



HERBAL TRANSDERMAL PRE-WORKOUT PATCH

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Abstract:

Transdermal drug delivery systems are gaining significant attention as an effective alternative to conventional oral supplements, particularly in sports nutrition, where users seek non-invasive and sustained-release solutions. This review highlights the development and evaluation of an innovative herbal transdermal pre-workout patch designed to enhance both physical endurance and mental alertness. The formulation integrates a synergistic blend of natural bioactive—caffeine for energy and focus, Ashwagandha for endurance and stress regulation, ginger for thermogenesis and anti-inflammatory support, and zinc for hormonal and immune balance. These actives are incorporated within a polymeric matrix that ensures structural integrity and controlled release over time. Functional excipients, including glycerine, oleic acid, and a water–ethanol solvent system, are used to improve skin permeability and biocompatibility, promoting steady transdermal absorption into systemic circulation to match pre-exercise physiological needs. Current advancements emphasize the combination of herbal pharmacology with innovative delivery technologies to meet consumer demands for clean-label, personalized, and multifunctional wellness products. Despite their promise, such systems face challenges related to large-scale clinical validation, long-term safety assessment, and regulatory harmonization across global markets. This review underscores the importance of comprehensive physicochemical and pharmacodynamic evaluation to ensure efficacy and safety. Looking ahead, smart transdermal systems incorporating wearable technology, biosensors, and adaptive dosing strategies represent the next frontier in personalized supplementation, potentially transforming pre-workout nutrition and performance enhancement.

Keywords: Transdermal patch, herbal pre-workout, caffeine, Ashwagandha, ginger, zinc acetate, HPMC, PVA, oleic acid, ethanol–water, sustained release, drug delivery system.

1. Introduction

The global health and fitness industry has witnessed a notable rise in the consumption of dietary supplements, particularly pre-workout formulations. These products are intended to enhance key aspects of physical performance, including muscular strength, endurance, energy levels, and cognitive focus. Individuals engaged in athletic training or physically demanding activities frequently utilize such supplements to improve exercise outcomes and delay fatigue.

Conventionally, pre-workout supplements are administered orally in the form of powders, capsules, or energy drinks. Although these formats offer convenience and efficacy, they are associated with several limitations. A major concern is first-pass metabolism, wherein active compounds undergo hepatic degradation before entering systemic circulation. This significantly reduces bioavailability and often necessitates higher doses to

achieve the desired physiological effects. Additionally, oral supplements may cause gastrointestinal discomfort—such as bloating, nausea, and cramping—especially when consumed on an empty stomach or alongside other dietary components. The delayed onset of action due to digestive processing further limits their utility in scenarios requiring rapid energy and focus.

To address these challenges, transdermal drug delivery systems (TDDS) have emerged as a promising alternative. TDDS facilitate the direct absorption of active compounds through the skin, bypassing the gastrointestinal tract and hepatic metabolism. This route offers several advantages, including improved bioavailability, sustained and controlled release, reduced dosing frequency, and enhanced user compliance. Transdermal patches are non-invasive, discreet, and easy to use, making them particularly attractive for individuals seeking efficient and user-friendly supplementation strategies.

Simultaneously, there has been increasing interest in the use of herbal and natural ingredients in wellness products. Herbal actives are generally perceived as safer and more holistic alternatives to synthetic compounds. Many plant-derived substances exhibit ergogenic, adaptogenic, and anti-inflammatory properties that support physical performance and recovery. When delivered via transdermal systems, these herbal ingredients offer synergistic benefits by combining therapeutic efficacy with pharmacokinetic advantages.

This review aims to explore the conceptualization, formulation, and evaluation of a novel herbal transdermal pre-workout patch. The proposed patch delivers a combination of natural caffeine, Ashwagandha extract, ginger extract, and zinc acetate through the skin using a polymeric matrix composed of hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC) and polyvinyl alcohol (PVA). The formulation is further optimized with glycerine, oleic acid, and a 1:1 ethanol-water solvent system to enhance skin permeability and patch performance. The objective is to provide a comprehensive overview of the pharmacological roles of each component, formulation strategies, physicochemical and biological evaluations, and the potential of this innovative delivery system in the context of sports nutrition and performance enhancement.

