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Polymer Chemistry and Its Applications in Pharmaceutical Composite Formulations

Anuradha Niranjan Chivate[1,*], Niranjan D. Chivate[2], Kiran A. Wadkar[3], Shubhangi A. Patil[4]

Abstract

Polymer chemistry plays a critical role in pharmaceutical formulations, particularly in enhancing drug stability, bioavailability, and controlled release. Polymers are widely utilized in drug delivery systems. Polymers are widely used in pharmaceutical sciences for drug delivery, controlled release, and stability enhancement. This paper explores the role of polymers in the extraction and formulation of glycyrrhetinic acid from Glycyrrhiza glabra, a bioactive compound. Various polymer-based extraction and purification techniques are discussed, emphasizing their efficiency, yield improvement, and sustainability. These methods, including polymeric micelles, solid-phase extraction, and molecularly imprinted polymers, have been shown to enhance the selective isolation of glycyrrhetinic acid while reducing solvent consumption and environmental impact. Additionally, the formulation of glycyrrhetinic acid using polymer-based excipients such as surfactants and co-surfactants is reviewed. Polymers like polyvinyl alcohol, polyethylene glycol, and chitosan play a crucial role in stabilizing formulations, enhancing solubility, and enabling targeted delivery. The use of polymeric nanoparticles, hydrogels, further improves the bioavailability and therapeutic potential of glycyrrhetinic acid. This paper highlights the advancements in polymer-assisted techniques for extraction and formulation, showcasing their importance in modern pharmaceutical development. By integrating polymer chemistry, researchers can achieve higher drug efficacy, stability, and sustainability in herbal-based formulations.

Keywords: Polymer chemistry, glycyrrhetinic acid, pharmaceutical formulation, bioavailability, surfactants, controlled release, purification

INTRODUCTION

Their unique physicochemical properties allow for precise modulation of drug solubility, permeability, and bioavailability, making them essential in modern drug formulation [1] The extraction and formulation of bioactive compounds such as glycyrrhetinic acid, a pentacyclic triterpenoid derived from *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, require innovative polymeric approaches to optimize their physicochemical characteristics and therapeutic efficacy. This study discusses various polymeric strategies employed in the isolation and formulation of glycyrrhetinic acid and evaluates their advantages over conventional methods.

Polymers used in pharmaceutical applications are typically synthesized via two major mechanisms: addition and condensation polymerization. Addition polymerization involves the stepwise addition of monomers with double bonds, forming high molecular weight polymers without any by-

***Author for Correspondence**
Anuradha Niranjan Chivate

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacology, Krishna Institute of Pharmacy, Krishna Vishwa Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University), Karad, Maharashtra, India
[2]Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacology, Krishna Charitable Trust's Krishna College of Pharmacy, Karad, Maharashtra, India
[3]Professor & Head, Department of Pharmacology, Appasaheb Birnale College of Pharmacy, Sangli, Maharashtra, India
[4]Head of Department, Department of Pharmacology, Krishna Charitable Trust's Krishna College of Pharmacy, Karad, Maharashtra, India

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product. In contrast, condensation polymerization involves a reaction between monomers with the loss of a small molecule, often water or alcohol. Understanding these mechanisms is critical for designing polymers with desired drug-carrying properties and degradation behavior.

The extraction of glycyrrhetinic acid from *Glycyrrhiza glabra* can be significantly improved using polymer-based extraction techniques, which enhance efficiency, selectivity, and sustainability [2]. Polymeric adsorbents, are increasingly utilized to achieve high-purity isolates. These approaches minimize solvent consumption, reduce environmental impact, and improve yield compared to traditional solvent extraction techniques. Additionally, polymeric micelles and dendrimers have shown promise in selectively binding and isolating glycyrrhetinic acid, ensuring higher recovery rates while maintaining bioactivity.

Formulating glycyrrhetinic acid into effective pharmaceutical products requires polymer-based excipients that enhance solubility, stability, and targeted drug delivery [3]. Hydrophilic polymers play key roles in improving dissolution rates and preventing drug degradation. Additionally, biodegradable polymers like chitosan and polylactic-co-glycolic acid (PLGA) enable controlled release formulations, ensuring sustained therapeutic action and reduced dosing frequency.

Polymeric nanoparticles, hydrogels, and self-emulsifying drug delivery systems (SEDDS) have been employed to encapsulate glycyrrhetinic acid, enhancing its bioavailability and pharmacokinetics. Nanocarrier systems, reducing systemic toxicity while improving drug absorption in specific tissues [4]. Hydrogels, which consist of cross-linked polymeric networks, offer sustained release and improved mucoadhesion, making them suitable for transdermal and oral formulations. SEDDS, composed of polymeric surfactants and co-surfactants, enhance the solubilization of glycyrrhetinic acid, ensuring efficient gastrointestinal absorption.

