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1 **Bioactive Non-Thermal Biocompatible Plasma Enhances Migration on**  
2 **Human Gingival Fibroblasts**

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25 **Abstract**

26 This study hypothesized that the application of low-dose non-thermal biocompatible dielectric barrier  
27 discharge plasma (DBD-NBP) to human gingival fibroblasts (HGFs) would inhibit colony formation but not  
28 cell death and induce matrix metalloproteinase (MMP) expression, extracellular matrix (ECM) degradation,  
29 and subsequent cell migration, which could result in enhanced wound healing. HGFs treated with plasma for  
30 3 min migrated to each other across the gap faster than those in the control and 5-min treatment groups on  
31 days 1 and 3. The plasma-treated HGFs showed significantly high expression levels of the cell cycle arrest-  
32 related *p21* gene and enhanced MMP activity. FAK-mediated attenuation of wound healing or actin  
33 cytoskeleton rearrangement, and plasma-mediated reversal of this attenuation supported the migratory effect  
34 of DBD-NBP. Further, we performed computer simulations to investigate the effect of oxidation on the  
35 stability and conformation of the catalytic kinase domain of FAK. We found that the oxidation of highly  
36 reactive amino acids Cys427, Met442, Cys559, Met571, Met617, and Met643 changes the conformation and  
37 increases the structural flexibility of the FAK protein and thus modulates its function and activity. Low-dose  
38 DBD-NBP-induces host cell cycle arrest, ECM breakdown, and subsequent migration, thus contributing to the  
39 enhanced wound healing process.

40

41 Keywords: non-thermal biocompatible plasma, oral wound healing, migration, focal adhesion kinase  
42 signaling, catalytic kinase domain

43

44 1. Introduction

45 Plasma is defined as an ionized gas consisting of charged particles (electrons and ions), radicals, stimulated  
46 atoms and molecules, and visible and UV photons <sup>[1]</sup>. This complex mixture can be applied to a variety of fields.  
47 Recently developed non-thermal biocompatible plasma (NBP), which uses ambient air and is conducted at a  
48 temperature lower than 40 °C, can be used in various biomedical applications <sup>[2]</sup>, for example, for killing  
49 bacteria, viruses, and fungi, and even cancer cells <sup>[3-7]</sup>, sterilizing wounds <sup>[8]</sup>, and enhancing wound healing <sup>[9]</sup>.  
50 It is also widely used for oral bacterial inactivation <sup>[10]</sup> and tooth whitening <sup>[11]</sup>.

51 The direct effects of NBP on cells are derived from highly reactive, short-acting radicals, including  
52 reactive oxygen species (ROS) and reactive nitrogen species (RNS) <sup>[12]</sup>. These ROS/RNS have double-  
53 sidedness, which means that their short-time, low dosage stimulates cell viability, proliferation, and migration,  
54 but their long-time, high dosage induces cell senescence or apoptosis by oxidative damage in mitochondrial  
55 DNA, proteins, and lipids <sup>[13-16]</sup>. The effects of NBP could also be mediated <sup>[13-16]</sup> by indirect factors, such as electric

56 or magnetic field, temperature, pH effects, UV radiation, or osmolality change <sup>[17]</sup>. The positive action of NBP  
57 may be explained by the synergistic effect of the various factors mentioned above <sup>[18]</sup>.

58 NBP has a variety of available sources with various physical and chemical properties, such as direct  
59 floating electrode-DBD (FE-DBD), indirect jet plasma, and hybrid-type plasma based on the surface  
60 microdischarge technique <sup>[1]</sup>. The formation of plasma products can also be modified by several factors,  
61 including treatment time, gas applied (oxygen, nitrogen, argon, or helium), application type (direct or indirect),  
62 cell adherence (adherent or suspension), cell type (keratinocyte, endothelial cell, or fibroblast), differential  
63 voltage, and gas flow rate <sup>[1,19]</sup>.

64 Among them, non-thermal DBD plasma is useful for its transportability, scalable function, controllability,  
65 and cost-benefit <sup>[20]</sup>. The DBD is defined as a discharge between two electrodes insulated by a dielectric barrier  
66 <sup>[21]</sup>. The dielectric barrier enables microdischarge between the gaps filled with atmospheric air or gas, which is  
67 high enough to cause ozone generation, disinfection, or pollution control. The DBD, using the human body as  
68 a counter electrode, primarily provides a more homogenous yield of plasma and plasma-driven species than  
69 indirect plasma sources <sup>[22]</sup>.

70 Plasma medicine has evolved from an obscure and little-accepted medical specialty to one that is critical  
71 to both clinical care and medical research in recent years. There are currently plasma sources specifically  
72 intended for the treatment of wound healing illnesses, and research into the cellular pathways mediated by  
73 plasma therapy in wound healing is well underway. However, switching from one plasma device to another will  
74 not result in the same therapeutic benefits. The biological effects caused by ROS, RNS radiation, working gas  
75 flow, electrical current flow from plasma to the body, and heat transfer to the treated surface, according to the  
76 plasma generating technology and its components, are the reason for this non-transferability. For wound  
77 healing, NBP has been successfully applied in patients with chronic wounds, such as chronic venous ulcers <sup>[8]</sup>,  
78 and is thought to primarily act by killing bacteria and blocking bacteria-driven delayed wound healing.  
79 However, whether this effect is primarily due to a decrease in bacterial colonization or direct stimulating effects  
80 on cells is still unclear. The potential of NBP to stimulate tissue regeneration and render microbiological  
81 organisms inert makes it useful for wound treatment. The NBP-treated patients had a significant reduction in  
82 the length of time required for tissue healing, no infection or postoperative pain, and almost immediate return  
83 of oral functions; they did not require analgesics. Following a biopsy of the mobile oral mucosa, wound  
84 administration of NBP may be advised as a safe and dependable alternative for healing tissue in wounds. NBP  
85 improved wound healing by promoting re-epithelialization, wound closure, the late phase of inflammation, and  
86 boosting tissue repair strength and rate of maturity. NBP therapy for acute wounds may hasten wound closure,

87 prevent or cure wound infection, and contribute to a better-quality scar in terms of strength and visual  
88 appearance. A quicker healing time can minimize costs, discomfort, hospitalization, and problems during the  
89 healing phase, and enhance the patient's quality of life. Furthermore, not enough studies have dealt with the  
90 effects of NBP on the acute wound healing process and unveiled a clear signaling mechanism for wound healing  
91 [23].

92 Therefore, the present study investigated whether non-thermal DBD plasma supplied with dry air would  
93 take a positive role in the wound healing process. This study hypothesised that non-thermal biocompatible DBD  
94 plasma (DBD-NBP) would accelerate the migration of the HGFs and result in improved wound healing.

95

## 96 2. Materials and Methods

97

### 98 2.1. Non-thermal DBD plasma generator with air supply

99 A round DBD plasma generator of 35 mm diameter was specially designed for plasma application to cells  
100 in a 35-mm dish. Dry air was supplied during plasma generation within a sealed chamber [Figure 1(a)]. An  
101 alternating current was generated with 25 ms on-time, 175 ms off-time, 1.69 kV, and 9.6 mA (Table 1, Figure  
102 1(b)). The optical emission spectrum peaked at 330 nm [Figure 1(c)].

103

### 104 2.2. Isolation and expansion of HGFs from gingival tissue

105 HGFs were obtained from the gingival tissue of healthy human donors, as previously described [24,25],  
106 under the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Korea University Anam Hospital (IRB No.  
107 ED14167). All experiments were performed in accordance with the relevant guidelines and regulations of  
108 the IRB of Korea University Anam Hospital. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants,  
109 before using their gingival tissues in this study. The gingival tissues were immersed in sterile Hanks' balanced  
110 salt solution supplemented with penicillin (200 units/mL) and streptomycin (200 g/mL). The tissues were  
111 washed twice with Ca<sup>2+</sup>- and Mg<sup>2+</sup>-free Dulbecco's PBS (DPBS) and then exposed to 3 mg/mL type I  
112 collagenase for 1 h at 37 °C. Subsequently, the tissues were centrifuged at 2,500 rpm for 20 min and then  
113 washed and resuspended in PBS. The isolated cells, referred to as HGFs, were filtered through a 100 µM cell  
114 strainer (BD, catalog no. 352360) and cultured in  $\alpha$ -MEM containing 10 % FBS and 1 % antibiotics, and the  
115 medium was changed every 2–3 days. All experiments were performed in passages # 3–8.

116

### 117 2.3. Cell viability

118 Cell viability was measured by the MTS assay (Promega, Madison, WI), according to the manufacturer's  
119 instructions. The HGF cells were seeded into culture plates at a concentration of  $2 \times 10^5$  cells/35-mm culture  
120 dish in 2 mL of alpha-MEM media and cultured overnight. After treatment with DBD-NBP at a different time,  
121 the cells were incubated for 24 h and then treated with the MTS reagent for 4 h. All supernatant samples were  
122 transferred to a 96-well plate and read at 490 nm using a microplate reader (Biotek, VT, USA).

123 For the ATP activity assays, cells were plated in a 35-mm culture dish in the same conditions as for the  
124 MTS assay. After 24 h, cells were lysed with the CellTiter-Glo Luminescent Cell Assay Kit (Promega), and  
125 luminescence was read using a microplate reader (Biotek).

126 Live/dead staining was performed using an assay kit (Molecular probes, USA). Cells were treated with  
127 plasma for 3, 5, and 10 min. The working gas effect was eliminated by performing an only-gas treatment for 5  
128 and 10 min in cells without plasma discharge. After 24 h of treatment, cells were stained with 4  $\mu\text{M}$  of EthD-1  
129 and 2  $\mu\text{M}$  of calcein AM and incubated for 20 min at room temperature in the dark. Images of the cells were  
130 captured using a fluorescence microscope (Nikon, USA).

131

#### 132 2.4. Colony formation assay

133 The isolated HGF cells were first investigated by performing a colony formation assay, using a method  
134 described previously [25]. The cells were plated at a density of  $1 \times 10^2$  cells per  $\text{mm}^2$  and maintained for 15 days  
135 at 37 °C. The DBD-NBP was applied at 2 L/min for 3 min at each time point to the cells in all experimental  
136 groups. Thereafter, the cells were fixed and stained in 4 % paraformaldehyde solution for 10 min, washed with  
137 DPBS, and then stained with 0.1 % crystal violet for 10 min. It was considered as colony forming units-  
138 fibroblast when more than 50 cells with a fibroblast phenotype were aggregated. The absorbance of crystal  
139 violet was read at 375 nm on a microplate reader, Synergy<sup>TM</sup>HT (BioTek).

140

#### 141 2.5. In vitro wound healing assay

142 An initial  $4 \times 10^5$  cells were seeded in both wells of a 35  $\mu\text{m}$ -dish (ibidi<sup>®</sup> Culture-Insert 2 Well, GmbH,  
143 Martinsried, Germany) for performing a two-dimensional invasion assay. After 24 h in culture medium  
144 (DMEM), serum was removed, and cells were immediately time-dependently treated with non-thermal DBD  
145 plasma for 3 and 5 min. Both confluent plates of HGF cells were removed after 24 h, and the cells invading the  
146 gap (500  $\mu\text{m}$ ) were subsequently monitored under a microscope (Nikon Eclipse Ti, Japan). Thereafter, the  
147 wound closure rate was determined by measuring the area of the open wound at each time point relative to the

148 area of the wound at the time of wounding using the TScratch<sup>®</sup> software program (CSElab, Zurich, Switzerland)  
149 [26].