2. Herbal Actives and Their Ergogenic Roles

2.1 Natural Caffeine

Caffeine is among the most extensively researched and commonly used ergogenic substances. It acts mainly as a central nervous system stimulant by blocking adenosine receptors, which increases neuronal activity and promotes the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine and norepinephrine. This results in enhanced alertness, faster reaction times, and a reduced sense of fatigue during physical activity. Natural sources such as coffee beans, guarana, and green tea not only provide caffeine but also contain polyphenols that contribute antioxidant effects. Delivering caffeine transdermal bypasses gastrointestinal absorption and first-pass metabolism, ensuring a steadier and more prolonged energy release. Permeation enhancers like ethanol and oleic acid further facilitate absorption by disrupting the stratum corneum and improving skin permeability to caffeine molecules.

2.2 Ashwagandha Extract (*Withania somnifera*)

Ashwagandha, a prominent adaptogen in Ayurvedic medicine, is valued for its capacity to balance the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and lower cortisol levels. Its active compounds, mainly withanolides, have been shown to improve mitochondrial efficiency, boost muscle power, and enhance cardiovascular endurance. When paired with caffeine, Ashwagandha can help moderate stress reactions and aid in post-exercise recovery. Nevertheless, its large molecular structure and poor water solubility require the inclusion of solubilizers and permeation enhancers in transdermal formulations to achieve optimal skin penetration.

2.3 Ginger Extract (*Zingiber officinale*)

Ginger is rich in bioactive compounds like gingerols and shogaols, known for their strong anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects. These constituents inhibit cyclooxygenase (COX) enzymes and decrease the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines, helping to alleviate muscle soreness and support post-exercise recovery. Additionally, ginger stimulates thermogenesis and enhances peripheral blood flow, improving nutrient

transport to muscle tissues. Its lipophilic characteristics make it well-suited for transdermal delivery, particularly when formulated with permeation enhancers such as oleic acid and ethanol to boost skin absorption.

2.4 Zinc Acetate

Zinc is an essential trace element that participates in more than 300 enzymatic processes, including those related to DNA synthesis, immune response, and hormonal regulation. The bioavailable form, zinc acetate, aids in testosterone production, which is vital for muscle development and recovery. Additionally, zinc contributes to antioxidant defence by stabilizing cellular membranes and minimizing oxidative damage. For transdermal application, zinc acetate often requires chelation or encapsulation techniques to enhance its solubility and improve skin permeability, as inorganic salts generally have limited absorption through the skin.

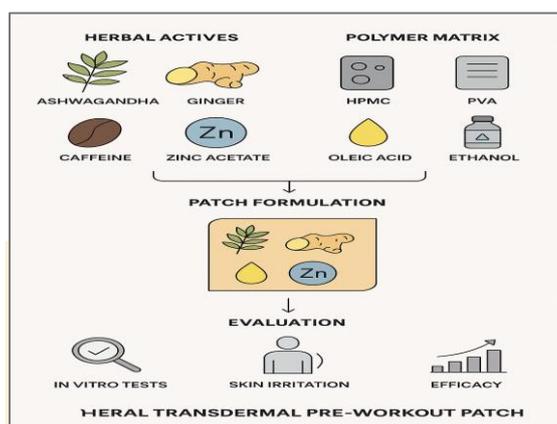


Fig1: Active ingredients for pre-workout transdermal patch

Table1: Herbal Active Ingredients for pre-workout transdermal patch.

