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Iontophoresis In Pharmaceuticals: An In-Depth Review Of Drug Delivery Systems

Niyati Shah*, Mamta Kumari, Piyushkumar Sadhu, Chitrali Talele.
Department of Pharmacy, Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Deemed to be University, Piparia, Vadodara-391760, Gujarat.
*Correspondence Author: Niyati Shah
Email: niyatishah25594@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Iontophoresis stands as a promising technique in the realm of pharmaceuticals, offering a non-invasive and controlled means of drug delivery. This comprehensive review aims to elucidate the principles, applications, and advancements in iontophoretic drug delivery systems. The methodological advancements and their implications in enhancing therapeutic outcomes are thoroughly explored. The review commences by delineating the fundamental principles underlying iontophoresis, emphasizing its electro kinetic mechanism to facilitate drug transport across biological membranes. Insights into the various factors affecting iontophoretic transport efficiency, including drug properties, current density, and electrode composition, are elucidated, emphasizing their crucial roles in optimizing delivery systems. Furthermore, the review provides a critical analysis of the diverse applications of iontophoresis across pharmaceuticals, spanning from local anesthesia delivery to transdermal drug administration. Highlighting the efficacy of iontophoresis in overcoming physiological barriers and achieving targeted drug delivery, the review underscores its potential in personalized medicine and chronic disease management. Moreover, the examination extends to encompass recent innovations and technological advancements in iontophoretic drug delivery systems, including novel electrode designs, micro needle integration, and controlled release strategies. These advancements not only enhance therapeutic efficacy but also address safety concerns and patient compliance, paving the way for future clinical applications. In conclusion, this in-depth review consolidates the current understanding of iontophoretic drug delivery systems, emphasizing their pivotal role in revolutionizing pharmaceutical interventions. The insights gleaned from this review serve to guide further research, fostering the development of more efficient and patient-centric drug delivery methodologies.

KEYWORDS: *Electro kinetic transport, Transdermal drug delivery, Therapeutic efficacy*

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INTRODUCTION

Iontophoresis, a technique gaining prominence in pharmaceuticals, represents a cutting-edge approach to controlled drug delivery. This non-invasive method harnesses the principles of electrochemistry to transport therapeutic compounds across biological barriers, presenting a promising alternative to traditional administration routes. At its core, iontophoresis operates on the principle of electro migration and electro osmosis. It utilizes a small electrical current to facilitate the movement of charged drug molecules through tissues, overcoming the inherent limitations of passive diffusion. By exploiting this electro kinetic phenomenon, iontophoresis enables precise control over drug transport, both spatially and temporally. One of its primary advantages lies in transdermal drug delivery. By bypassing the gastrointestinal tract, iontophoresis offers a pathway for drugs that may undergo degradation in the digestive system or experience low bioavailability due to hepatic metabolism. Moreover, it allows for the targeted delivery of medications to specific anatomical sites, optimizing therapeutic concentrations while minimizing systemic exposure and side effects. The potential applications of iontophoresis extend beyond transdermal delivery, encompassing diverse therapeutic areas such as pain management, dermatology, and ophthalmology. From local anesthesia administration to treating chronic conditions, the technique demonstrates versatility in addressing varied medical needs. Nevertheless, challenges persist, including the optimization of current densities for efficient drug transport, electrode design for enhanced performance and patient comfort, and the need for standardized protocols to ensure reproducibility and safety.

What is Iontophoresis

Iontophoresis is a specialized drug delivery technique that utilizes an electric field to transport charged molecules across biological membranes. This method leverages the principles of electro migration and electro osmosis to enhance the penetration of therapeutic substances through tissues, enabling controlled and targeted delivery. In this process, a small electrical current is applied to an iontophoretic device containing the drug of interest. The device typically consists of two electrodes—an active electrode that contains the drug and a counter electrode—placed on the patient's skin or mucous membranes. The application of the electrical current facilitates the movement of ions in the drug solution, driving them through the skin or mucosal barriers. One of its primary applications is in transdermal drug delivery, offering a non-invasive route to administer medications. By bypassing the gastrointestinal tract and avoiding first-pass metabolism, iontophoresis can enhance the bioavailability of drugs that might otherwise face absorption challenges. Additionally, its targeted delivery capability minimizes systemic exposure, reducing potential side effects. It finds application in various medical fields, including pain management, dermatology, and ocular therapies. Ongoing research focuses on optimizing electrode designs, exploring new drug formulations, and refining protocols to improve efficacy and patient comfort, further solidifying its potential as a valuable drug delivery method.

Iontophoretic Devices:

The main manufacturing concerns as in any equipment should include safety, convenience, reliability and reproducibility of the device.

The components of the equipments are:

a) DC power supply
b) A milliammeter
c) A timer
d) A rheostat
e) The 2 electrodes +ve and –ve

Factors Affecting Iontophoretic Drug Delivery

1. Presence of extraneous ions:

Other ions of the some charge can decrease the Iontophoretic delivery of the drug ions because these ions compete with the drug for the iontophoretic flux.

