

12.2.3 Molecular Diagnosis

You know that for effective treatment of a disease, early diagnosis and understanding its pathophysiology is very important. Using conventional methods of diagnosis (serum and urine analysis, etc.) early detection is not possible. Recombinant DNA technology, Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and Enzyme Linked Immuno-sorbent Assay (ELISA) are some of the techniques that serve the purpose of early diagnosis.

Presence of a pathogen (bacteria, viruses, etc.) is normally suspected only when the pathogen has produced a disease symptom. By this time the concentration of pathogen is already very high in the body. However, very low concentration of a bacteria or virus (at a time when the symptoms of the disease are not yet visible) can be detected by amplification of their nucleic acid by PCR. *Can you explain how PCR can detect very low amounts of DNA?* PCR is now routinely used to detect HIV in suspected AIDS patients. It is being used to detect mutations in genes in suspected cancer patients too. It is a powerful technique to identify many other genetic disorders.

A single stranded DNA or RNA, tagged with a radioactive molecule (probe) is allowed to hybridise to its complementary DNA in a clone of cells followed by detection using autoradiography. The clone having the mutated gene will hence not appear on the photographic film, because the probe will not have complementarity with the mutated gene.

ELISA is based on the principle of antigen-antibody interaction. Infection by pathogen can be detected by the presence of antigens (proteins, glycoproteins, etc.) or by detecting the antibodies synthesised against the pathogen.

12.3 TRANSGENIC ANIMALS

Animals that have had their DNA manipulated to possess and express an extra (foreign) gene are known as **transgenic animals**. Transgenic rats, rabbits, pigs, sheep, cows and fish have been produced, although over 95 per cent of all existing transgenic animals are mice. *Why are these animals being produced? How can man benefit from such modifications?* Let us try and explore some of the common reasons:

- (i) **Normal physiology and development:** Transgenic animals can be specifically designed to allow the study of how genes are regulated, and how they affect the normal functions of the body and its development, e.g., study of complex factors involved in growth such as insulin-like growth factor. By introducing genes from other species that alter the formation of this factor and studying the biological effects that result, information is obtained about the biological role of the factor in the body.
- (ii) **Study of disease:** Many transgenic animals are designed to increase our understanding of how genes contribute to the development of