Comparatively, polymer-based strategies outperform conventional methods in terms of efficiency, selectivity, and sustainability. Traditional solvent extraction methods often suffer from low selectivity and require extensive purification steps, leading to higher costs and increased solvent waste [5]. Similarly, conventional formulations of glycyrrhetinic acid face challenges related to low aqueous solubility and rapid metabolism, limiting their clinical efficacy. In contrast, polymeric approaches offer precision in extraction, improved stability, and enhanced bioavailability, making them highly advantageous for pharmaceutical applications.

ROLE OF POLYMERS IN EXTRACTION AND PURIFICATION

The isolation of glycyrrhetinic acid from *Glycyrrhiza glabra* involves various solvent extraction techniques, including maceration, solvent treatment, and Soxhlet extraction [6]. These traditional methods, while widely used, often suffer from inefficiencies such as high solvent consumption, lengthy extraction times, and low selectivity. To overcome these challenges, the introduction of polymeric filtration membranes and adsorbents has proven to be a promising approach, improving both the yield and purity of the final product.

Polymeric resins and adsorbents, particularly polystyrene-divinylbenzene copolymers, are highly effective in selectively capturing glycyrrhetinic acid while removing unwanted impurities [7]. These materials function through mechanisms such as hydrophobic interactions, ion exchange, and size exclusion, allowing for the targeted isolation of glycyrrhetinic acid with minimal loss of bioactivity. Molecularly imprinted polymers (MIPs) further enhance selectivity by utilizing specific molecular recognition sites designed to bind glycyrrhetinic acid with high affinity. Additionally, solid-phase extraction (SPE) techniques incorporating polymeric adsorbents streamline purification, reducing solvent use and increasing extraction efficiency.

Beyond extraction, polymer chemistry plays a crucial role in the formulation of glycyrrhetinic acid, ensuring its stability, bioavailability, and controlled release. Due to its low aqueous solubility and susceptibility to degradation, glycyrrhetinic acid benefits significantly from polymer-based excipients that enhance its physicochemical properties [8]. Hydrophilic polymers such as polyethylene glycol (PEG), hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC), and polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) improve solubility and dissolution rates, facilitating better drug absorption. Biodegradable polymers like polylactic-co-glycolic acid (PLGA) and chitosan are particularly valuable in sustained-release formulations, enabling prolonged therapeutic effects while minimizing dosing frequency.

Nanotechnology further enhances the pharmaceutical potential of glycyrrhetinic acid by incorporating polymeric nanoparticles, liposomes, and hydrogels for targeted delivery. Nanopolymers and polymeric nanoparticles play a pivotal role in targeted drug delivery. These nanoscale systems can be functionalized with ligands for active targeting or exploit the enhanced permeability and retention effect for passive targeting. Their tunable surfaces and responsive properties allow for precise delivery of glycyrrhetinic acid to specific tissues, reducing systemic toxicity and enhancing therapeutic efficacy. Polymeric nanoparticles, often composed of PLGA or polycaprolactone (PCL), protect the drug from premature degradation and enable controlled drug release [9]. Liposomes, with their lipid bilayer structures stabilized by polymeric surfactants, provide efficient encapsulation, improving drug transport across biological membranes. Hydrogels, consisting of three-dimensional polymeric networks, offer sustained drug release and increased bioadhesion, making them suitable for topical and transdermal applications.

Another effective formulation approach involves self-emulsifying drug delivery systems (SEDDS), which utilize polymeric surfactants and co-surfactants to enhance the solubilization and absorption of glycyrrhetinic acid. These systems improve oral bioavailability by facilitating drug dispersion in the gastrointestinal tract, overcoming solubility limitations. Furthermore, polymeric micelles, formed by amphiphilic block copolymers, provide a stable environment for hydrophobic drugs, increasing systemic circulation time and improving therapeutic outcomes [10].

Compared to conventional extraction and formulation techniques, polymer-assisted strategies offer superior efficiency, selectivity, and sustainability. Traditional solvent-based methods often require extensive purification steps, leading to increased costs and environmental concerns [11]. In contrast, polymeric approaches provide enhanced extraction precision, reduced solvent consumption, and improved stability of glycyrrhetinic acid formulations.

POLYMER-BASED FORMULATION OF GLYCYRRHETINIC ACID

The pharmaceutical formulation of glycyrrhetinic acid involves incorporating polymeric excipients to enhance its solubility, stability, and overall bioavailability [12]. Glycyrrhetinic acid, a bioactive compound derived from glycyrrhizin, exhibits significant therapeutic properties, including anti-inflammatory, antiviral, and anticancer effects. However, its poor aqueous solubility and limited systemic absorption present challenges in drug formulation, necessitating the use of polymer-based excipients. Key polymeric components used in the formulation of glycyrrhetinic acid include:

Surfactants (e.g., Tween 80)

Surfactants play a crucial role in improving the dispersion and solubility of glycyrrhetinic acid in aqueous environments [13]. Tween 80, a nonionic surfactant, reduces surface tension and facilitates the formation of micelles that encapsulate hydrophobic drug molecules, enhancing their solubility in water-based formulations. This approach is particularly useful in developing oral and injectable formulations where increased solubility directly correlates with improved bioavailability [14, 15].

