

REVIEW: POTENTIAL OF NANOEMULGEL FORMULATIONS FOR TOPICAL DRUG DELIVERY

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ABSTRACT

Nanoemulgel is a combination of two different formulation systems, known as nanoemulsion preparation with gel matrix. In recent years, there has been an increase in the use of topical nanoemulgel preparations because they are easy to apply and can avoid damage to various drugs in the body. Although topical nanoemulgel preparations have some limitations, they are capable of delivering lipophilic drugs topically. The purpose of this review is to summarize the potential of nanoemulgel formulations for topical drug delivery against various physiological challenges and limitations of the formula. Through the publication search, as many as 124 articles were obtained based on the screening results of 29 articles that met the inclusion criteria and were used as a review. The analysis of data for this article was conducted through a narrative review. This preparation may improve the permeability of the drug into the skin by penetrating the stratum corneum through intercellular and intracellular pathways, depending on the components used: oil phase, surfactants, cosurfactants, and gelling agents. Surfactants are responsible for damaging the structure of the skin layer by lowering the surface tension, and gelling agents are responsible for increasing the viscosity and adhesiveness of the skin. Nanoemulgel formulations for topical drug delivery can be used to treat several diseases, such as inflammation, arthritis, wounds, fungal infections, bacterial infections, and psoriasis. The nanoemulgel formulation may provide promising potential in delivering lipophilic drugs topically in the future

Keywords: Nanoemulgel, nanoemulsion, gel, topical drug delivery

INTRODUCTION

A Localized drug delivery system in which drugs are incorporated into the skin to attain the local effects of a drug, known as a topical drug delivery system, can mitigate various risks such as gastric-induced drug degradation, first-pass metabolism in the liver, and varied absorption conditions due to changes in pH, the availability of enzymes, and gastric emptying time. However, topical drug delivery systems have major challenges related to the skin barrier properties of the stratum corneum, which require nano-based delivery systems to improve drug bioavailability and permeability (Gadkari Patil and Saudagar, 2019; Singh et al., 2013). Nanoemulsions are nanotechnology-based systems.

Nanoemulsions have been reported to work as novel carrier systems to resolve the problems related to topical delivery of lipophilic drug molecules. These systems can load drugs and enhance permeability by enveloping lipophilic molecules in an oil film and delivering them through the stratum corneum into the skin (Kumar Ali and Baboota, 2016). Despite their excellent properties, nanoemulsions have some disadvantages, such as low viscosity, poor retention and spreadability, and unfavorable product stability owing to the thermodynamically unstable nanoemulsion interface. Therefore, it is important to incorporate

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nanoemulsions into gel dosage forms to enhance the pharmacological viscosity, adhesiveness, and exposure time of the drug to the skin surface (Sharma, et al., 2019).

Nanoemulgel is a combination of two different systems in which a nanoemulsion loaded with a drug is incorporated into a gel base to provide a dual controlled release system (Paliwal and Kaur, 2019). This type of gel base has the limitation of being unable to transport lipophilic drugs. For this reason, lipophilic drugs are dissolved in the nanoemulsion phase to increase drug permeability through the skin and incorporated into the gel base to solve the problem of low viscosity in nanoemulsion systems (Ghiasi, et al., 2019; Abdallah, et al., 2021). The objective of this review is to provide a summary of the potential of nanoemulgel formulations for topical drug delivery against various physiological challenges and limitations of its formulation, but still provides good efficacy.

RESEARCH METHODE

Tools and Materials

This review article used data collected by conducting online research from national and international publications in electronic databases, including Google Scholar and PubMed. The keywords "Nanoemulgel", "Nanoemulsion", Nanoemulsion Gel", "Hydrogel" and "Topical Drug Delivery System" were used during the search. Compilation of this review article was assisted by Mendeley® software.

Article Selection Criteria

The inclusion criteria in this study were articles in accredited journals or those with ISSN and E-ISSN published between 2013 and 2023, with a complete article structure, suitable with predetermined themes, and research articles. The exclusion criteria in this study were articles in non-accredited journals published before 2013, incomplete article structure, not following the specified theme, and article reviews.