150

## 151 2.6. Detection of reactive species

152 For ROS/RNS detection, we used 2',7'-dichlorodihydrofluorescein diacetate (H<sub>2</sub>DCFDA; Invitrogen, CA,  
153 USA) for intracellular ROS level detection, QuantiChrom<sup>™</sup> Peroxide Assay Kit for H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection, and  
154 QuantiChrom<sup>™</sup> Nitric Oxide Assay Kit (BioAssay Systems, CA, USA) for intracellular RNS level detection.  
155 The experiments were performed according to the manufacturer's protocol. Cells were treated with DBD-NBP  
156 for 3 and 5 min. Non-treated cells were used as a negative control, and cells treated with 100 μM of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> were  
157 used as a positive control for H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection. To investigate intracellular ROS, 24 h after treatment, cells were  
158 loaded with 20 μM H<sub>2</sub>DCFDA and incubated for 30 min in dark conditions. Subsequently, the cells were washed  
159 twice with PBS to remove the extra H<sub>2</sub>DCFDA, and each group of cells was collected and analyzed in a flow  
160 cytometer (BD Biosciences). H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection was performed according to the manufacturer's protocol. Briefly,  
161 the samples and substrate were incubated for 30 min at room temperature and optical density (OD) was read at  
162 585 nm. The concentration of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> was calculated according to the standard curve (plotted using H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> solution  
163 at the standard concentrations of 0, 3, 6, 9, 12, 18, 24, and 36 μM). For RNS detection, we used a microplate  
164 reader to read the absorbance at OD 540 nm of the samples incubated with the substrate for 10 min at 60 °C.  
165 As final products of NO decomposition in the solution, the concentrations of NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> were calculated  
166 according to the standard curve (plotted using NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> at the standard concentrations of 0, 30, 60, and  
167 100 μM, respectively).

168

## 169 2.7. Quantification of gene expression related to HGF migration

170 Total RNAs were extracted from frozen cells using the RNeasy Plus Kit (Qiagen NV, Hilden, Germany).  
171 Complementary DNAs (cDNAs) were synthesised with the Transcriptor First Strand cDNA Synthesis Kit  
172 (Roche Diagnostics GmbH, Mannheim, Germany) using a random hexamer. These cDNA samples were then  
173 analyzed using SYBR Green I Master Mix on the LightCycler<sup>®</sup> 480II (Roche). The results were normalized  
174 using the human beta-actin gene as a control. PCR was performed with the related primers for MMP-2, VEGF,  
175 Collagen type I, Collagen type IV, PDGF-beta, CDKN1A (p21), and beta-actin (Supplementary information).

176

## 177 2.8. Zymography for the detection of MMP-2/9 activation

178 A zymographic analysis was carried out in 8 % (w/v) SDS-polyacrylamide gels containing gelatin (1.5  
179 mg/ml), as previously described (ref. number: PMID: 22144310). The gels were stained and destained with  
180 SimplyBlue SafeStain (Invitrogen™, Thermo Fisher Scientific, MA, USA), according to the manufacturer's  
181 procedure. Zones of enzymatic activity were photographed using Printgraph 2M (ATTO Co., LTD., Tokyo,  
182 Japan).

183

#### 184 2.9. Immunoblot analysis

185 Immunoblot analysis was conducted as described (Supplementary information). Antibodies against AKT  
186 (Cat. #4691), p-AKT-S473 (Cat. #4060), mTOR (Cat. #2972), p-mTOR-S2448 (Cat. #2971), and p-FAK(Y397)  
187 (Cat. #3283S) were purchased from Cell Signaling Technology (MA, USA). Antibodies against p21 (Cat. sc-  
188 152), VEGF (Cat. sc-152), and GAPDH (Cat. sc-32233) were purchased from Santa Cruz Biotechnology (CA,  
189 USA). The ImageJ software program (National Institutes of Health, USA) was used for the quantification of  
190 immunoblot results. The phosphorylated proteins were normalized with GAPDH.

191

#### 192 2.10. Confocal fluorescence imaging of HGF morphology

193 HGF cells were seeded on the sterilized cover glass and treated with plasma for 3 min, with or without  
194 FAK inhibitor (PF-562271, Selleckchem, Houston, TX, USA) cultured for 72 h, and then fixed using 4%  
195 paraformaldehyde. The localization of F-actin was determined using Phalloidin Alexa-488 (Abcam, Germany),  
196 and cell nuclei were stained with Hoechst 33342 (Bio-Rad, CA, USA) according to the manufacturer's  
197 instructions. Representative images were taken using the biological confocal laser scanning microscope  
198 OFV10-ASW (Olympus, Hamburg, Germany).

199

#### 200 2.11. Computational details

201 Molecular dynamics (MD) simulations were carried out to study the effect of oxidation on the kinase  
202 domain (KD) of the FAK protein (PDB ID: 4K9Y (6)). For this purpose, we prepared two model systems, i.e.  
203 the native KD and its oxidised form, illustrated in Figure S1 of the Supplementary Information. All simulations  
204 were performed at 310 K and 1.0 bar, employing a V-rescale thermostat with a time constant of 0.1 ps<sup>[27]</sup> and  
205 a Parrinello-Rahman barostat with a time constant of 2.0 ps<sup>[28]</sup>. A cutoff of 1.4 nm was used for non-bonded  
206 (i.e. van der Waals and Coulomb) interactions, and the electrostatics were treated with the reaction field method  
207<sup>[29]</sup>. In all simulations, a time step of 2 fs was used, and the MD trajectories were saved every 100 ps. Periodic  
208 boundary conditions were applied in all directions. Thus, we prepared three replicas of the native and oxidised



209 KD systems with different initial velocities, generating a total of six structures. These model systems were  
210 utilised to calculate the average RMSD values of the alpha carbons of the KD protein before and after oxidation.  
211 Furthermore, we used these systems to determine the secondary structures of the native and oxidised KD  
212 proteins during the last 50 ns of the equilibration. The SASA of each AA residue in the native KD protein was  
213 also calculated in the last 50 ns of the equilibration to identify the AAs highly exposed to the solvent. These  
214 AAs were then considered to create the oxidised KD structure. Specifically, the KD system was oxidised  
215 through the modification/oxidation of the Met and Cys residues that had higher SASA values and were highly  
216 reactive to the plasma treatment according to literature <sup>[30,31]</sup> (see also Tables S1 and S2 in the Supplementary  
217 Information).

218 All MD simulations were carried out using the GROMACS 5.1.2 package <sup>[32]</sup>, employing the GROMOS  
219 54A7 force field <sup>[33]</sup>. The parameter set of the oxidised Met and Cys residues used in the oxidised KD was  
220 obtained from <sup>[34]</sup>. The SASAs and secondary structures of the native and oxidised KD proteins were calculated  
221 with the `gmx sasa` and `gmx do_dssp` tools of GROMACS, respectively, using the data obtained from 500  
222 snapshots of the MD trajectory taken at every 100 ps from the last 50 ns and averaging over three replicas.

223

## 224 2.12. Statistical analysis

225 Statistical analyses were performed using a two-tailed Student's *t*-test. The statistically significant  
226 differences were based on \**P*-value <0.05, \*\**P*-value < 0.01, \*\*\**P*-value < 0.001. All experiments were  
227 replicated in triplicate, and the data are represented by the mean ± standard deviation of replicates.

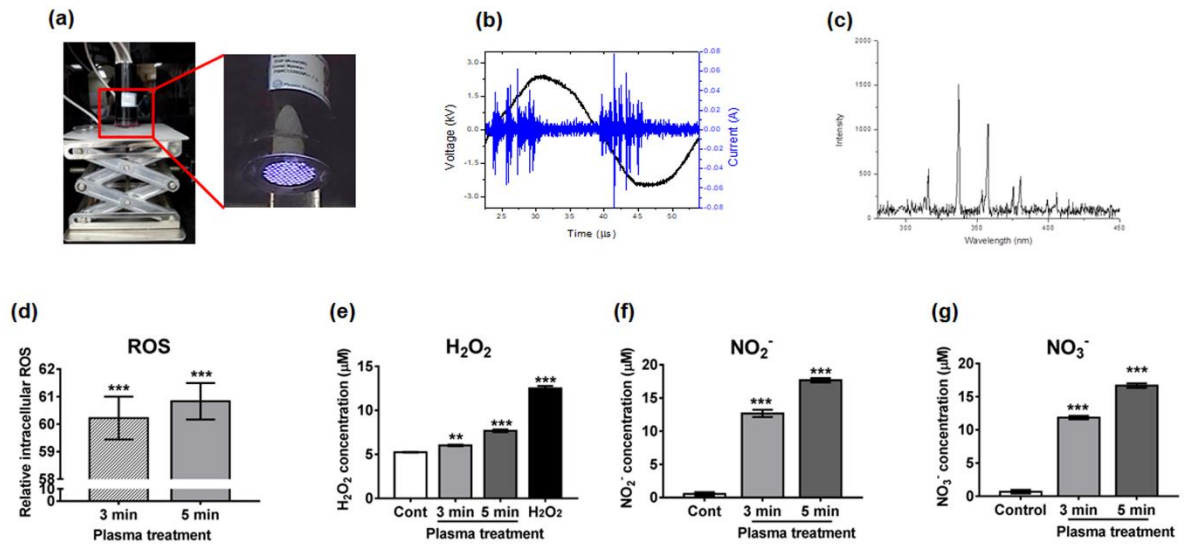
228

## 229 3. Results

230

### 231 3.1. NBP-generated DBD plasma device

232 NBP was generated by a DBD plasma device that used air gas as a feeding gas in this study. The properties  
233 of this device have been well described in our previous study <sup>[35]</sup>. Figure 1 shows the optical emission spectra  
234 of NBP that were measured by charge-coupled device spectrometry (HR400, Ocean Optics, Dunedin, FL),  
235 while the current and voltage were measured by an oscilloscope (Tektronix, Beaverton, OR).



236

237 **Figure 1. Dielectric barrier discharge (DBD) plasma source.** (a) Application of plasma to the cells on a 35-  
 238 mm-diameter dish using a discharging plasma source. (b) Electric characteristics. (c) The optical emission  
 239 spectrum of non-thermal biocompatible plasma (NBP). Total intracellular reactive oxygen species (ROS) level  
 240 in human gingival fibroblasts (HGFs) after treatment with air-plasma for 3 and 5 min at the rate of 2 L/min, 25  
 241 ms on-time, and 150 ms off-time. (d) Total intracellular ROS level (sample/control), (e) H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentration,  
 242 (f) Nitrite concentration and (g) Nitrate concentration, Control means the gas-only treatment.

