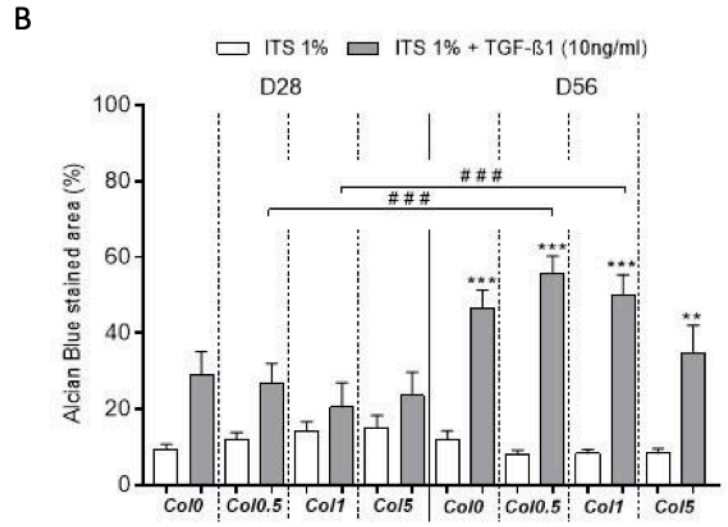
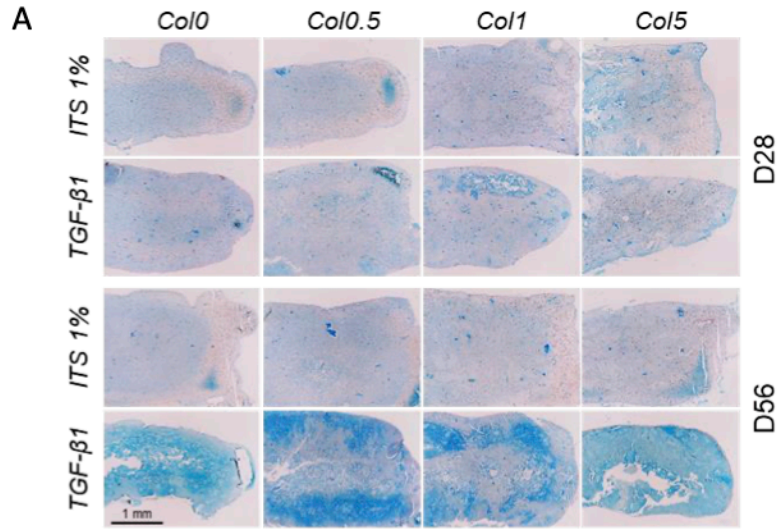


ITS 1%    ITS 1% + TGF-β1 (10ng/ml)

D28

D56





## Supplementary data 1: Previous studies using type I Collagen in hydrogels for cartilage engineering

Reference	Collagen quantity added	Other bioinks component	Cellular		Type of experiment
			Cell type	Species	
Beketov et al, 2021 [1]	0.04 mg/mL	Collagen buffer solution	Chondrocyte	Rat	<i>in vivo</i>
Lee et al, 2018 [2]	0.05 mg/mL	/	Preosteoblasts	Mouse	<i>in vitro</i>
Sanz-Ramos et al, 2014 [3]	1 ; 2 or 3 mg/mL	/	Chondrocytes	Rat	<i>in vitro</i>
			Chondrocytes	Sheep	<i>in vivo</i>
Yang et al, 2018 [4]	3 mg/mL	Alginate	Chondrocytes	Rat	<i>in vitro</i>
Yang et al, 2018 [5]	6 mg/mL	Methacrylated Hyaluronic acid Methacrylated icariin	Bone marrow mesenchymal stem cells	Rabbit	<i>in vitro</i>
Zheng et al, 2009 [6]	7 mg/mL	/	Chondrocytes	Rabbit	<i>in vivo</i>
Yuan et al, 2014 [7]	7 mg/mL	/	Chondrocytes	Rabbit	<i>in vitro</i>
Lee et al, 2021 [8]	40 mg/mL	Proanthocyanidin Oxidized hyaluronic acid	/	/	<i>in vivo</i>

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## Supplementary Data #2: Rheological properties of the studied bioinks

**Methods.** Experimental results were obtained by the use of stress-controlled rheometer (Discovery HR2, TA Instruments, USA) with a flow sweep procedure from  $100\text{s}^{-1}$  to  $0.1\text{ s}^{-1}$  and a 40mm parallel plates geometries. The gap between the top and bottom geometries was defined at  $850\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ . To avoid drying effect of hydrogels during rheological testing, the top geometry was equipped with a water trap and enclosed by a plate cover.