Research Procedure

The literature search yielded 124 national or international publications. There were 29 articles that met the predetermined inclusion criteria, while the other 95 articles did not meet the set criteria because of the exclusion criteria, could not be found because of errors in the web journal, and could not be accessed in full text. This review article is presented using a descriptive analysis. The publication search process is illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Flow Chart Of The Publication Search Method

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Skin has permanent properties that act as a protective barrier against external agents. The outermost layer of the skin is the stratum corneum, which is a part of the skin epidermis. The stratum corneum consists of keratinized cells, lipids, fatty acids, and cholesterol, which help to retain moisture and provide a hydrophobic barrier to the skin. After successfully passing through the stratum corneum, the drug penetrates the dermal layer with abundant blood vessels. A part of the active substance of the drug enters the systemic circulation. Thus, skin penetration is a major challenge for topical drug delivery. The application of nanocarriers is an effective strategy to penetrate the stratum corneum barrier without disrupting the structure of the skin layer by utilizing intercellular and intracellular transport mechanisms (Hussain et al., 2016).

One of the new carriers for topical preparations is a nanoemulgel based on nanoemulsion preparations incorporated into a gel matrix (Tayah and Eid, 2023). Nanoemulsion is a heterogeneous colloidal mixture of oil and water, with one component as the dispersed phase and the other as the dispersion phase. Surfactants are emulsifying agents adsorbed at the interfaces of dispersed and dispersed phases by reducing surface tension. High solubilization capacity may improve the thermodynamic activity of the skin. However, the low viscosity of this system results in low retention time and spreadability. On the other hand, gel preparation cannot contain a large amount of drug, but this system can improve viscosity, spreadability, and adhesiveness (Ghiasi, et al., 2019).



Figure 2. Nanoemulgel Delivery System for Topical Preparations

The distinctive drug release of nanoemulgel formulations includes drug release from the inner phase of the nanoemulsion into the gel base and then into the skin. When the nanoemulsion gel comes into contact with the skin, it releases nano-sized droplets owing to their small diameter, which traverses two different pathways, as shown in **Figure 2**. One is cell-to-cell transfer involving concentration gradient-based movement, called intercellular or intracellular transport, while the other is traversing through the intercellular space or paracellular transport. Although there is a third pathway called transappendageal transport, its influence on drug penetration is limited, as hair follicles and glandular ducts constitute a negligible portion of the total skin surface area (Raju et al., 2019).

Numerous advantages have been reported for the application of nanoemulgels for drug delivery, including nanoemulgels capable of delivering larger amounts of the drug due to their better solubilization capacity, good adhesion and cross-linking properties that affect drug penetration on the skin, providing better lipophilic drug delivery, increasing nanoemulsion stability, facilitating the movement of drugs to the stratum corneum due to the fine dispersion of drugs in nanoemulsion droplets (Ghiasi, et al., 2019), providing a pleasant appearance, ease of application, and ease of cleaning (Eid, et al., 2014). However, nanoemulgel also has several disadvantages, including the manufacturing of the nanoemulsion phase, which is quite expensive because it requires special tools and high maintenance costs, such as the fact that it is sometimes difficult to control the formation of bubbles, and is a new technology that has not been widely used. Therefore, there is still little interest from manufacturers to convert existing products on the market into nanoemulgel preparations (Raju, et al., 2019).

The main components of nanoemulgels (**Table I**) consist of an oil phase, surfactants, co-surfactants, and gelling agents that improve permeability and adhesiveness to the skin by increasing the partition coefficient and retention of the product on the skin (Ghiasi et al., 2019). Nanoemulgel characteristics have good thermodynamic stability with particle sizes less than 100 nm and excellent bioavailability and permeability (Abdallah et al., 2021; Tayah and Eid, 2023).

Formulation	Use	Example	Reference			
Aqueous	For aqueous phase	Water, alcohol	(Mittal, Ali and			
Phase	emulsion		Baboota, 2021)			
Oil Phase	For oil phase emulsion	Oleic acid, emu oil	(Mittal, Ali and			
	-		Baboota, 2021)			
Surfactant	Reducing surface	- Cationic: hexadecyl trimethyl ammonium	(Shakeel, et al., 2013)			
	tension	bromide, quaternary ammonium	(Mittal, Ali and			
		compounds, and dodecyl dimethyl ammonium bromide	Baboota, 2021)			
		- Nonionic: Poloxamer 124, Tween 20, Tween 80, Caproyl 90				
		- Anionic: sodium dodecyl sulfate and sodium bis-20 ethylhexylsulfosuccinate	(Usman, et al., 2013)			
		- Zwitterionic: carboxybetaine	(Kumar, Saw and			
		-	Mandal, 2019)			
Co-surfactant	Help improve surfactant performance	PEG-400, Transcutol HP, ethyl alcohol	(Kesan, et al., 2017)			
Gelling Agent	Increasing viscosity	- Natural: pectin, carrageenan, alginate	(Mittal, Ali and			
		acid, xanthan gum, acacia gum	Baboota, 2021)			
		- Synthethic: carbomer	(Chen, et al., 2013)			
		- Semi synthethic: hydroxypropyl	(Shende and Gupta,			
		cellulose, ethyl cellulose	2020)			
Preservative	Protection from	Methylparaben, propylparaben,	(Raju, et al., 2019)			
	microorganism	benzalkonium chloride, benzoic acid, sodium benzoate				
Antioxidant	Prevent degrading	Butyl hydroxy toluene (BHT), Butyl	(Raju, et al., 2019)			
	preparation by oxidation	hydroxy anisole (BHA)				
Humectant	Maintain moisture	Glycerin, propyleneglycol	(Raju, et al., 2019)			
Penetration	Enhancing drug	Isopropyl myristate, urea, chenopodium oil,	(Raju, et al., 2019)			
Enhancer	penetration into skin	pyrrolidone, dimethyl sulfoxide, linoleic acid, menthol				