243

### 244 3.2. Intracellular ROS and RNS levels in HGFs after treatment with NBP-DBD plasma

245 Intracellular ROS and RNS levels were evaluated following NBP treatment for 3 and 5 min, respectively  
 246 (Figure 1(d)). After day 1, the intracellular ROS levels of the 3- and 5-min-treated groups increased significantly  
 247 over those of the control group ( $p$ -value<0.001). The concentration of hydrogen peroxide (H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>) also increased  
 248 in groups of 3- and 5-min NBP treatment compared to the gas-only treatment (control) group [Figure 1(e)].  
 249 Next, nitrite and nitrate concentrations were measured to estimate the RNS levels. Both nitrite (Figure 1(f)) and  
 250 nitrate levels (Figure 1(g)) within the cells significantly increased to  $(12.04 \pm 0.03) \%$  and  $(11.92 \pm 0.026) \%$   
 251 for 3 min, and  $(17.03 \pm 0.04) \%$  and  $(16.85 \pm 0.041) \%$  for 5 min, respectively, compared with the control [ $(0.71$   
 252  $\pm 0.01) \%$  and  $(0.7 \pm 0.08) \%$ ] levels in HGFs, according to the exposure time of NBP.

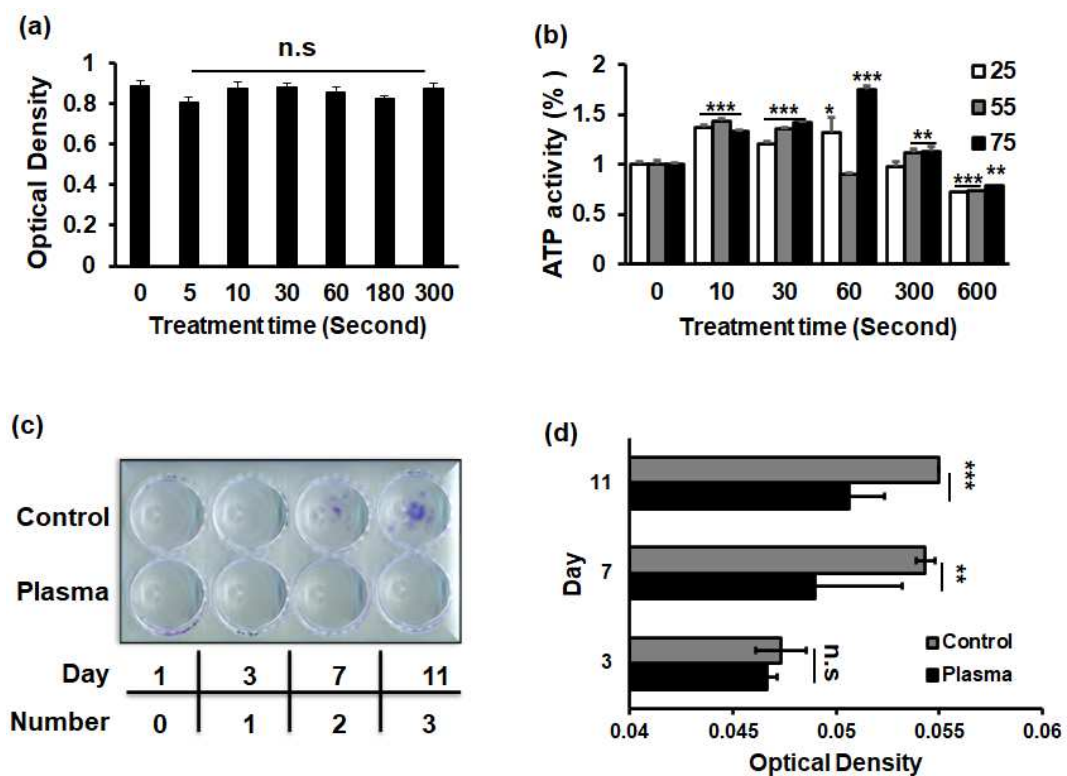
253

### 254 3.3. Effects of NBP on the viability and colony formation ability of HGFs

255 The effect of NBP on the viability of HGFs was assessed according to the exposure time via the MTS  
 256 tetrazolium assay. The HGFs were stable in their viability with up to 300 s of air-plasma treatment at 2 L/min,  
 257 25 ms on-time, and 150 ms off-time. Later, the effect of NBP on HGFs was confirmed by the adenosine

258 triphosphate (ATP) assay. The results showed that ATP as the energy currency of HGFs was elevated until 60  
 259 s, and it was stable as the exposure time increased from 10 to 300 s in 25, 50, and 75 ms on-time, respectively.  
 260 However, the number of viable cells significantly decreased after the application of NBP for 600 s (Figure 2(a)).  
 261 We found that the NBP treatment was not harmful to HGF viability up to 300 s at a low exposure time of NBP  
 262 [Figure 2(b)].

263 Next, we evaluated the apoptosis of HGFs using the crystal violet stain after NBP treatment every 4 days.  
 264 The HGFs made the colony units depending on the cultured time after 7 days. However, colony formation in  
 265 the NBP-treated group was inhibited by cumulative air-plasma application on days 3, 7, and 11, as indicated by  
 266 crystal violet staining [Figure 2(c)]. Quantification at 450 nm absorbance showed less colony formation [Figure  
 267 2(d)].



268

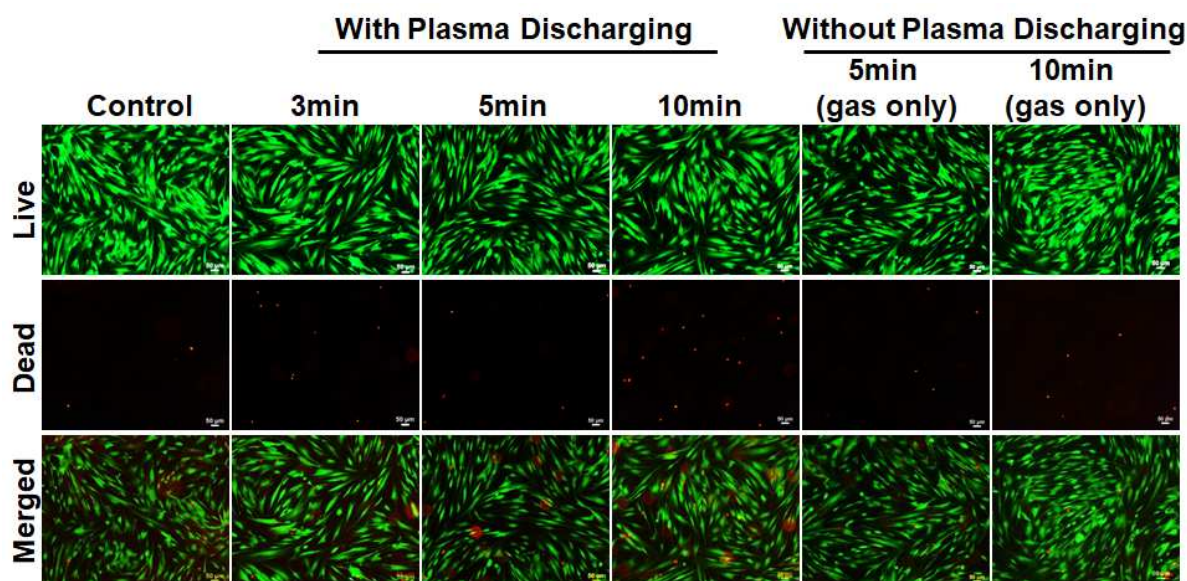
269 **Figure 2. Effects of NBP on the viability and colony formation ability of human gingival fibroblasts**  
 270 **(HGFs).** (a) Cell viability was assessed using MTS reagent. Cells were seeded ( $1 \times 10^2$  per  $\text{mm}^2$  area in common  
 271 media) in 35mm dishes for growth analysis. The viability of HGFs was stable as the exposure time increased  
 272 from 10 to 300 s in MTS assay. Data represent the mean without any significant differences among groups. (b)  
 273 Validation of ATP levels after treatment with NBP using Cell-Titer-Glo. After counting the cells, cells were  
 274 used to evaluate this relative ATP content by luminescence. The metabolic capacity of HGFs was slightly  
 275 elevated or stable as the exposure time increased from 10 to 300 s in the ATP activity assay. However, the ATP

276 activity in cells decreased significantly after the application of NBP for 600 s in 25, 50, and 75 ms on-time (all  
 277  $P$ -value < 0.001). (c) Cumulative application of NBP inhibited colony formation in fibroblasts. The cells were  
 278 stained with 0.5 % crystal violet, and colonies of more than 50 fibroblasts were counted. (d) Colony changes in  
 279 incubation days for cell populations treated as in (c) (\*\*  $p$  < 0.01, \*\*\*  $p$  < 0.001, t-test). Quantification at 450  
 280 nm absorbance also showed less staining in cells after NBP application at days 7 and 10. The bar graph shows  
 281 the associated colony formation ability of NBP treatment compared with control cells.

282

### 283 3.4. Live/Dead assay to enumerate viable cells

284 Plasma treatment showed minimal toxicity to HGF cells. Cell viability was detected by using a live/dead  
 285 assay kit (with 4  $\mu$ M of EthD-1 and 2  $\mu$ M of calcein AM) after plasma treatment for 3, 5, and 10 min (Figure  
 286 3). Moreover, to eliminate the working gas effect, we performed the only-gas treatment for 5 and 10 min in  
 287 cells without plasma discharge.