Active ingredient	Scientific identity	Key bioactive components	Mechanism of action	Functional role in pre-workout formulations	Reference
Ashwagandha	Withania somnifera (root extract)	Withanolides	Adaptogenic, anti-stress, anabolic	Promotes muscular strength, enhances endurance, supports recovery.	Desai et al., 2020
Zinc acetate	Zinc acetate (Zn(CH ₃ COO) ₂)	Zinc ions	Antioxidant, immunomodulatory, enzymatic cofactor	Aids immune resilience, mitigates oxidative stress, supports tissue repair	Labrada super charge, 2025
Ginger	Zingiber officinale (rhizome extract) Gingerols, shogaols.	Gingerols, shogaols	Anti-inflammatory, circulatory stimulant	Alleviates muscle soreness, enhances thermogenesis and blood flow.	Kim et al., 2021; ijcrt style
Caffeine powder	Caffeine anhydrous	Methylxanthine alkaloid	Cns stimulation, thermogenic	Elevates alertness, boosts energy, enhances fat oxidation	Nutrija, 2025

3. Patch Matrix and Excipients

3.1 Natural Polymers: HPMC and PVA

Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC) and polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) are widely used hydrophilic polymers in the formulation of transdermal patches. HPMC offers strong film-forming ability and regulates drug release through its swelling and gel-forming behaviour. PVA enhances the patch's mechanical strength and flexibility, ensuring durability during use. Achieving the right ratio of HPMC to PVA is essential to balance tensile strength, adhesion, and drug diffusion properties for optimal patch performance.

Table 2: Types of transdermal patches along with their description and key features.

Type of patch	Description	Key features
Reservoir type	Drug is enclosed between a backing layer and a rate-controlling membrane.	Enables controlled release; suitable for potent herbal actives.
Matrix type	Drug is uniformly dispersed within a polymer matrix.	Simple design; facilitates steady diffusion of drug molecules.
Drug-in-adhesive type	Drug is directly incorporated into the adhesive layer.	Thin and flexible; enhances patient comfort; widely adopted commercially.
Multilayered patch	Composed of two or more layers with distinct release profiles.	Allows combination of immediate and sustained drug release.
Micro-reservoir type	Drug is suspended in a polymer with microscopic dispersed reservoirs.	Integrates benefits of both reservoir and matrix systems.

3.2 Glycerine

Glycerine functions both as a plasticizer and a humectant in transdermal formulations. It enhances the flexibility of the polymer matrix, reducing brittleness and the risk of cracking. Moreover, glycerine draws moisture to the skin, improving hydration and promoting better drug penetration. Its compatibility with both hydrophilic and lipophilic substances make it an important and versatile excipient in transdermal delivery systems.

3.3 Oleic Acid

Oleic acid, a monounsaturated fatty acid, serves as an effective skin penetration enhancer. It alters the lipid structure of the stratum corneum, increasing membrane fluidity and enabling easier passage of larger molecules. This property makes oleic acid especially beneficial for enhancing the transdermal delivery of lipophilic herbal extracts such as ginger and Ashwagandha, thereby improving their absorption and flux through the skin.

3.4 Ethanol: Water (1:1)

The ethanol-water solvent system provides an ideal balance between solubility and skin tolerance. Ethanol increases drug solubility and promotes permeation by disrupting and extracting lipids from the stratum corneum, while water helps maintain skin moisture and prevents dryness. A 1:1 ratio of ethanol to water offers optimal efficiency while preserving the skin's integrity.

4. Formulation Design and Optimization

The effective creation of a transdermal herbal pre-workout patch depends on careful formulation design and optimization. This involves a sequence of interconnected steps to guarantee the product's stability, effectiveness, and user compliance. Every component—including the active agents, polymers, plasticizers,

solvents, and enhancers—must be thoroughly assessed for their compatibility and functional performance within the patch matrix.

Recommended Anatomical Sites for Transdermal Patch Application

Selection of the application site significantly influences the pharmacokinetic profile of transdermal drug delivery systems. Regions with enhanced vascularity, thinner stratum corneum, and minimal movement are preferred to ensure optimal absorption and therapeutic efficacy. The following anatomical sites are commonly recommended:

- **Deltoid region (upper arm):** Exhibits good vascular supply and minimal mechanical interference, facilitating consistent drug uptake.
- **Inter-scapular region (upper back):** Offers a stable surface with reduced sweat accumulation, minimizing patch displacement.
- **Lower abdominal area:** Characterized by uniform skin texture and comfort, supporting sustained drug permeation.
- **Anterior or lateral thigh:** Provides a broad surface area and favourable blood flow, enhancing systemic absorption.