Table I. Components Of Nanoemulgels

Based on emulsification techniques, nanoemulgel preparations can be divided into 2 types.

1. High-energy method

This method uses mechanical devices, such as *microfluidizers*, high-pressure *homogenizers*, and ultrasonication, to generate forces that can disrupt both phases. Highenergy methods can generate heat in the components during preparation, resulting in thermodynamic instability. However, this method is not suitable for thermolabile drugs (Kotta et al., 2015).

2. Low energy method

This method includes phase-inversion emulsification and self-emulsification. The phase inversion emulsification method results from the alteration of surface affinity due to changes in temperature and composition. The self-emulsification (spontaneous) method involves blending the oil phase, surfactant, and aqueous phase at an appropriate ratio. This method is suitable for thermolabile drugs (Kotta et al. 2015).



Figure 3. Nanoemulgel Preparation Procedure

Nanoemulgel preparation procedure consists of three main steps (Raju. et al., 2019)

- 1. Formulation of oil-in-water or water-in-oil nanoemulsion
 - Oil phase preparation occurs when the emulgator is dissolved under hot conditions. For example: Span 20 in liquid paraffin
 - Preparation of aqueous phase i.e. the aqueous phase is prepared by dissolving the emulgator under hot conditions. Example: Tween 20 in pure water
 - The drug is dissolved in the oil or water phase (according to its solubility).
 - The oil and aqueous phases were mixed gradually and then stirred at room temperature until they were homogeneous.
- 2. Formulation of gel base The gel base was prepared by dispersing the polymer in pure water at moderate and constant stirring speeds using a mechanical stirrer, and the pH was adjusted to 6-6.5 using neutralizing agents such as triethanolamine (TEA).
- 3. Incorporation of nanoemulsion into gel base
 - The nanoemulsion was placed into the gel base, stirred gently until homogeneous, and then tested.

Test	Objective	Tools	Reference	
Physical Test				
Appearance	Observe color stability, homogeneity, and phase separation	Visual observation	(Print, et al., 2015)	
рН	Measure suitability of product's pH to skin pH	pH meter	(Paliwal and Kaur, 2019b)	
Viscosity	Measure viscosity of preparation	Viscometer	(Yeo, et al., 2021)	
Spreadability	Measure spreadability of preparation	Vernier Caliper	(Das, M. Sharadha, et al., 2021)	
Particle Size	Determine particle size	Zetasizer	(Print, et al., 2015)	
Polidispersity Index	Determine droplet size distribution	Zetasizer	(Tayah and Eid, 2023)	
Zeta Potensial	Measure electric charge on shear plane/shear field	Zetasizer	(Das, M. Sharadha, et al., 2021)	
Rheology Characteristic	Evaluate and flow property of semisolid preparation	Viscometer rotation	(Eid. et al., 2014)	
Bioadhesivity	Measure adhesiveness	Glass plate	(Raju, et al., 2019)	
Chemical Test				
Assay	Determine drug content of preparation	Spectrophotometry	(Raju, et al., 2019)	
In vitro Release Assay	Determine drug release of preparation	Spectrophotometry UV	(Hussain. et al., 2016)	
Microbiology Te				
Microbiology	Ensure peraparations are free of bacteria and mold	Petri dish	(Raju, et al., 2019)	
Activity Test				
Skin Irritation Test	Testing skin irritation	Visual observation	(S. Bhattacharya and Prajapati, 2017)	
Skin Penetration (Cell Diffuse Test)	Testing drug penetration ability	Spectrophotometry UV	(S. Bhattacharya and Prajapati, 2017)	

Table II. Nanoemulgel T	esting
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To obtain a nanoemulgel formulation that is stable, microbe-free, and effective, it is necessary to conduct several tests, including physical, chemical, microbiological, and activity tests. Physical testing included physical examination/description, pH, viscosity, spreadability, particle size, polydispersity index, zeta potential, rheological characteristics, and bioadhesivity. Chemical testing includes assays and in vivo release tests, while activity testing includes skin irritation and penetration tests. The functions of each test and the tools used to conduct nanoemulgel testing can be seen in Table II.