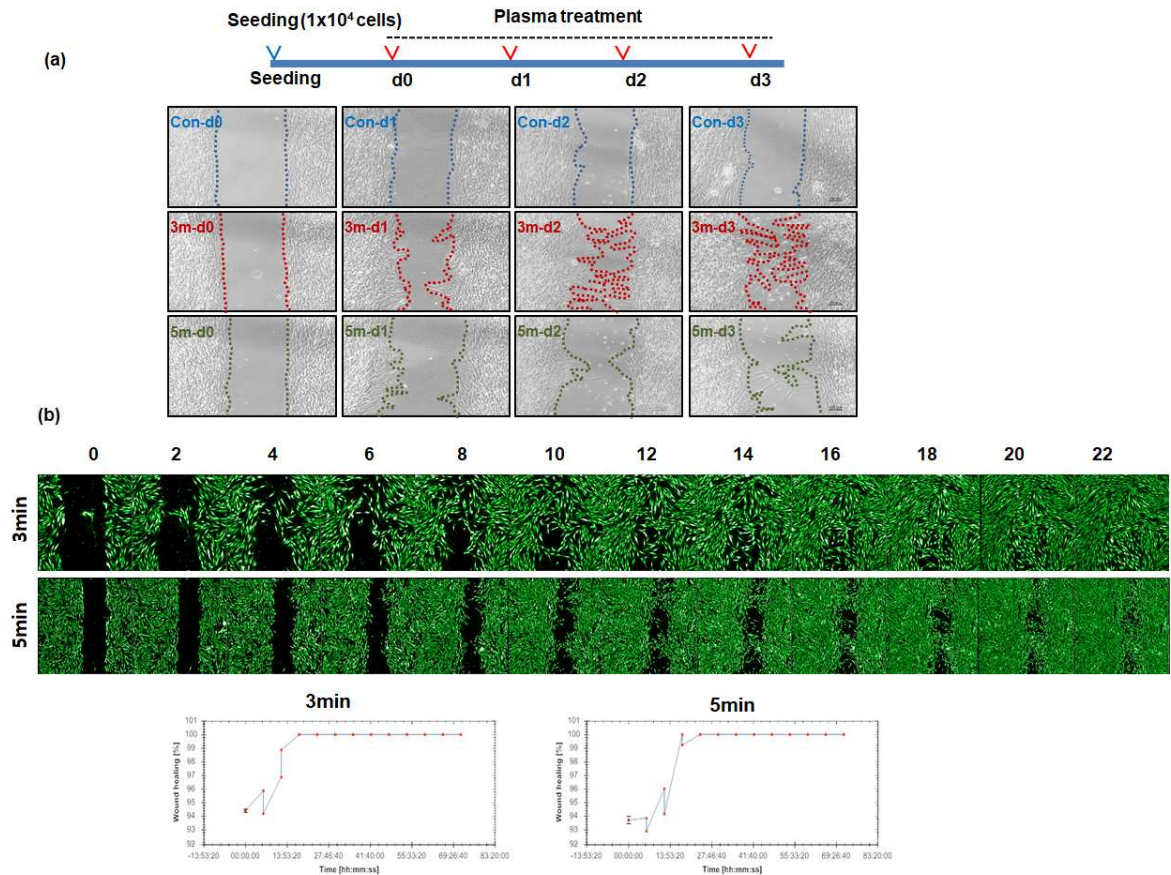
288

289 **Figure 3. Plasma treatment showed minimal toxicity to HGF cells.** Live and dead staining were evaluated  
 290 by confocal analysis, and data were represented as fluorescence density. Cell toxicity after being treated with  
 291 NBP was detected a by live/dead assay kit (with 4  $\mu$ M of EthD-1 and 2  $\mu$ M of calcein AM) with plasma  
 292 treatment time for 3, 5, and 10 min. The working gas effect was eliminated by performing the only-gas treatment  
 293 for 5 and 10 min in cells without plasma discharge. The green fluorescence indicates live cells, while red  
 294 fluorescence indicates dead cells under the confocal microscope and then merged by Olympus FluoView  
 295 software. The scale bar represents 50  $\mu$ m. EthD-1, Ethidium homodimer I, calcein AM, calcein acetoxymethyl.

296

297 3.5. Increased migratory activity by NBP on HGFs

298 HGFs were assessed for migration activity after NBP treatment with the basal medium. We treated HGFs  
 299 with NBP every day for 3 and 5 min and took a picture immediately after treatment. In migration assay, a peak  
 300 increase in the migration of HGFs was noted on days 1, 2, and 3 following plasma application. HGFs treated  
 301 with plasma for 3 min (2 L/min, 25 ms on-time, and 150 ms off-time) migrated towards each other across the  
 302 gap faster than HGFs in the control and 5-min treatment groups (Figure 4).

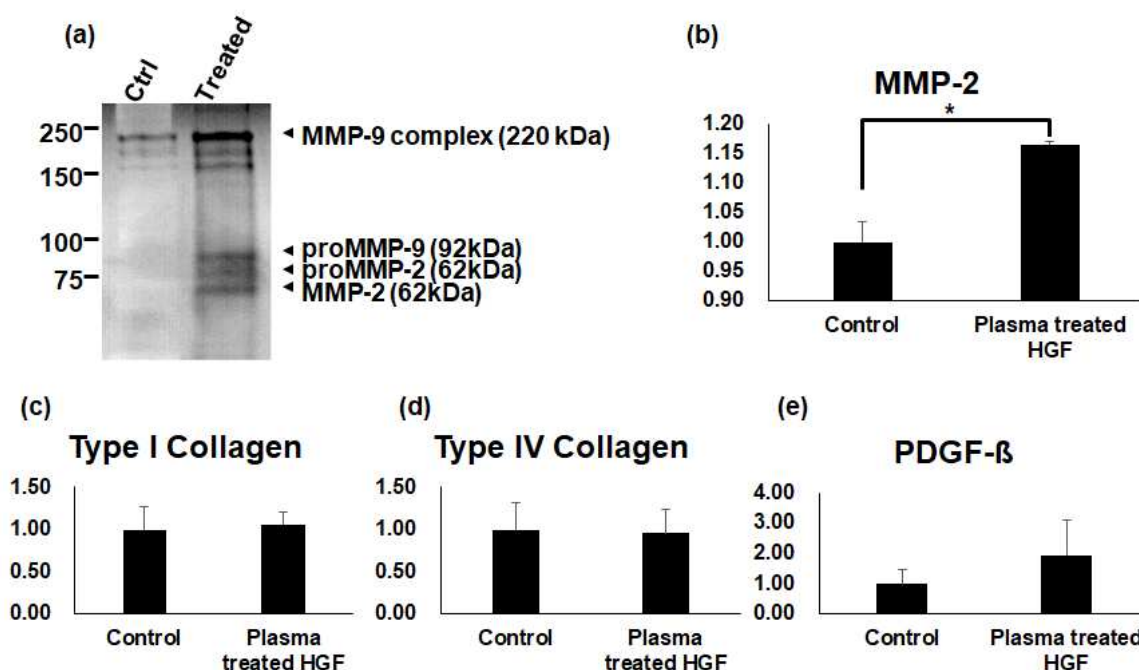


303  
 304 **Figure 4. Effect of NBP on human gingival fibroblast (HGF) migration.** (a) Scratch wound healing assay  
 305 using HGF cells. Representative pictures of NBP-treated HGFs at 0, 3, and 5 min for three consecutive days.  
 306 The wound closure assay pictures were taken every day. Air-plasma was applied for three consecutive days (25  
 307 ms on-time, 150 ms off-time, 2 L/min). The cells treated for 3 min migrated towards each other, compared to  
 308 the cells in the control and 5-min treatment groups. Representative time-lapse images of monolayer cultures for  
 309 HGFs after DBD-NBP treatment. (b) Scratch-wound closure was observed over time in HGFs by NBP  
 310 treatment. Wound healing of HGFs was increased by bio-plasma treatment. HGFs treated with bio-plasma for  
 311 3 min closed 2 h earlier than those treated for 5 min, and the time to complete closure was 4 h faster. Wound  
 312 closure is expressed as the remaining area uncovered by the cells.

313

314 3.6. Increased tissue remodeling by extracellular matrix (ECM) breakdown

315 The level of ECM breakdown was investigated. The metalloprotease (MMP) and pro-metalloprotease  
316 (pro-MMP) proteins were activated, indicating invigorated tissue remodeling. A zymography assay showed an  
317 increase in the activity of the MMP-9 complex, proMMP-2, and proMMP-9 proteins of plasma-treated HGFs,  
318 but not of the control HGFs [Figure 5(a)]. Next, differences in gene expression patterns of MMP-2 transcripts  
319 between the control and plasma-treated HGFs were evaluated. The latter showed significantly higher MMP-2  
320 expression levels than the former [Figure 5(b)]. To determine whether ECM breakdown would affect the  
321 degradation of collagen structures, the gene expression patterns of types I or IV collagen and PDGF- $\beta$  were  
322 investigated. No significant differences in the expression patterns of these genes were found between the control  
323 and plasma-treated groups (Figs. 5(c)–(e)).



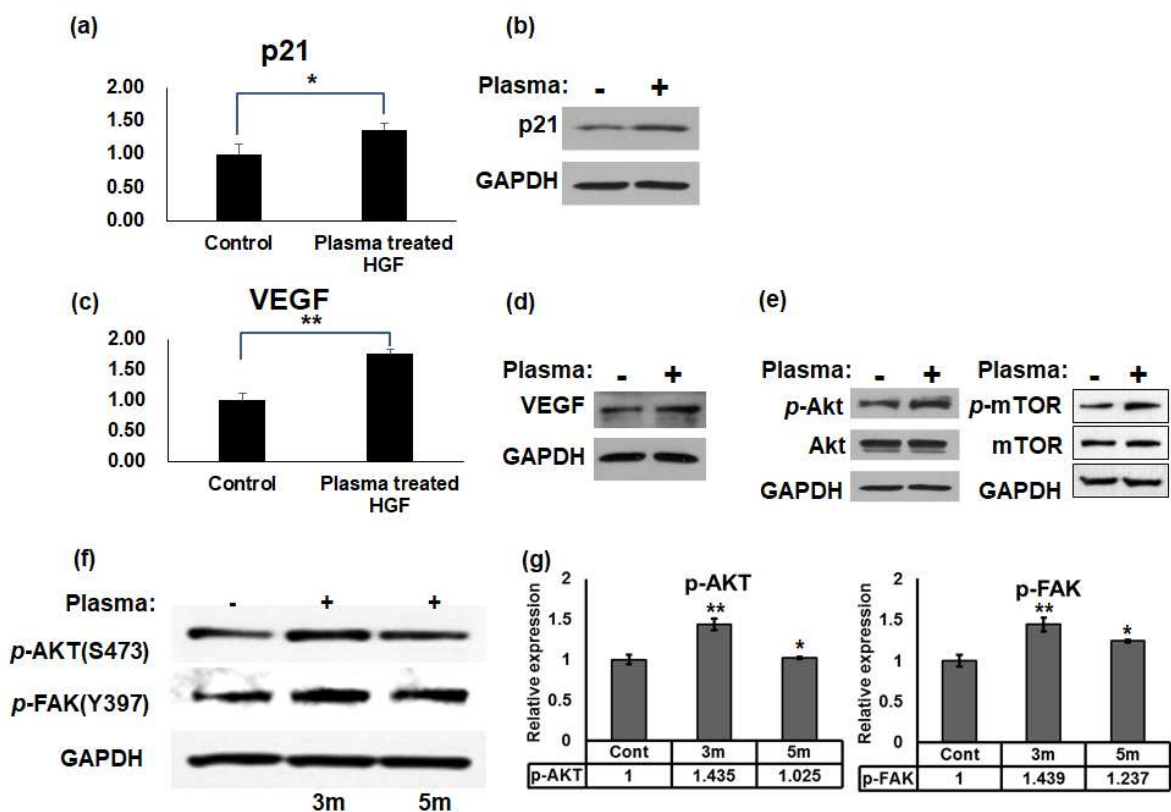
324  
325 **Figure 5. Extracellular matrix (ECM) destruction by non-thermal biocompatible plasma (NBP) on**  
326 **human gingival fibroblasts (HGFs).** (a) Changes in proteinase activity were analysed by gelatinolytic  
327 zymography. Image were inverted (original blot is in supplementary information) (b) Relative amount of MMP2  
328 transcript, (c) Transcripts of Type I collagen, (d) Transcript of Type IV collagen, and (e) PDGF- $\beta$  (\**P*-value <  
329 0.05). Full-length blots/gels are presented in the supplementary information file.

330  
331 3.7. Induction of cell cycle arrest and cell migration

332 First, we investigated whether NBP affects cell cycle regulation by assessing the expression of the *p21*  
333 gene, which is related to cell cycle arrest. Consequently, a significant increase in *p21* expression was observed

334 in plasma-treated HGFs, compared to the control cells [Figure 6(a)]. Plasma-treated HGFs also showed elevated  
 335 p21 protein levels, as indicated by immunoblot analysis (Figure 6(b)).

336 In migrating cells, there is a particular mechanism, involving not only cytoskeletal change but also a  
 337 signaling pathway, to stimulate MMPs. The vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), protein kinase B  
 338 (AKT)-mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR), and focal adhesion kinase (FAK pathways were assessed after  
 339 treatment with NBP for 3 min. The migration-related gene *VEGF* was expressed at significantly higher levels  
 340 in plasma-treated HGFs than in control cells (Figure 6(c)). The activation of AKT-mTOR and p-FAK were also  
 341 confirmed in NBP-treated HGFs by western blotting, which indicated that these downstream pathways were  
 342 involved in cell migration (Figure 6(d), (e)). Finally, we evaluated the gene and protein expression levels of  
 343 AKT and FAK and observed an increase in 3-min-treatment HGFs, but a slight decrease in 5-min-treatment  
 344 HGFs (Figure 6(f), (g)). These results demonstrated that low-dose NBP treatment was effective for cell  
 345 migration.