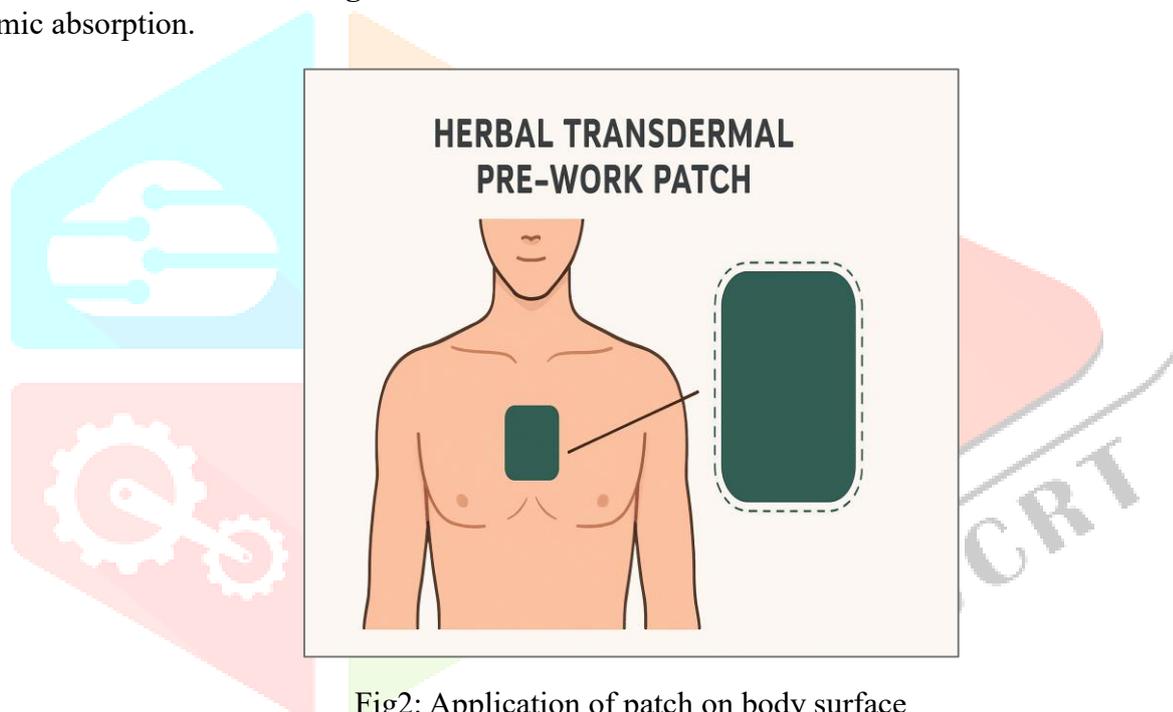


Fig2: Application of patch on body surface

4.1 Solubility Studies

The successful formulation of a transdermal herbal pre-workout patch requires precise design and systematic optimization. This process consists of several interrelated stages aimed at achieving product stability, therapeutic efficacy, and user comfort. Each formulation component such as active ingredients, polymers, plasticizers, solvents, and permeation enhancers must be carefully analysed to ensure mutual compatibility and optimal performance within the patch matrix.

4.2 Polymer Ratio Optimization

The patch remains stable and undamaged throughout application and use. The proportion of HPMC to PVA is carefully adjusted to maintain an ideal balance between flexibility, tensile strength, and drug permeation. A well-optimized blend ensures even drug distribution and controlled, sustained release behaviour.

4.3 Glycerine Concentration Adjustment

Glycerine is included in the formulation as both a plasticizer and a humectant to enhance the patch's flexibility and skin compatibility. Its concentration plays a vital role too little can result in brittle films, while too much may reduce adhesion and alter drug release. Through systematic optimization, the optimal glycerine level is established to preserve flexibility without compromising mechanical strength or drug stability. Additionally, glycerine supports moisture retention, promoting skin hydration and improved drug permeation.

4.4 Patch Thickness Standardization

Maintaining a uniform patch thickness is crucial to ensure consistent drug content and release rates. Any variation in thickness may cause dosing irregularities and alter the rate of transdermal absorption. By employing precise casting methods and controlled drying conditions, uniform thickness is achieved across all batches. This standardization enhances reproducibility and supports accurate dosing during clinical assessment.