The rheological behavior of collagen-based hydrogels were described as yield stress fluid according to Herschel-Bulkley (H-B) model (Equation 1). Numerical fitting was performed on TRIOS software (v5.1, TA instruments, USA) to define parameters for each hydrogels (Table 1). Equation 1 :  $\tau = \tau_0 + k\dot{\gamma}^n$ . Where  $\tau$  is the shear stress in Pa,  $\tau_0$  the yield stress in Pa,  $k$  the consistency index in  $\text{Pa}^n$  and  $n$  the flow index (-)

**Results.** As demonstrated in previous works (1-3), the variation of the H-B parameters are too small (e.g.  $\tau_0 \in [20 ; 50]\text{Pa}$ ), to be considered as impacting in EBB.

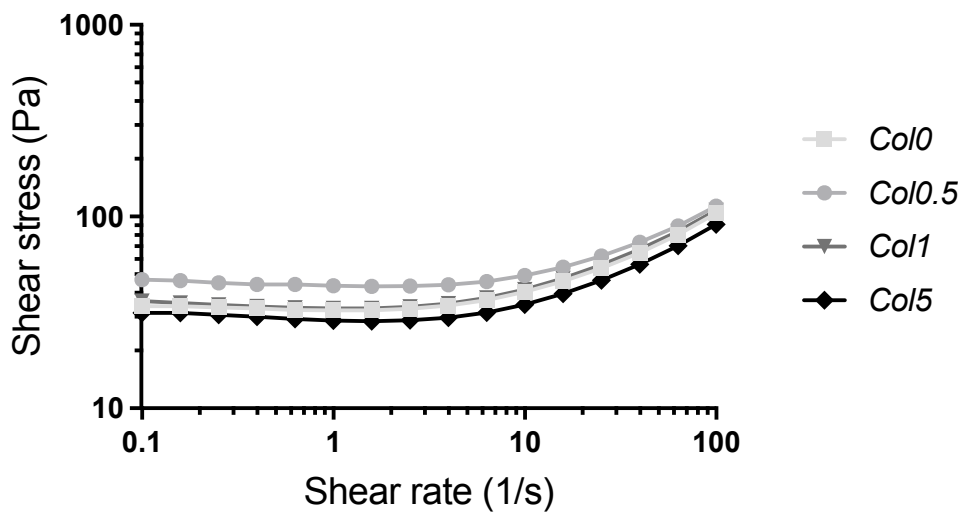


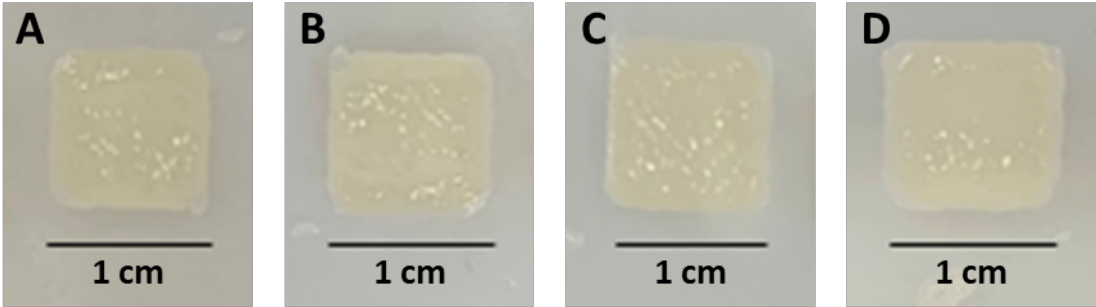
Figure 1 : Rheological behavior (Shear stress vs Shear rate) of collagen-based hydrogels (standard deviation less than 3%).

Table 1 : H-B parameters describing the rheological properties of collagen-based hydrogels.