346  
 347 **Figure 6. Induction of cell cycle arrest and cell migration.** (a) Expression of the cell cycle arrest-related gene,  
 348 *p21*. (b) The increased amount of p21 protein. (c) Increased expression of the angiogenesis-related gene *VEGF*.  
 349 (d) Increased amount of VEGF protein. (e) Increased activity of AKT-mTOR signaling molecules induced by  
 350 NBP. (f) Activity of AKT and FAK proteins at 3 and 5 min (\**P*-value < 0.05, \*\**P*-value < 0.01). (g) Relative

351 expression levels of p-AKT and p-FAK. Full-length blots/gels are presented in the supplementary  
352 information file.

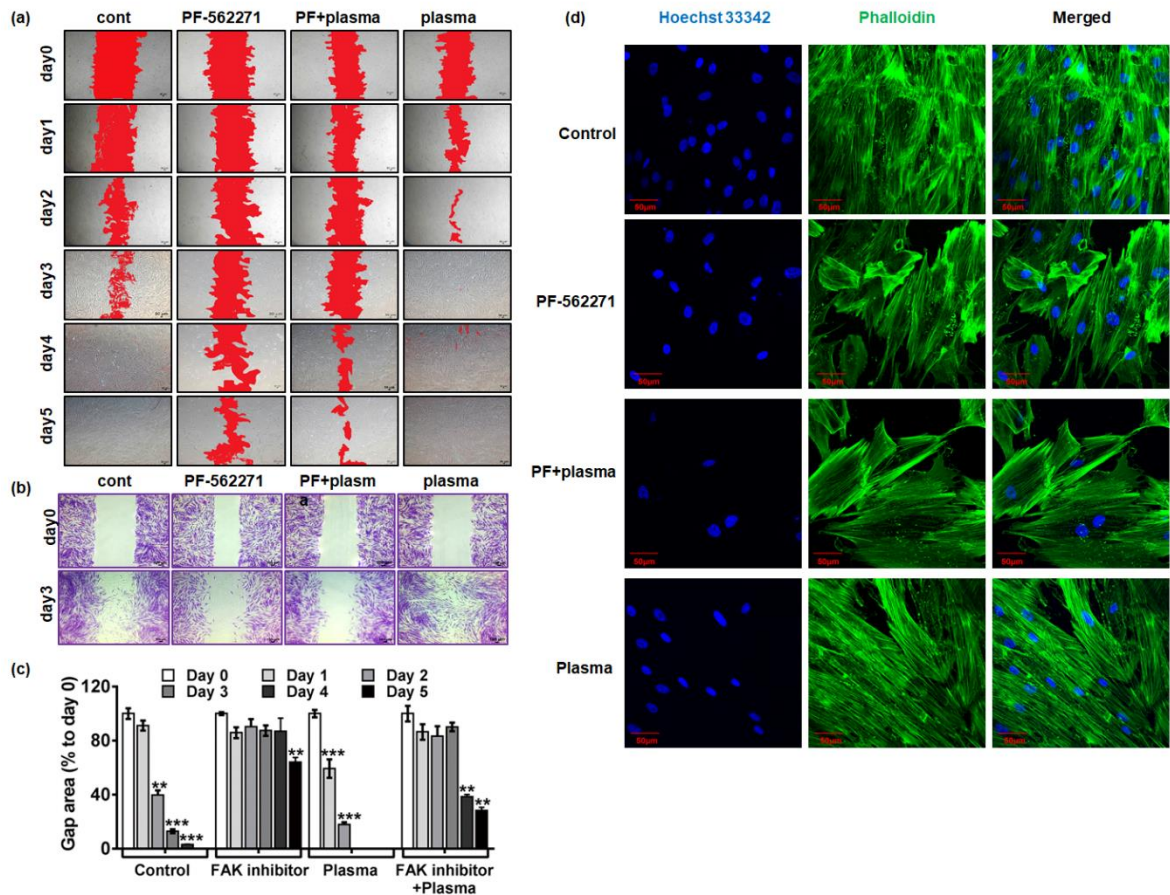
353

### 354 3.8. Plasma-stimulated cell migration through the FAK-related pathway

355 A wound healing assay was performed to evaluate the migration of HGF cells after treatment with 1) FAK  
356 inhibitor only, 2) NBP treatment for 3 min, and 3) FAK inhibitor combined with NBP treatment for 3 min  
357 compared with 4) control and observed up to 5 days [Fig 7(a)]. The treatment with NBP facilitated the gap  
358 closure in cells, whereas that with FAK inhibitor attenuated it. NBP application slightly reversed the activity of  
359 FAK inhibitor. HGF cells were stained with crystal violet at day 0 and day 3 [Fig 7(b)]. The percentage of the  
360 uncovered gap area in each representative image is shown as % of day 0 for each group (Fig 7(c)).

361 The cell movement is indicated by the actin filaments aligned in the shape. Migration speeds were strongly  
362 correlated with focal adhesion (FA) organization, where the cells with more aligned adhesions were considered  
363 to be migrating faster <sup>[36]</sup>. We have assessed the plasma treatment that rearranged the stress fibre of HGF cells.  
364 Plasma treatment enhanced the rearrangement of HGF cell's actin cytoskeleton, which facilitated cell migration.  
365 On the other hand, FAK inhibitor attenuated the plasma effect of actin cytoskeleton rearrangement and  
366 shortened actin fibres, indicating plasma-enhanced cell migration through the FAK-related cell signaling  
367 pathway (Fig 7(d)).





368

369

**Figure 7. Plasma-stimulated cell migration through the FAK-related pathway.** (a) A wound healing assay

370

was performed to evaluate the migration of HGF cells after treatment with FAK inhibitor, plasma treatment for

371

3 min, and FAK inhibitor + plasma treatment for 3 min with observation for up to 5 days. The scale bar

372

represents 50  $\mu$ m. (b) The percentage of uncovered gap area in each representative image is shown as % of day

373

0 for each group. Data are represented as means  $\pm$  SD obtained from three independent experiments. (\**P*-value

374

<0.05, \*\**P*-value < 0.01, \*\*\**P*-value < 0.001) (c) HGF cells were stained with crystal violet on day 0 and day

375

3, respectively. Scale bar represents 100  $\mu$ m. FAK, focal adhesion kinase; HGF, human gingival fibroblast.

376

Plasma treatment rearranged the stress fibre of HGF cells (d). Cells were treated with plasma for 3 min, with or

377

without FAK inhibitor, and cultured for 72 h. Cells were identified by actin staining with Alexa Fluor 488-

378

phalloidin (green) and nuclei were counterstained with Hoechst 33342 (blue). Plasma treatment enhanced actin

379

cytoskeleton rearrangement in HGF cells, which facilitated cell migration. On the other hand, the FAK inhibitor

380

attenuated the plasma effect on actin cytoskeleton rearrangement and shortened actin fibers, indicating plasma-

381

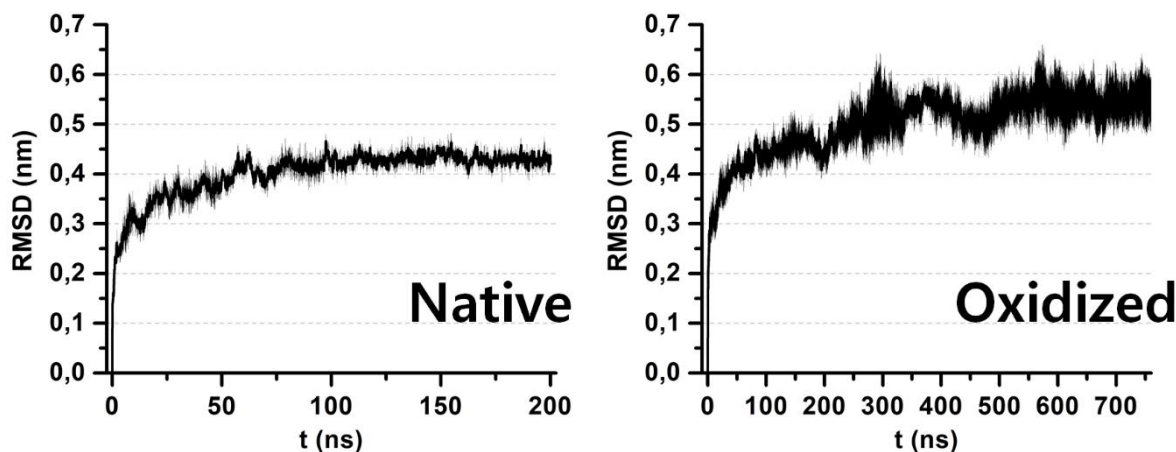
enhanced cell migration through the FAK-related cell signaling pathway. Scale bar = 50  $\mu$ m.

382

383

3.9. Effect of oxidation on the stability and conformation of the FAK protein

384 In section 2.6., we demonstrated by protein expression experiments a clear activation of the FAK  
385 protein at 3 min (low dose) of plasma exposure [Figure 6(f), (g)], which coincided with the results  
386 of the cell migration experiment (Figure 7). To support these experiments and to study the effect of  
387 FAK oxidation at the atomic level, we performed molecular dynamics (MD) simulations.  
388 Specifically, we focused on the catalytic domain of the FAK protein, i.e. the kinase domain (KD),  
389 which is mainly responsible for initiating the kinase signaling cascade [37]. Any modification in the  
390 KD (e.g. mutation or oxidation of its residues) can lead to the disruption of its interaction with the  
391 FERM (Four-point-one, ezrin, radixin, moesin) domain, which results in the phosphorylation of  
392 Tyr397 (as observed in Figure 6(f)), eventually leading to the full catalytic activation of the enzyme  
393 [38,39].  
394 To understand the effect of plasma oxidation on the KD of FAK, we oxidised specific amino acids  
395 (AAs), based on their chemical reactivity and modification, as well as their solvent accessible surface  
396 areas (SASAs) calculated in our simulations. Thus, we oxidised six KD residues (i.e. Cys427,  
397 Met442, Cys559, Met571, Met617, and Met643) that are highly reactive and have higher  
398 accessibility to solvent (see Table S1 in the Supplementary Information). To oxidise these AAs, we  
399 modified the Cys residues to cysteic acid moieties and the Met residues to methionine sulfoxides (see  
400 Table S2 in the Supplementary Information) based on [30,31].



401  
402 **Figure 8. Computer simulation.** Average root means square deviations (RMSDs) of the alpha carbons of the  
403 native and oxidised kinase domains (KDs) of FAK.

404

405 Figure 8 illustrates the time evolution of the root mean square deviations (RMSDs) of the alpha  
406 carbons of the native and oxidised KDs, averaged over three simulations for each protein system.