2. Ionic strength:

Higher ionic strength of the solution subjected to iontophoretic current resulted in decreased iontophoretic transport of the drug into the tissues as increase in ionic strength yields higher concentration of extraneous ions which compete for the electric current.

3. Concentration:

Increased concentration of the charged molecule yields greater molecules in the tissues.

4. Current intensity:

Higher the intensity, greater then transport

5. Polarization:

Direct current can cause polarization whilst pulsed current can decrease tissue polarization.

6. Shifts in pH in Tissue and Drug Solutions:

With metallic electrodes, shifts in pH are noted which can affect ionization of the drug. pH changes in the tissue can use injury due to migration of hydronium and hydroxyl ions produced by electrolysis. Separate buffered electrolyte solutions can be used which can prevent flow of ions into the tissue. Like charges repel each other while opposite charges attract. So to assist the positively charged lidocaine ions to be transported to the skin, the ionic form must be applied under a positively charged electrode which then moves to the cathode.

7. Influence of pH

The pH is of importance for the iontophoretic delivery of drugs. The optimum is a compound that exists predominantly in an ionized form. When the pH decreased, the concentration of hydrogen ion increases and a vascular reaction (vasodilatation) is initiated because of C-fiber activation, thus it is important to keep the pH as close as possible to and, at least when working with vasodilators, at pH 5.5 and below. There is an increasing risk for vascular reaction due to the high concentration of hydrogen ions rather than the compound used. Since hydronium ions are small they penetrate the skin more easily than larger drug ions.

8. Current Strength:

There is a linear relation between the observed fluxes of a 1-cm 2 , the current is limited to 1 mA due to patient comfort considerations. This current should not be applied for more than 3 min because of local skin irritation and burns. With increasing current, the risk of non specific vascular reactions

(vasodilatation) increases. At a current of 0.4-0.5 mA/cm 2, such a vascular reaction is initiated after a few seconds of iontophoresis with deionised or tap water. This latter effect is probably due to current density being high enough a small area to stimulate the sensory nerve endings, causing reactions such as the release of substance P from C-fiber terminals.

9. Ionic Forms of drug

Negative (Cl-) and positive (Na+) ions are present in equal amounts in a sodium chloride solution. An ion with the opposite charge must be nearby for a sodium ion to migrate.A counter-ion is the latter ion with the opposite charge. A co-ion is an ion with the same charge but a distinct kind. It is crucial to understand that adding buffering agents is how pH correction is carried out while employing iontophoresis. The amount of drug ions that must be transported through the tissue barrier by the applied current is decreased when buffering agents are used as co-ions since they are often smaller and more mobile than the ion to be supplied.

10. Molecular Size

Permeability coefficients for positively, negatively, and uncharged solutes through human skin have been demonstrated to depend on molecular size. The permeability coefficient falls as the molecule size rises.But several solutes—like insulin, vasopressin, and a few growth hormones—have also been shown to pass through the epidermal barrier and into the systemic circulation despite having relatively large molecular sizes.

11. Connective or Electro-osmotic Transport

The passage of ions across the membrane during iontophoresis with a particular current causes a solvent flow known as electro-osmosis.The electro-osmotic contribution pales in comparison to that of ion transport.The volume flow effect caused by an applied potential differential across the membrane has been demonstrated to facilitate the entry of uncharged compounds (such as bovine serum albumin).It has also been shown that iontophoresis increases the penetration of many dipolar ions, which are compounds that are zwitter ions, such as phenylalanine. It has been demonstrated that anodic delivery of the majority of these drugs delivers much higher levels than cathodic delivery. Iontophoresis is typically more successful for charged compounds, especially monovalent ions.

12. Current-Continuous Vs Pulsed Mode

Long-term continuous current application can alter the delivery of iontophoresis.Skin polarisation brought on by continuous DC current may decrease the effectiveness of iontophoretic administration in direct proportion to the duration of current application. Periodically delivering direct current, or pulsed DC, can overcome this polarisation. However, if the frequency is too high, pulsed DC might reduce the effectiveness of pulsed transport by depolarizing the skin during the "off time." Compared to convenient DC, pulsed DC has been shown to improve iontophoretic transport for proteins and peptides. The majority of drug ions that are combined with iontophoresis and LDPM for diagnostic reasons are tiny in size. Thus, the duration of time required for an effect is quite brief (5–20 s) when contrasted with the 20–40 min required when iontophoresis is used therapeutically.

13. Physical Factors

The delivery rate's intra- and intersubject variability is decreased by intrathoresis. This is a drawback that comes with using the passive absorption method. In vivo iontophoretic experiments corroborate clinical observations that there are slight variations in the flow rate after transdermal iontophoresis across skin types—hairy and hairless, as well as between males and females. The state of the vascular bed is also crucial; a dilated vascular bed improves the drug's yield through the skin, whereas a preconstricted vascular bed reduces the drug's flux through the skin.