4.5 Drying Conditions Control

Drying conditions—including temperature, humidity, and drying time—are vital for preserving the stability of herbal constituents and the overall integrity of the patch. High temperatures can degrade thermosensitive compounds such as withanolides and gingerols, while inadequate drying may retain excess moisture, promoting microbial growth. Hence, optimized and well-controlled drying parameters are employed to maintain appropriate moisture content, ensuring both the stability of active ingredients and the mechanical durability of the patch.

4.6 Compatibility and Stability Studies

Compatibility studies are performed to assess potential interactions between the active compounds and excipients. These evaluations include visual examination, pH analysis, and advanced analytical methods such as differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) and Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) to identify any chemical or physical incompatibilities. A stable formulation confirms that all components function harmoniously, ensuring consistent efficacy and safety over the product's entire shelf life.

5. Physicochemical Evaluation of the Patch

Physicochemical evaluation plays a vital role in the formulation of transdermal patches, ensuring their uniformity, stability, and functional performance. Such assessments offer valuable information about the patch's mechanical strength, moisture retention, drug uniformity, and skin compatibility. A thoroughly characterized patch not only complies with regulatory requirements but also guarantees patient safety and optimal therapeutic effectiveness.

5.1 Thickness and Weight Uniformity

Consistent thickness and weight are crucial to maintaining uniform dosing in transdermal patches. Any deviations in these parameters may result in irregular drug content and variable release patterns. Thickness is determined using a digital micrometre at several points on the patch, and the mean value is recorded. Weight uniformity is evaluated by individually weighing each patch and comparing the results with the expected theoretical weight. According to pharmacopeial guidelines, acceptable variations generally fall within $\pm 5\%$ of the average value.

5.2 Folding Endurance

Folding endurance testing assesses the patch's mechanical durability and flexibility, which are especially important for patches applied to movable body areas like joints or limbs. During the test, the patch is repeatedly folded at the same location until it either breaks or develops cracks. A greater folding endurance value reflects superior mechanical strength and enhanced comfort for the user during application.

5.3 Moisture Content and Moisture Uptake

Moisture content plays a key role in determining the patch's stability and longevity. Excessive moisture can encourage microbial contamination, whereas too little can make the patch brittle. To measure moisture content, patches are weighed before and after drying in a desiccator. Moisture uptake studies are also conducted under humid conditions to evaluate the patch's tendency to absorb environmental moisture. These evaluations help anticipate how the patch will perform under different storage and usage environments.

5.4 Surface pH

The surface pH of the patch is evaluated to confirm its compatibility with human skin, which normally maintains a pH between 4.5 and 6.5. Deviations from this range can lead to skin irritation or compromise the natural protective barrier. To determine surface pH, the patch is placed in contact with distilled water, and the pH of the obtained solution is measured using a calibrated pH meter.

5.5 Tensile Strength

Tensile strength indicates the patch's capacity to resist stretching and tearing during handling and use. It is determined using a texture analyser or universal testing machine that applies force until the patch ruptures, with results expressed in Newtons per square millimetre (N/mm²). Sufficient tensile strength is essential to maintain the patch's integrity and ensure reliable adhesion throughout its intended period of application.

5.6 Drug Content Uniformity

Drug content uniformity verifies that every patch contains and delivers the correct amount of active ingredients. To evaluate this, the patch is dissolved in an appropriate solvent, and the resulting solution is analysed using methods like UV-visible spectrophotometry or high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC). Consistent drug distribution is essential to ensure therapeutic reliability and meet regulatory quality standards.

5.7 Visual Inspection and Surface Morphology

Visual examination is carried out to identify any physical imperfections, including air bubbles, cracks, or irregular surfaces. The surface structure can be further evaluated using scanning electron microscopy (SEM) to study the distribution of polymers and active components. A uniform, smooth, and defect-free surface reflects proper formulation techniques and improves user satisfaction.