407 It is clear that the native KD equilibrates after 100 ns and remains stable during the rest of the  
408 simulation time, yielding an RMSD fluctuating around 0.43 nm. In contrast, the oxidised KD  
409 stabilises only at around 500 ns, at a higher RMSD value, fluctuating around 0.55 nm. Thus, oxidation  
410 leads to higher fluctuations of the RMSD, indicating that the oxidised KD becomes slightly more  
411 flexible. This is due to the conformational changes in the protein domain. Indeed, the results of the  
412 secondary structure analysis show slight alterations in the secondary structure of the KD after  
413 oxidation. Upon oxidation, the percentage of the random coil structure in the KD increases and the  
414  $\alpha$ -helix structure decreases by approximately 2–3 %, whereas other conformations stay more or less  
415 unchanged (see Table S3 in the Supplementary Information). Thus, oxidation results in a slight  
416 increase in structural flexibility, thereby affecting protein stability. Note that the oxidation degree  
417 used in our simulations was low, which corresponded to the short plasma treatment time (3 min) used  
418 in our experiments. Therefore, it does not lead to drastic conformational changes. However, it is most  
419 likely sufficient to change the function of the FAK protein and thus affect its catalytic activity.

420

#### 421 4. Discussion

422 This study determined that NBP accelerated the migration of HGFs. The migratory effect could be  
423 supported by new vessel formation and ECM breakdown. Overall, these synergistic actions of NBP could  
424 establish favourable wound beds and result in enhanced wound healing.

425 Favourable wound healing by NBP has been reported in several *in vivo* rodent studies <sup>[40,41]</sup>. Enhanced  
426 wound repair enabled more elastic tissue retention, because of less tissue damage, and allowed less leukocyte  
427 production, because of bacterial load reduction <sup>[42]</sup>. The healing of pruritic and necrotic leg wounds of patients  
428 has been proven to be clinically efficient and reliable <sup>[43,44]</sup>. Accelerated re-epithelialisation, fewer fibrin layers  
429 and blood crusts, and normal wound surroundings have also been found on the skin donor sites of 34 patients  
430 after NBP application <sup>[45]</sup>.

431 The present study found that low-dose NBP treatment did not inhibit HGF proliferation. Moreover,  
432 previous studies showed that low-dose NBP treatment did not suppress the proliferation or viability of  
433 keratinocytes <sup>[12,46,47]</sup>, fibroblasts <sup>[48]</sup>, endothelial cells <sup>[49]</sup>, or immune cells <sup>[50]</sup>. Using a plasma device with  
434 surface microdischarge technology, one study using the gamma-H2AX stain assay reported that plasma  
435 application for up to 2 min was endurable to the *ex vivo* human skin samples without DNA damage, although  
436 toxic products, such as ozone, NO, and UV, were discharged <sup>[51]</sup>.

437 This study showed elevated p21 levels in plasma-treated HGFs. The *p21* gene, also known as cyclin-  
438 dependent kinase inhibitor 1, is a potent cell cycle regulator from phase G1 to S [52]. It is involved in cell  
439 senescence as well as growth cessation. Several previous studies have shown the regulatory role of NBP on  
440 DNA. In a study using keratinocytes, the G2/M phase arrest of the cells was found after NBP application [53],  
441 and cell cycle arrest was dependent on plasma sources and application time [12,23]. An experiment of human  
442 keratinocytes revealed the time-dependent loss of viable cells and linear increase in DNA damage after 24 h of  
443 NBP application [12], reporting an increased number of G2/M phase cells and decreased number of G1 phase  
444 cells. This phenomenon has been also found in other studies with cancer cells, indicating that G2/M phase arrest  
445 is a common pathway after NBP application [23].

446 Increased response of the matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs)-2, and -9 is an important finding of this study. The  
447 extracellular matrix is remodeled by matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs). Neutrophils, microglia, and  
448 endothelial cells all produce gelatinase B (MMP-9) which is an inducible 92 kDa MMP. Gelatinase A (MMP-  
449 2) is a 72-kDa MMP that is found in abundance in the brain. MMP activity has been associated with a variety  
450 of pathologic disorders, and MMP inhibitors are being studied in a few experimental models for their therapeutic  
451 usefulness. The proMMP-2 and -9 and MMP-9 complex were more highly activated in the plasma-treated group  
452 than in the control group. Furthermore, a relative gene expression profile showed that MMP-2 was expressed  
453 at higher levels in the plasma-treated group than in the control group. Tissue inhibitors of metalloproteinases  
454 (TIMPs) control MMP activity, which is essential for ECM homeostasis. TIMPs are well-known for their ability  
455 to reduce MMP activity and thus prevent tumour development and metastasis. TIMPs have the ability to bind  
456 to all known MMPs and inhibit their activity by forming noncovalent complexes with them. As a result, TIMPs  
457 play an important role in balancing the delicate balance of ECM breakdown and reconstruction. MMP acts as a  
458 protease to decompose structural components of the ECM, creating space for cells to migrate, allowing tissue  
459 remodeling, and enabling signal transduction [54]. Meanwhile, this study could not show differences in type I  
460 and IV collagen gene expression between the control and plasma-treated groups. This was in contrast to the  
461 previous report on the positive role of NBP on human dermal fibroblasts, which promoted the production of  
462 type I collagen [55]. Further studies are required to determine the accurate role of NBP in collagen breakdown.

463 This study found the elevation of the AKT activity and *VEGF* gene expression. One study demonstrated  
464 that AKT plays a key role in endothelial cell signal transduction that induces migration and is required for  
465 VEGF to stimulate cell migration [56,57]. The serine/threonine kinase AKT is a key signaling molecule for  
466 functional regulation, including cell survival and growth. It also plays an important role in cell motility, such  
467 as tumor invasion, by actin cytoskeleton modification [58] or via MMP-9 production [59].

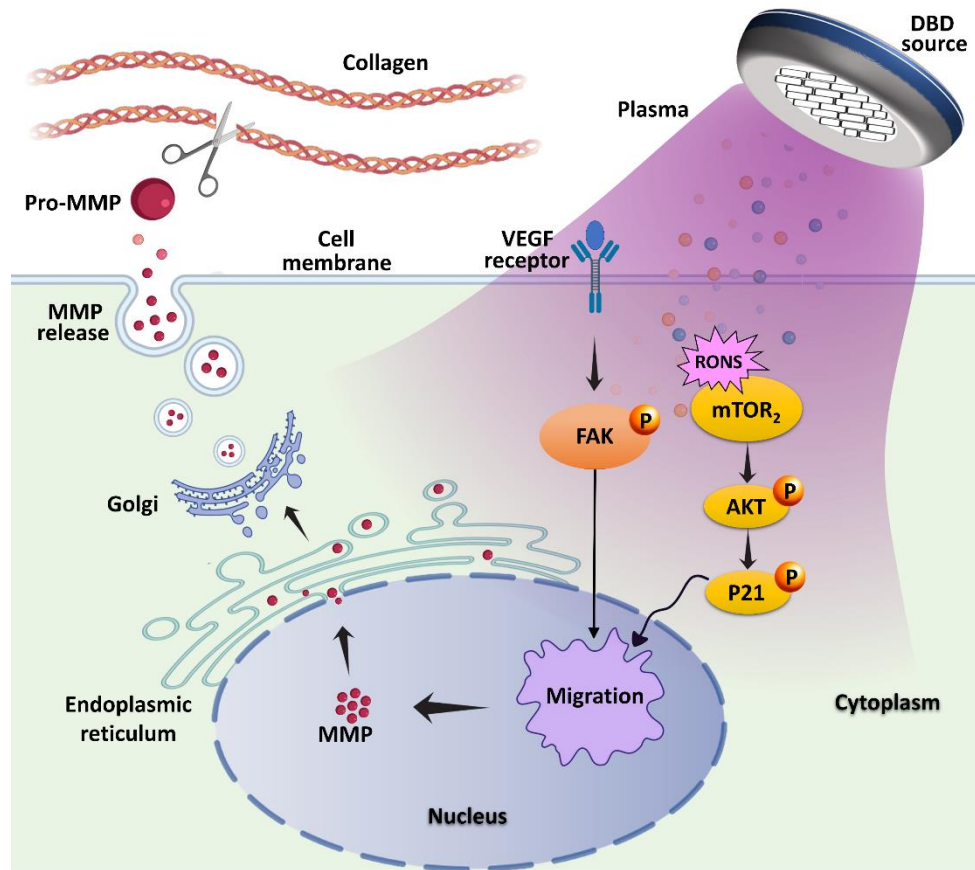


Figure 9. Low dose non-thermal biocompatible dielectric barrier discharge plasma increases the motility and reparative properties of human gingival fibroblasts. NBP stimulates the migration of human HGF cells by enhancing PI3K/AKT pathways that can affect the p21 signals and promotes the production and secretion of MMPs through FAK expression regulation.

468

469 Previously, an important role of the AKT-mTOR pathway in wound healing was suggested. One report  
 470 showed that AKT-mTOR activation could elevate epithelial cell migration and wound healing in the mouse  
 471 model [60]. Another report revealed that the dysfunction of AKT-mTOR signalling pathway resulted in impaired  
 472 wound healing in diabetic rats [60]. The present study also supported the above pathway; therefore, NBP  
 473 application could have an important role in the activation of mucosal healing.

474 We also observed the peak activation patterns of both AKT and FAK molecules at 3 min of plasma  
 475 exposure, which coincided with the cell migration results. Attenuation of cell migration or actin cytoskeleton  
 476 rearrangement by FAK inhibitor but reversal by NBP indicated that NBP enhanced cell migration through the  
 477 FAK-related cell signaling pathway. One report showed that the activation of VEGF receptor leads to the  
 478 activation of downstream FAK and phosphoinositide 3-kinase (PI3K)/AKT [61,62]. Another study demonstrated

479 that phosphorylated FAK was responsible for angiogenesis<sup>[63]</sup>. Therefore, low-dose DBD-NBP could accelerate  
480 cell migration via upregulating p-AKT and p-FAK (Tyr 397), and VEGF proteins.

481 Collectively, the supposed hypothesis for the mechanism of HGF migration is that three steps are involved  
482 in the migration of the HGFs. The first step is cell cycle arrest. The low-dose plasma may stop the cell cycle  
483 but is not lethal to cells. The second step is ECM disruption for the establishment of the migrating bed for easier  
484 transportation of cells. Finally, HGF migration occurs as a result of the outward migrating signal cascade.  
485 Wound closure time is different compared to the cells and actual animals. Just for the cell, wound closure was  
486 finished for several days less than a week according to cell numbers and wound distance which we made. To  
487 avoid this issue, we use iBidi system the width of cell free gap is 500  $\mu\text{m}$  +/- 100  $\mu\text{m}$ . In this case, the wound  
488 closure was finished until 3 days on average time. After all, we observed significant results between groups  
489 compared with the control, plasma treated group shows more fast closure end even 3 min and 5 min. between  
490 3 min and 5 min, 3 min plasma treated group is better ability than 5 min plasma treated group for wound closure.  
491 The HGFs detach and move to the middle of the wound until the wound closure is completed. As it is known  
492 that MMPs action or ECM breakdown alone cannot guarantee cellular migration, VEGF-AKT-FAK- or AKT-  
493 mTOR-related signal transduction would aid the migration process.

494 The FAK protein plays an important role in cell-cell and cell-matrix interaction and is a promising drug  
495 target. It is composed of an FERM domain and a catalytic KD that controls its enzymatic activity. FAK  
496 maintains its auto-inhibited conformation by a strong interaction between its FERM domain and KD, and during  
497 this auto-inhibited state, it protects its activation loop from phosphorylation by Src kinase. Disruption of the  
498 FERM-KD interaction leads to the auto-phosphorylation of Tyr397 (situated in the FERM-KD linker), resulting  
499 in full catalytic activation of the FAK protein<sup>[38,39,64]</sup>.