14. Patient Anatomical Factors

Patient anatomical characteristics that affect the depth of penetration, which varies from patient to patient, include the size of other tissues, such as skeletal muscle, the existence of subcutaneous adipose tissue, and the thickness of the skin at the application site.

Furthermore, because inflammation raises body temperature, which can help drugs travel throughout the body, its degree can affect how well a medicine penetrates the body.

IONTOPHORESIS FOR PHYSICAL THERAPY

Iontophoresis has emerged as a valuable adjunctive tool in physical therapy, offering a non-invasive method to deliver medications for managing various musculoskeletal and inflammatory conditions. In physical therapy, iontophoresis is commonly utilized to administer anti-inflammatory drugs, such as corticosteroids and non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), directly to affected tissues. This targeted delivery helps alleviate pain, reduce inflammation, and promote tissue healing without subjecting the patient to systemic side effects associated with oral medications.

The process involves placing electrodes on the patient's skin, near the affected area, and applying a low-level electrical current to facilitate the penetration of the drug through the skin and into deeper tissues. The medication is often encapsulated in an ionized form, allowing it to be carried by the electrical current, effectively targeting the localized region of injury or inflammation. Conditions commonly treated with iontophoresis in physical therapy include tendonitis, bursitis, plantar fasciitis, and various forms of localized pain resulting from sports injuries or repetitive strain. By directly delivering medication to the site of injury, iontophoresis can accelerate the healing process and reduce pain and swelling, thereby complementing other therapeutic interventions like exercises, stretches, and manual therapies.

The technique offers several advantages, including precise drug targeting, reduced systemic side effects, and improved patient compliance due to its non-invasive nature. However, factors such as individual patient sensitivity to electrical stimulation and skin conditions may influence its suitability for some individuals. Ongoing research focuses on optimizing drug formulations for iontophoresis, exploring novel electrode designs to enhance drug delivery efficiency, and investigating its efficacy in various musculoskeletal conditions. Overall, iontophoresis stands as a valuable modality in physical therapy, providing targeted and localized drug delivery to aid in the management of pain and inflammation, thereby contributing to improved patient outcomes and rehabilitation.

SIDE EFFECTS OF IONTOPHORESIS:

Iontophoresis is generally considered safe, there are potential side effects associated with its use, though they are typically mild and transient. Some possible side effects includes skin irritation, allergic reasons, skin burns, electrolyte imbalance.

APPLICATIONS OF IONTOPHORESIS:

Iontophoresis finds diverse applications across various fields due to its ability to deliver drugs non-invasively and precisely to targeted areas. Some notable applications include:

1. Physical Therapy: In physical therapy, iontophoresis is used to deliver anti-inflammatory medications to specific musculoskeletal areas affected by conditions like tendonitis, bursitis, and sports injuries. It helps reduce pain and inflammation locally without exposing the entire body to medications.
2. Dermatology: Iontophoresis is employed in dermatology to administer medications for conditions such as hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating), psoriasis, and localized skin infections. It allows for the targeted delivery of drugs to affected skin areas, enhancing efficacy and minimizing systemic side effects.
3. Ophthalmology: In ophthalmology, iontophoresis assists in delivering ophthalmic drugs across ocular barriers. This method aids in treating eye conditions like corneal ulcers, uveitis, and certain types of glaucoma by facilitating the penetration of medications to the affected eye tissues.
4. Pain Management: For localized pain management, iontophoresis serves as an alternative to oral medications. It delivers pain-relieving medications directly to the affected area, offering relief from conditions such as arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, and other nerve-related pains.
5. Transdermal Drug Delivery: Iontophoresis has applications in transdermal drug delivery systems, enabling the administration of medications that would otherwise have poor absorption through the skin. This method facilitates the delivery of drugs with specific physicochemical properties across the skin barrier.
6. Research and Development: Beyond clinical applications, iontophoresis is utilized in research settings to study drug transport mechanisms, investigate the permeability of biological membranes, and develop new drug formulations with enhanced delivery properties.

The versatility of iontophoresis in delivering drugs non-invasively to localized areas continues to expand its applications across medical, pharmaceutical, and research domains, offering a promising avenue for targeted and controlled drug delivery.

CONCLUSION

Iontophoresis emerges as a cornerstone in personalized medicine, offering precise control over drug transport while minimizing systemic exposure. Its diverse applications, spanning from localized treatments to transdermal drug delivery, highlight its adaptability across various medical disciplines, promising tailored solutions for specific conditions. The exploration of technological advancements reveals a trajectory toward enhanced precision and safety. Novel electrode designs, coupled with controlled release strategies, signify a shift toward more efficient and patient-friendly iontophoretic systems. This comprehensive review underscores the transformative impact of iontophoresis in pharmaceuticals, urging ongoing innovation and research. Through continued advancements, iontophoresis stands poised to reshape drug delivery paradigms, offering targeted, efficient, and safer therapeutic interventions tailored to individual patient needs.

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