6. In Vitro and Ex Vivo Studies

In vitro and ex vivo evaluations play a crucial role in assessing the performance of transdermal patches before clinical use. These studies offer valuable information on drug release patterns, skin permeation characteristics, and formulation uniformity. They act as predictive tools for in vivo effectiveness and aid in refining formulation parameters to achieve optimal therapeutic outcomes.

6.1 In Vitro Release Studies

In vitro release testing replicates the diffusion of active compounds from the patch matrix into a receptor medium, simulating the early stage of transdermal absorption. These experiments are generally performed using Franz diffusion cells, where the patch is positioned on a synthetic membrane or dialysis film that separates the donor and receptor chambers. The receptor phase—commonly phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) or an ethanol-water solution—is maintained at physiological temperature (32–37°C) and continuously stirred. At specific time intervals, samples are collected and analysed using UV-visible spectrophotometry or high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) to measure the release of caffeine, Ashwagandha, ginger, and zinc. The resulting data are used to plot release profiles over time, illustrating the rate and extent of drug diffusion.

6.2 Ex Vivo Permeation Studies

Ex vivo permeation experiments assess the efficiency with which active substances cross biological skin barriers. Usually, Franz diffusion cells are used to mount human cadaver skin or excised animal skin (such as pig or rat). To find out how much medicine has penetrated, samples from the receptor compartment are taken at predetermined intervals after the patch is applied to the epidermal surface. This method helps evaluate the effectiveness of penetration enhancers like ethanol and oleic acid and offers practical insights into skin absorption. To characterize the total transdermal efficiency, important metrics like flux ($\mu\text{g}/\text{cm}^2/\text{h}$), permeability coefficient, and lag time are computed.

6.3 Drug Content Uniformity

For constant dosage, the active substances must be distributed uniformly across the patch surface. By choosing patches at random from various batches, dissolving them in appropriate solvents, and measuring the concentration of each active using approved analytical techniques, drug content homogeneity is evaluated. After comparing the data to theoretical values, acceptable limits—typically $\pm 10\%$ —are established. Each patch will consistently give the desired therapeutic dose because of uniformity.

6.4 Kinetic Modelling of Drug Release

Kinetic models are used to analyse the in vitro release data in order to comprehend the mechanism of drug release from the patch matrix. Typical models consist of:

- **Zero-order kinetics:** This means that the rate of release is constant regardless of the concentration of the drug.
- **First-order kinetics:** Indicates that the rate of release is proportionate to the amount of drug still present.
- **Higuchi model:** Describes diffusion-based release from a matrix system.
- **Korsmeyer-Peppas model:** Used to determine the release mechanism (anomalous transport, erosion, or Fickian diffusion).

Regression analysis is used for model fitting, and correlation coefficients (R^2 values) are used to choose the best-fit model. These models direct formulation modifications and aid in predicting in vivo behaviour.

6.5 Stability Under Test Conditions

During in vitro and ex vivo studies, the stability of herbal actives is monitored to ensure they retain potency throughout the testing period. Factors such as temperature, pH, and light exposure are controlled, and degradation products are identified if present. Stability data support shelf-life estimation and confirm the robustness of the formulation.

7. Pharmacodynamic and Ergogenic Evaluation

To ascertain the herbal transdermal pre-workout patch's functional efficacy, pharmacodynamic and ergogenic analyses are crucial. The physiological and performance-enhancing benefits of the active substances applied topically are evaluated in these investigations. The objective is to create a relationship between the formulation's pharmacological action and its desired effects, which include enhanced mental focus, improved strength, less fatigue, and increased endurance. The performance of the patch is thoroughly assessed using both preclinical (animal) and clinical (human) models.