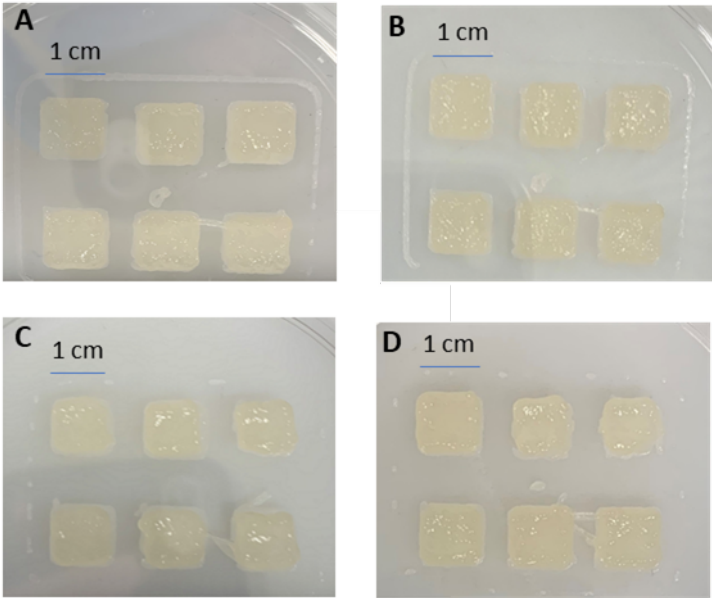
H-B parameters	Col0	Col0.5	Col1	Col5
$\tau_0$ (Pa)	32.06	43.59	33.02	21.56
$k$ ( $\text{Pa}^n$ )	1.120	0.690	1.192	1.580
$n$ (-)	0.906	1.006	0.901	0.817

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**Supplementary data 3: Macroscopical aspects of EBB constructs**



Constructs with a final size of 1 cm × 1 cm and four consecutive layers were extruded at 28°C using a 3D biprinter. We inspected each construct printed visually. Photographs of the constructs post-printing, before their polymerization, were taken for the Col0 (A), Col0.5 (B), Col1 (C), and Col5 (D) bioinks. All printed substitutes showed defined and reproducible structures, similar to the initial design regardless of the bioink composition without geometric imperfection (rectangular shapes with a length of 1 cm, a width of 1 cm, and a thickness of 4 mm, corresponding to the deposition of 4 consecutive layers). These observations agree with the rheology studies, which do not show any significant difference between the four bioinks.



Macroscopical repeatability of the process

**Supplementary Data 4: Quantitative real-time PCR primers**

Gene		Primer sequences	Annealing temperature (°C)	Amplicon size (bp)	Accession number
<i>RPS29</i>	Fwd	5'-AGATGGGTCACCAGCAGCTGTACTG-3'	60	73	NM_001032
	Rev	5'-AGACACGACAAGAGCGAGAA-3'			
<i>COL2A1</i>	Fwd	5'-ATGACAATCTGGCTCCCAAC-3'	55	200	NM_001844
	Rev	5'-GAACCTGCTATTGCCCTCTG-3'			
<i>COL11B</i>	Fwd	5'-GCATGAGGGCGCGGTAGAGA-3'	70	195	NM_033150.2
	Rev	5'-TGGTCCTGGTTGCCGACAT-3'			
<i>SOX9</i>	Fwd	5'-GAGCAGACGCACATCTC-3'	55	118	NM_000346
	Rev	5'-CCTGGGATTGCCCCGA-3'			
<i>ACAN</i> (Aggrecan)	Fwd	5'-TCGAGGACAGCGAGGCC-3'	63	85	NM_001135
	Rev	5'-TCGAGGGTGTAGCGTGTAGAGA-3'			
<i>COMP</i>	Fwd	5'-ACAATGACGGAGTCCCTGAC-3'	60	115	NM_000095
	Rev	5'-TCTGCATCAAAGTCGTCCTG-3'			
<i>VCAN</i> (Versican)	Fwd	5'-TGTTCTCCCACTACCCTTG-3'	62	122	NM_001164098
	Rev	5'-CTCCACAGTGGGTGGTCTT-3'			
<i>COL1A1</i>	Fwd	5'-AGGTGCTGATGGCTCTCCT-3'	60	104	NM_000088
	Rev	5'-GGACCACTTTCACCCTTGT-3'			
<i>COL10A1</i>	Fwd	5'-GCTAAGGGTGAAAGGGGTTTC-3'	60	118	NM_000493
	Rev	5'-CTCCAGGATCACCTTTTGGA-3'			
<i>RUNX2</i>	Fwd	5'-CCCGTGGCCTTCAAGGT-3'	60	73	NM_001278478
	Rev	5'-CGTTACCCGCCATGACAGTA-3'			
<i>ALPL</i> (Alkaline Phosphatase)	Fwd	5'-GGTGAACCGCAACTGGTACT-3'	62	187	NM_001632
	Rev	3'-CCCACCTTGGCTGTAGTCAT-3'			
<i>MMP13</i>	Fwd	5'-TGGTGGTGATGAAGATGATTT-3'	60	162	NM_002427
	Rev	5'TCTAAGCCGAAGAAAGACTGC-3'			
<i>BGLAP</i> (osteocalcin)	Fwd	5'-GTGCAGAGTCCAGCAAAGGT-3'	62	175	NM_199173
	Rev	5'-TCAGCCAACCTCGTCACAGTC-3'			