500 A few studies demonstrated that ROS induces tyrosine phosphorylation of FAK through a variety of  
501 cellular signaling pathways<sup>[65,66]</sup>. However, none of them explained the cause of FAK activation or discussed  
502 the oxidation-related changes in the conformation of this protein at the atomic level. In our MD simulations, we  
503 showed that the oxidation of its KD, the degree of which most likely corresponds to a short plasma treatment  
504 time (3 min), resulted in a higher RMSD value (Figure 8). This indicates that the oxidised KD is slightly more  
505 flexible than the native KD, which is because of the conformational changes in the protein. Thus, oxidation  
506 induces a slight increase in the structural flexibility of KD, thus affecting its stability. This in turn might disrupt  
507 the FERM-KD interaction, leading to the phosphorylation of its Tyr397 residue [as observed in Figure 6(f)] and  
508 ultimately to an increase in its catalytic activity. The latter can be correlated with the expression of the FAK

509 protein observed in Figure 6(g). Thus, our simulation results are qualitatively in line with our experimental  
510 results.

511 In our experiments, we observed a decrease in the FAK protein expression at a higher oxidation dose (i.e.  
512 5 min of plasma treatment) compared to a lower oxidation dose (i.e. 3 min of plasma exposure). A decrease in  
513 FAK expression may be associated with an increase in the FERM-KD interaction. A longer (5 min) plasma  
514 exposure leads to a high probability of the oxidation of other AAs, such as Trp, Phe, Tyr, or His, which are also  
515 vulnerable to oxidation after Met and Cys<sup>[30]</sup> and are present in the KD of the FAK protein. The plasma-induced  
516 oxidation of Trp, Phe, Tyr, and His mainly results in the hydroxylation of these AAs<sup>[30,31]</sup>. This might  
517 subsequently increase the hydrophilic interaction of these AAs with other AAs in the FERM domain, by the  
518 formation of hydrogen bonds, which can again restore the FERM-KD interaction. This can then result in the  
519 hypo-phosphorylation of the FAK protein<sup>[67]</sup>, leading to a reduction of its catalytic activity. Nevertheless, as  
520 shown in [Figure 6(f), (g)], the FERM-KD interaction is the strongest in the native FAK protein, both after  
521 high- (5 min) and low-dose (3 min) plasma treatments.

522 This study analysed the effect of DBD-NBP on HGFs, and to the best of our knowledge, this is the first  
523 study to elucidate the signaling pathway underlying the migratory effect of NBP. Furthermore, this study  
524 elucidated the role of DBD-NBP in migration-related actin cytoskeleton modification.

525 In conclusion, low-dose DBD-NBP induced cell cycle arrest, ECM breakdown, and subsequent migration  
526 in host cells. Our simulation results revealed that the plasma-induced oxidation of the KD of the FAK protein  
527 (i.e. chemical modifications in its residues) leads to instability and conformational changes in the protein. This  
528 can lead to a disruption of the FERM-KD interaction, eventually resulting in an increase in the catalytic activity  
529 of the FAK enzyme. Hence, our simulation results are qualitatively in line with our experimental observations.  
530 These consecutive reactions would be beneficial for a fast and enhanced wound healing process. Thus, non-  
531 thermal DBD plasma could be used as a promising tool for enhanced wound healing.

532

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678 **Author Contributions:** I.S. started, participated in the organisation of, and coordinated the study and wrote  
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682 prepared corresponding figures and tables. P.S. assisted in the simulations, participated in the discussion of the  
683 computational study. M.Y., P.S., and A.B. planned and wrote the computational part of the article. I.H.

684 contributed to the execution of the study, organised the database, accomplished the statistical analyses and  
685 contributed to the drafting of the article. All authors read and agreed to the final version of the manuscript. J.R.  
686 and I.H. are the guarantors of the present work, and, as such, had full access to all the data in the study, and take  
687 responsibility for the integrity of the data and the precision of the data analysis.

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689 **Data Availability:** All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article (and  
690 its supplementary information files)

691 **Competing Interests:** There are no competing interests to disclose.

692

693 **Table list**694 **Table 1.** physical parameters of the DBD plasma source.

<b>Gas source</b>	<b>Air</b>
Available area of plasma discharge (mm <sup>2</sup> )	3.8
Voltage ( $V_{\text{rms}}$ , kV)	1.69
Current ( $I_{\text{rms}}$ , mA)	9.6
Discharge voltage (kV)	0.2
On-time (ms)	25
Off-time (ms)	175
Cycle ( $\mu\text{s}$ )	31.4
Frequency (Hz)	31847.13376
Duty ratio on-time pulse (%)	13
Energy transfer/discharge cycle (J)	0.0000143
Energy transfer/continuous discharge (J/sec)	0.455
Energy transfer-/duty ratio (J/sec)	0.0569
Energy transfer of unit area/duty ratio (J/sec·mm <sup>2</sup> )	0.015

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## Supplementary Information

# Enhanced Migration of Human Gingival Fibroblasts via Non-Thermal Biocompatible Dielectric Barrier Discharge Plasma

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**Figure S1.** Schematic illustration of the native and oxidized kinase domain (KD) of the FAK protein, together with its six amino acids (Met and Cys residues) selected for oxidation. The residues shown in the left and right figure are those before and after oxidation, respectively (see also Table S2).

**Figure S2.** A slight conformational change and twisting in the FAK protein after oxidation.

**Figure S3** Zymography original blot. Clear areas represent proteolytic activity evaluated for NBP treatment on HGF cells.

**Table S1:** Met and Cys residues of the KD of the FAK protein. Rows highlighted with light blue color show the residues that have higher SASA and are hence chosen for oxidation.

**Table S2.** Chemical structures of Met and Cys and their oxidized forms used for the creation of the oxidized KD of the FAK protein.

**Table S3.** Secondary structure analysis of the native and oxidized KD of the FAK protein.

### 1. Supplementary materials and methods

#### 1.1 Quantification of gene expression

The PCR amplification programme consisted of an initial denaturation at 95 °C for 3 min, followed by 45 cycles of denaturation at 95 °C for 10 s, annealing at 60 °C for 30 s, and extension at 72 °C for 10 s. The following primers were used: for MMP-2, forward, 5'-AAGAAGTAGCTGTGACCGCC -3', and reverse, 5'- TTGCTGGAGACAAATTCTGG -3'; for VEGF, forward, 5'-CACACAGGATGGCTTGAAGA-3', and reverse, 5'- AGGGCAGAATCATCACGAAG -3'; for Collagen type I, forward, 5'-CACACGTCTCGGTCATGGTA-3', and reverse, 5'-AAGAGGAAGGCCAAGTCGAG -3'; for Collagen type IV, forward, 5'-



CTCCACGAGGAGCACAGC-3', reverse, 5'-CCTTTTGTCCCTTCACTCCA-3'; for PDGF-beta, forward, 5'-CTGGCATGCAAGTGTGAGAC-3', reverse, 5'-AATGGTCACCCGAGTTTGG-3'; for CDKN1A (p21), forward, 5'-AGTCAGTTCCTTGTGGAGCC-3', and reverse, 5'-CATGGGTTCTGACGGACAT-3'; and for beta-actin, forward, 5'-CCTTGCACATGCCGGAG-3', and reverse, 5'-GCACAGAGCCTCGCCTT -3'.

## 1.2 Immunoblot analysis

Briefly, total protein concentration in cell lysates was determined using the Pierce BCA Protein Assay Kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific, MA, USA). An equal amount of total protein (20  $\mu$ g) was loaded on a (4–12) % gradient SDS-polyacrylamide gel for electrophoresis. The proteins were transferred onto a nitrocellulose membrane (Amersham™ Protran™ 0.2  $\mu$ m NC, GE Healthcare Life Science, Buckinghamshire, UK). The membrane was blocked and incubated with the primary antibody at 4 °C overnight. After washing thrice with TBS containing 0.1 % Tween-20 (TBS-T), the membranes were incubated with secondary antibodies for 1 h at room temperature.

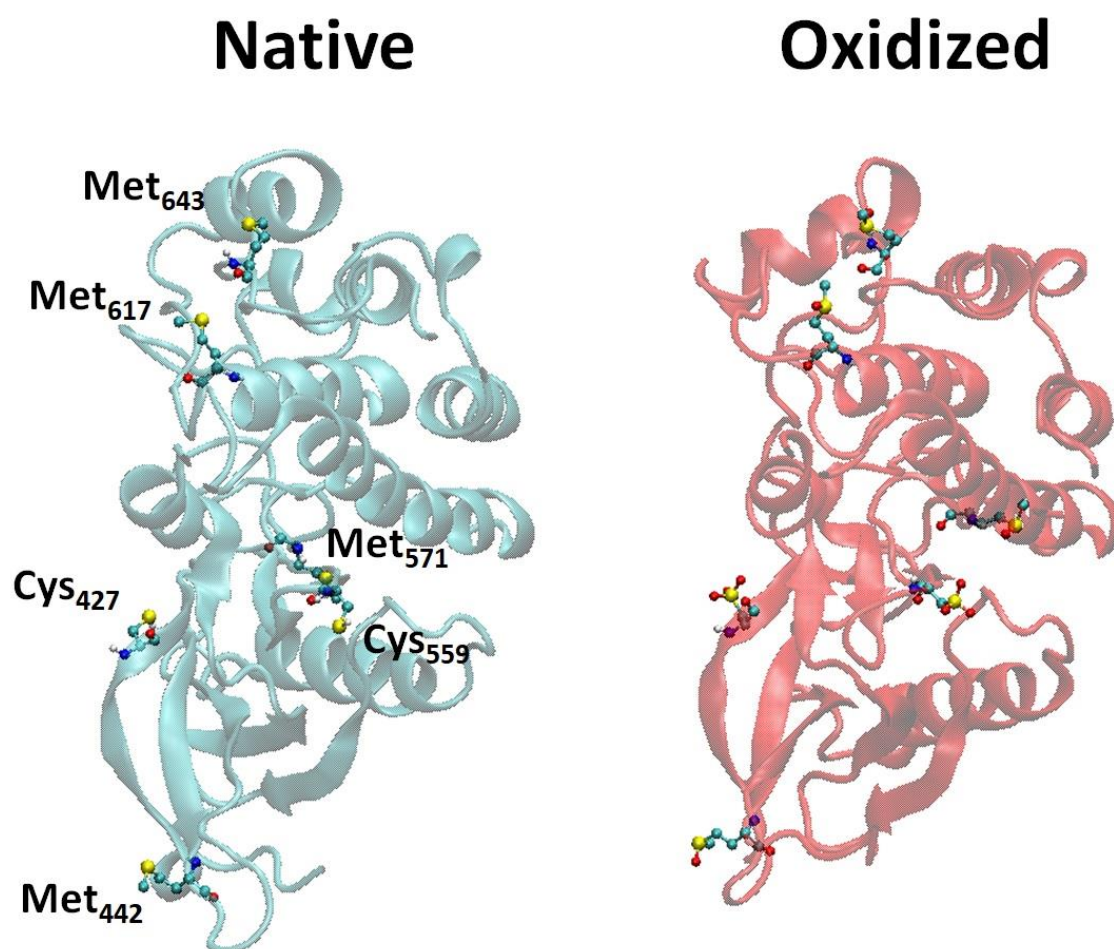
## 1.3 Computational simulation

We placed these model systems in a cubic box with dimensions  $\sim 8.5 \times 8.5 \times 8.5$  nm<sup>3</sup> and solvated them by adding simple point-charge (SPC) [1, 2] water molecules together with a physiological (150 mM) concentration of NaCl. Afterwards, the systems were energy-minimised using the steepest descent method, followed by a series of equilibration runs with the following positional restraints: (a) positional restraints on the KD backbone atoms, a force constant of 10,000 kJ.mol<sup>-1</sup>.nm<sup>-2</sup>, and an NVT ensemble (i.e. constant number of particles, volume, and temperature) for 2 ns; (b) the same as in (a) but in an NpT ensemble (i.e. constant number of particles, pressure, and temperature); (c) the same as in (b) but a force constant of 1,000 kJ.mol<sup>-1</sup>.nm<sup>-2</sup>; and (d) the same as in (b) but a force constant of 200 kJ.mol<sup>-1</sup>.nm<sup>-2</sup> for 6 ns. In this manner, we were able to slowly equilibrate the systems without causing strong disturbances in their original structures. Subsequently, we carried out the final equilibration simulations, again using the NpT ensemble for 200 ns (in the case of the native KD) and 750 ns (in the case of the oxidised KD), without any positional restraints.