7.1 Animal Models for Ergogenic Assessment

- Prior to human trials, animal studies offer a controlled setting for examining the biological effects of the patch and screening for any toxicity or negative reactions. Rodents (rats or mice) are frequently used models, and they undergo standardized testing of strength and endurance.
 - **Endurance Testing:** To assess stamina and time-to-exhaustion, animals are put on a treadmill or put through a forced swim test. The amount of time spent exercising before becoming fatigued is noted and contrasted between the treatment and control groups.
 - **Biochemical Markers:** Following exercise, blood samples are taken to evaluate biomarkers like:
 - **Cortisol:** A stress hormone that rises in response to physical activity; reduced levels following treatment signify enhanced stress tolerance.
 - **Lactate:** Builds up during anaerobic metabolism; lower levels indicate improved aerobic efficiency.
 - **Testosterone:** Anabolic assistance from zinc acetate and ashwagandha may be the cause of elevated levels after treatment.
 - **Muscle Glycogen Analysis:** Skeletal muscle tissue samples are examined for glycogen content, which indicates capacity for recovery and energy reserves.
- These investigations support the ergogenic potential of the patch and direct dosage optimization for human use.

7.2 Human Trials and Performance Metrics

The gold standard for assessing the transdermal patch's practical efficacy is human clinical studies. To prevent bias, these trials are usually double-blind, randomized, and placebo-controlled. Depending on the goal of the study, participants may be trained athletes or healthy volunteers.

- **VO₂ Max Testing:** One important measure of aerobic capacity is VO₂ max, or maximal oxygen uptake. A treadmill or cycle ergometer is used to quantify it while breathing gasses are tracked. Following patch treatment, an increase in VO₂ max indicates enhanced cardiovascular efficiency.
- **Time-to-Fatigue:** Until they are exhausted, participants engage in a standardized exercise (such as jogging or cycling) at a set intensity. Increased endurance and a delayed onset of exhaustion are indicated by a longer time-to-fatigue.
- **Perceived Exertion (RPE Scale):** Subjective effort during exercise is measured using the Borg Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) scale. Improved energy and concentration are indicated by a lower RPE score for a particular workload.
- **Cognitive Function Tests:** Because caffeine and ashwagandha affect mental alertness, cognitive advantages are assessed before and after exercise using tests including reaction time, memory recall, and attention span.
- **Vital Signs Monitoring:** To guarantee the patch's safety and tolerability, heart rate, blood pressure, and skin condition are tracked.

7.3 Comparative Evaluation with Oral Supplements

Comparative studies between the patch and comparable oral formulations may be carried out to demonstrate the benefits of transdermal distribution. Comparisons are made between parameters including side effect profile, duration of effect, and start of action. Transdermal systems are anticipated to exhibit: Sustained plasma concentration throughout time; • Faster onset because they avoid stomach absorption. A lower frequency of crashes caused by stimulants or gastrointestinal distress.

7.4 Subject Compliance and User Feedback

For any transdermal system to be successful, user acceptability is essential. Participants are questioned about:

- Comfort during physical exercise;
- Ease of application and removal.
- Allergic reactions or skin irritation.
- Overall contentment and readiness to make frequent use of the product.
- Positive comments bolster the viability of long-term adherence and commercial deployment.

8. Safety and Skin Irritation Studies

When developing transdermal medication delivery systems, safety assessment is essential, especially when using herbal compounds. Despite the fact that herbal actives are typically regarded as safe, their transdermal use introduces new factors such long-term tolerability, skin compatibility, and possible sensitization. The methods and conclusions pertaining to the safety and dermatological evaluation of the herbal transdermal pre-workout patch are described in this section.

8.1 Patch Test Protocols

Patch testing is the primary method for assessing skin irritation and allergic potential. The test involves applying the transdermal patch to a defined area of the skin—typically the forearm or upper back—on healthy human volunteers. The patch remains in place for 24 to 72 hours under occlusive conditions. After removal, the site is examined for signs of erythema, edema itching, or rash. The reactions are graded using standardized dermatological scales such as the Draize scoring system. A score of 0 indicates no reaction, while higher scores reflect increasing severity. A well-tolerated patch should consistently yield scores of 0 or 1 across all subjects.

8.2 Histopathological Analysis

To substantiate visual observations, histopathological evaluation is performed on skin biopsies obtained from animal models or ethically approved human volunteers. The collected tissue specimens are fixed in buffered formalin, processed via paraffin embedding, and sectioned using a microtome. Standard haematoxylin and eosin (H&E) staining is employed to visualize cellular and tissue architecture under light microscopy. The assessment focuses on detecting any morphological alterations in the epidermal and dermal layers, including inflammatory infiltrates, necrotic zones, or disruption of the stratum corneum. The absence of such pathological manifestations confirms the dermal biocompatibility of the transdermal patch and its phytoconstituents.