Co-surfactants (e.g., Propylene Glycol)

Co-surfactants assist in emulsification and stabilization by optimizing the interfacial properties between hydrophobic and hydrophilic components [16]. Propylene glycol, a widely used co-surfactant,

aids in maintaining the stability of the formulated system by preventing phase separation and aggregation. This enhances the uniform distribution of glycyrrhetinic acid within the formulation, ensuring consistent therapeutic effects. Additionally, co-surfactants contribute to the permeability enhancement of the drug across biological membranes [17, 18].

Oil Carriers (e.g., Almond Oil)

Lipid-based delivery systems, such as self-emulsifying drug delivery systems (SEDDS), incorporate oil carriers like almond oil to improve the solubility and absorption of glycyrrhetinic acid [19]. Almond oil, being a natural lipid, provides a biocompatible medium for drug dissolution and facilitates lymphatic transport, bypassing hepatic metabolism and enhancing systemic availability. Such oil-based formulations are particularly advantageous for oral delivery, as they ensure a prolonged release profile and improved patient compliance [20, 21].

STABILITY STUDIES AND DRUG RELEASE

The stability of polymeric drug formulations is a critical factor influencing their efficacy, safety, and shelf life [22]. Stability studies assess how a formulation maintains its physical, chemical, and biological properties over time under different storage conditions. Polymeric drug delivery systems, which offer controlled and sustained release, require extensive stability testing to ensure their integrity and functionality throughout their intended shelf life [23].

Stability Studies in Polymeric Drug Formulations

Stability studies of polymer-based drug formulations are often conducted under accelerated conditions to predict long-term stability [24]. These studies help identify potential degradation pathways and optimize formulation parameters for improved performance. The key parameters monitored during stability testing include: Polymer-based formulations often include hydrogels, nanoparticles, or micelles that must remain homogeneously dispersed.[25] Phase separation indicates instability and can lead to drug precipitation or loss of uniformity in drug release. Many polymeric formulations rely on pH-sensitive mechanisms for controlled drug release. Any fluctuation in pH over time can alter drug solubility, leading to reduced efficacy. Buffering agents are often incorporated to maintain pH stability. The viscosity of a polymeric formulation directly affects drug release kinetics and injectability [26]. Changes in viscosity can be indicative of polymer degradation or alterations in molecular weight distribution. This parameter is particularly important for injectable formulations and hydrogel-based system. Ensuring that the drug remains chemically stable within the polymer matrix is crucial [27].

CONCLUSION

Polymer chemistry significantly enhances the efficiency of pharmaceutical formulations by improving extraction yield, purification, and stability. The incorporation of polymeric excipients in glycyrrhetinic acid formulations optimizes its therapeutic potential, offering new avenues for pharmaceutical advancements. Polymer-based delivery systems address these challenges by enhancing solubility, prolonging systemic circulation, and improving targeted delivery. Various polymeric excipients, such as polyethylene glycol (PEG), polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP), and chitosan, have been employed to develop nanoparticles, hydrogels, and micelles that encapsulate glycyrrhetinic acid, thus enhancing its stability and efficacy. Furthermore, polymeric excipients contribute to controlled and sustained drug release, minimizing fluctuations in drug concentration and reducing dosing frequency. This leads to improved patient compliance and therapeutic outcomes. Advanced polymer modification techniques, including grafting and crosslinking, further optimize drug-polymer interactions, ensuring precise drug loading and release kinetics. The integration of polymer chemistry into glycyrrhetinic acid formulations also facilitates innovative drug delivery strategies, such as transdermal patches and injectable hydrogels, broadening its pharmaceutical applications. As polymer technology continues to evolve, the development of smart polymers with stimuli-responsive properties. Ultimately, leveraging polymer chemistry in glycyrrhetinic acid formulations revolutionizes drug delivery, improving

therapeutic efficacy, stability, and patient adherence, paving the way for future pharmaceutical advancements. The advancement of polymer-based pharmaceutical systems increasingly depends on interdisciplinary collaboration. Chemists contribute to the synthesis and modification of functional polymers; biologists elucidate interactions at the cellular level; and engineers optimize formulations for manufacturing and delivery. This collaborative approach ensures the development of sophisticated, patient-centric drug delivery systems that bridge the gap between laboratory innovation and clinical application.

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