## 2. Supplement results

We focused on Met and Cys residues for oxidation of the FAK protein, which are highly reactive amino acids (AAs). However, to find out which of the Met or Cys to oxidize, we calculated the solvent accessible surface area (SASA) of these residues. Thus, based on the SASA results we selected six AAs (i.e., Cys427, Met442, Cys559, Met571, Met617 and Met643) for oxidation, see AAs highlighted with light blue color in Table 1. As is clear, these residues have higher accessibility to solvent. To oxidize the above-mentioned AAs, we modified Met to methionine sulfoxide and Cys to cysteic acid (Figure S1).

**Figure S1.** Schematic illustration of the native and oxidized kinase domain (KD) of the FAK protein, together with its six amino acids (Met and Cys residues) selected for oxidation. The residues shown in the left and right figure are those before and after oxidation, respectively (see also Table S2).



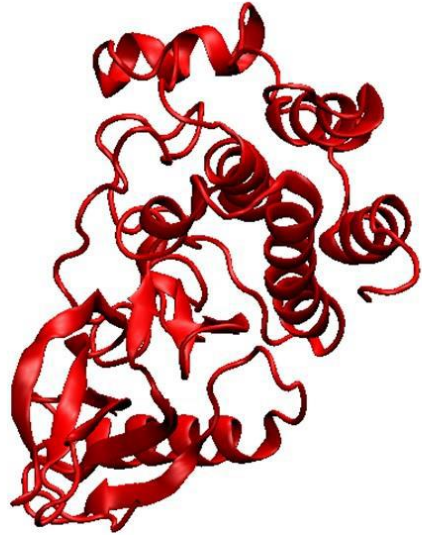
The percentage of the random coil structure increases, and the  $\alpha$ -helix structure decreases by approximately 2-3 %, whereas other conformations stay more or less unchanged. This indicates that the oxidation results in a slight increase in the structural flexibility, thereby affecting its stability. Note that the oxidation degree used in our simulations is low, which probably corresponds to a short treatment time. Therefore, it does not lead to drastic conformational changes. However, it is most likely sufficient to change the function of FAK protein, thereby affecting its activity.

**Figure S2.** A slight conformational change and twisting in the FAK protein after oxidation.

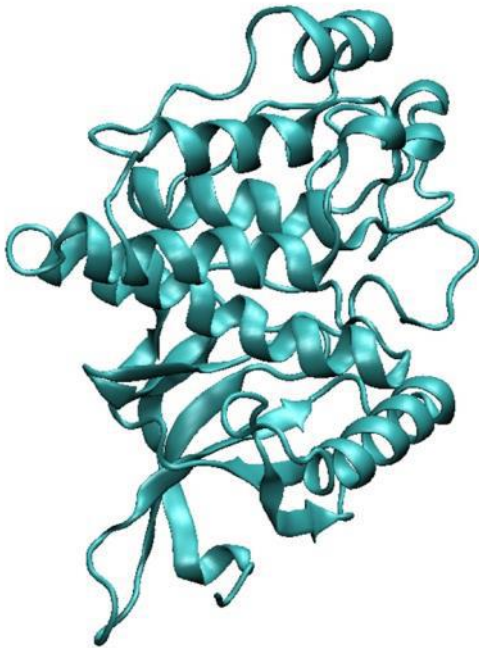
**Native**



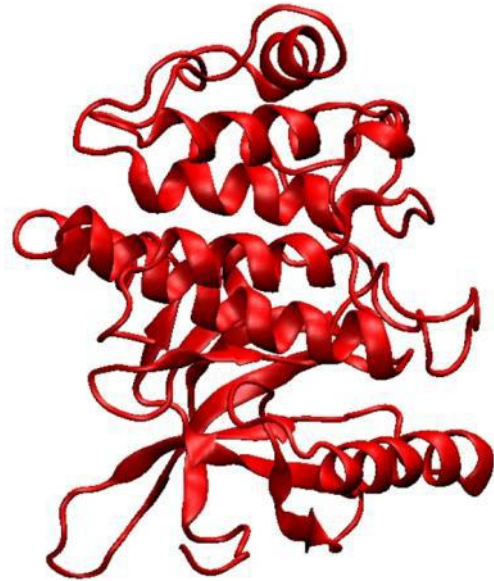
**Oxidized**



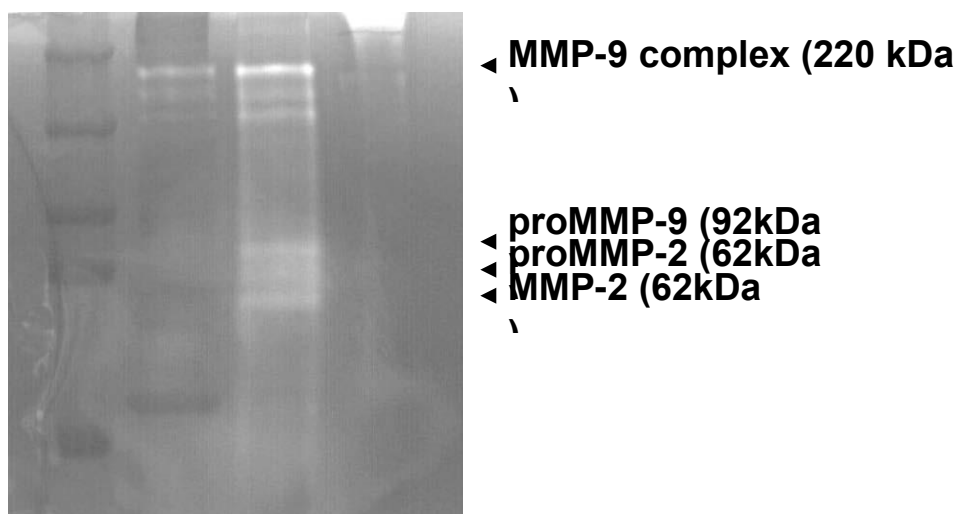
**Native**



**Oxidized**



**Figure S3.** Zymography original blot. Clear areas represent proteolytic activity evaluated for NBP treatment on HGF cells. Lane 1, marker, lane 2, control, lane 3, NBP treated for 3 min.



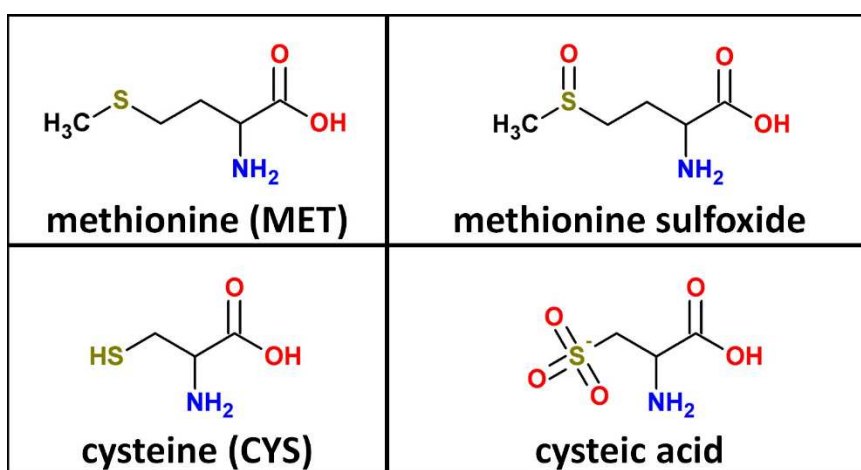
The native FAK reaches its equilibration after  $\sim 100$  ns and stays stable in the rest of the simulation time, yielding an RMSD fluctuating around 0.43 nm. In contrast, the oxidized FAK protein obtains its stability at a much longer time, i.e., at around 600 ns, having a higher RMSD value than the native one, which fluctuates around 0.55 nm. This indicates that the oxidized structure become slightly more flexible than the native structure, which can be due to the conformational changes in the protein. Indeed, the secondary structure analysis showed a slight difference in secondary structure after oxidation (Table S2).

**Table S1.** Met and Cys residues of the KD of the FAK protein. Rows highlighted with light blue color show the residues that have higher SASA and are hence chosen for oxidation.

AA residue	Residue number	SASA (nm <sup>2</sup> )
CYS	427	0.59 $\pm$ 0.14
MET	442	0.94 $\pm$ 0.16
CYS	456	0.04 $\pm$ 0.04
CYS	459	0.03 $\pm$ 0.03

MET	475	0.18 ± 0.10
MET	499	0.05 ± 0.05
CYS	502	0.02 ± 0.02
CYS	559	0.32 ± 0.09
MET	571	0.46 ± 0.16
MET	589	0.04 ± 0.04
MET	607	0.03 ± 0.03
CYS	611	0.02 ± 0.02
MET	612	0.02 ± 0.02
MET	617	0.44 ± 0.09
MET	643	0.99 ± 0.16
CYS	647	0.14 ± 0.08
MET	655	0.00 ± 0.00
CYS	658	0.00 ± 0.00

**Table S2.** Chemical structures of Met and Cys and their oxidized forms used for the creation of the oxidized KD of the FAK protein.



**Table S3.** Secondary structure analysis of the native and oxidized KD of the FAK protein.

System	Coil	$\beta$ -sheet	$\beta$ -bridge	Bend	Turn	$\alpha$ -helix	3-helix
Native	0.22 $\pm$ 0.02	0.15 $\pm$ 0.00	0.01 $\pm$ 0.00	0.13 $\pm$ 0.01	0.12 $\pm$ 0.01	0.35 $\pm$ 0.02	0.02 $\pm$ 0.01
Oxidized	0.25 $\pm$ 0.01	0.14 $\pm$ 0.01	0.01 $\pm$ 0.00	0.13 $\pm$ 0.01	0.11 $\pm$ 0.01	0.33 $\pm$ 0.01	0.02 $\pm$ 0.01

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