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Active		Table III. Applications of Nanoemulgel For Formulation			Therapeutic	
substances	Oil phase	Surfactant	t Co-surfactant	Gelling agent	effects	References
A. Synthetic d						
Natrium	- Clove oil	Isopropyl	Tween 20	Carbopol 980	Anti	(Md, et al.,
diclofenac	- Eucalyptus oil	myristate		~	inflammatory	2020)
Miconazole	Almond oil	Span 80	Tween 20	Carbopol 940	Antifungal	(Tayah and Eid, 2023)
Amphotericin B	Sefsol oil 218	Tween 80	Transcutol P	Carbopol	Antifungal	(Hussain, et al., 2016)
Methotrexate	Peanut oil	Tween 20	PEG-400	Xanthan gum	Joint inflammation	(Das, M Sharadha, et al., 2021)
Celecoxib	Combination of acetonitrile, triacetin, Campul 908	Acconom MC8-2EP	Capmul MCM C10	Carbopol 940	Joint inflammation	(Bhattacharya and Prajapati, 2017)
Fusidic Acid Na. Fusidic	Pine oil	Tween 80	Span 20	Carbopol	Anti-bacterial	(Eid, et al., 2019)
Tacrolimus	Fish oil and flaxseed oil	Tween 80	Transcutol P	Carbopol 934	Anti-psoriasis	(Mittal, Ali and Baboota, 2021)
Adapalene	Soya bean oil	Tween 80	Isopropyl myristate	Carbopol 934	Anti-acne	(Print, et al., 2015)
B. Natural dr	ug		•			,
Brucine	Nut oil	Tween 80	PEG-400	Na-CMC	Anti inflammatory and antiseptic	(Abdallah, et al. 2021)
Ginger extract	Isopropyl myristate	Tween 80	Ethanol	Carbopol 934	Joint inflammation	(Amit et al., 2019)
Naringen	Combination of Capryol 90 and tocotrienols	Solutol HS15	Transcutol P	Carbopol	Wound healing	(Yeo, et al., 2021)
Ebselen	Captex	Koliphor [®] ELP	EBP-Soluplus	HPMC K4M	Antifungal	(Vartak, et al., 2020)
Terbinafine	Oleic acid		Propylene- glycol	Carbopol 934	Antifungal	(Paliwal and Kaur, 2019)
Tolnaftate	Almond oil	Tween 80	Propylene- glycol	Carbopol 934	Antifungal	(Gadkari, Patil and Saudagar, 2019)
Thymoquinone	Chia seeds oil	Coliphor	Transcutol HP	Carbopol 940	Wound healing	(Algahtani,et al. 2021)
Black cumin	Black cumin oil	Tween 80	Propylene- glycol	Carbomer 940	Anti-bacterial	(Jufri and Natalia, 2014)
Capsaicin	Olive oil	Tween 80	Ethanol	Carbomer	Analgesic, anti inflammatory	(Ghias, et al., 2019)

Lipophilic drugs of both synthetic and natural origin have been reported to be successfully prepared in topical nanoemulgel preparations used for several treatments, such as inflammation, wound healing, arthritis, bacterial infections, and fungal infections with formulations such as oil phase, surfactants, co-surfactants, and gelling agents, as shown in **Table III**.

CONCLUSION

Topical nanoemulgel formulation is one of the effective strategies to penetrate the stratum corneum barrier as one of the major challenges of topical administration without disturbing the structure of the skin layer by utilizing intercellular and intracellular transport mechanisms and the role of nanoemulgel components in overcoming the limitations of the formulation consisting of oil phases, surfactants, co-surfactants, and gelling agents that can lower surface tension and improve drug adhesion. Topical nanoemulgel formulations can be used to treat several diseases, such as inflammation, arthritis, wounds, fungal infections, bacterial infections, *and psoriasis*. Therefore, this topical nanoemulgel formulation could provide promising potential for the topical delivery of lipophilic drugs in the future.

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