8.3 Long-Term Safety and Sensitization Studies

To complement visual observations, histopathological evaluation is performed on skin biopsy samples collected from animal models or consenting human participants. The tissues are fixed in formalin, sectioned using a microtome, and stained with haematoxylin and eosin (H&E) to assess microscopic architecture. The analysis focuses on detecting any structural abnormalities in the epidermal and dermal layers, such as inflammatory responses, necrotic changes, or disruption of the stratum corneum. The absence of such histological alterations confirms the biocompatibility of the transdermal patch and its incorporated ingredients.

8.4 Microbial Contamination and Preservation

Microbial safety of the transdermal patch is evaluated by screening for potential contamination with bacteria, fungi, and yeast. Samples of the formulation are inoculated onto nutrient agar and Sabouraud dextrose agar media, followed by incubation under controlled conditions to observe microbial growth. The formulation is required to comply with pharmacopeial limits for total microbial load. To prevent microbial proliferation during storage and application, suitable preservatives may be incorporated into the patch matrix. Additionally, ethanol present in the solvent system contributes inherent antimicrobial activity, thereby reducing the dependence on synthetic preservatives.

8.5 Skin Barrier Function and TEWL Measurement

Trans-epidermal water loss (TEWL) is measured to evaluate the influence of the transdermal patch on skin barrier integrity. The parameter is quantified using a Terametre, which detects the rate of water vapor flux from the skin surface. An elevated TEWL value indicates disruption of the epidermal barrier, whereas stable readings suggest that the patch formulation preserves skin homeostasis. This assessment is particularly critical for patches containing penetration enhancers such as oleic acid and ethanol, which may alter the lipid organization of the stratum corneum.

8.6 User Acceptability and Dermatological Feedback

In addition to objective tests, subjective feedback from users is collected regarding comfort, ease of use, and any sensations experienced during wear. Dermatologists may be consulted to evaluate skin condition before and after patch application. High user acceptability and absence of dermatological concerns support the product's readiness for market deployment.

9. Regulatory and Commercial Landscape

The formulation and commercialization of herbal transdermal delivery systems necessitate strategic alignment with prevailing regulatory standards and market trends. With the increasing consumer preference for natural, non-invasive therapeutic solutions, regulatory authorities are progressively adapting their frameworks to accommodate novel formats such as herbal transdermal patches. This section highlights the essential regulatory requirements and commercial determinants that influence the successful development, approval, and market integration of such innovative products.

9.1 Regulatory Classification and Jurisdiction

Herbal transdermal patches represent a distinct category that intersects the domains of pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and nutraceuticals. Their regulatory classification is determined by factors such as intended therapeutic use, nature of claims, and compositional attributes. In the Indian context, products rooted in traditional systems like Ayurveda may be governed by the Ministry of AYUSH, whereas those making therapeutic claims fall under the jurisdiction of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO). In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) may classify such formulations as cosmeceuticals, dietary supplements, or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, depending on their composition and labeling. Accurate classification is essential for identifying the appropriate regulatory pathway and ensuring compliance with relevant standards.

9.2 Compliance with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)

Adherence to Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) is essential to ensure the quality, safety, and consistency of herbal transdermal formulations. Key GMP considerations for such products include:

- Standardization of herbal extracts to maintain batch-to-batch uniformity.
- Validation of critical manufacturing steps such as mixing, casting, and drying.
- Implementation of microbial limit testing and long-term stability studies.
- Comprehensive documentation and traceability of raw materials, excipients, and processing parameters.

Compliance with GMP not only fulfils regulatory obligations but also plays a pivotal role in establishing consumer confidence and enhancing market credibility of the product.

9.3 Labelling and Claims

Labelling regulations differ across jurisdictions; however, they universally mandate transparent disclosure of key product information. This includes:

- Specification of active ingredients along with their respective concentrations
- Clear statement of intended use and application guidelines
- Relevant warnings, contraindications, and recommended storage conditions
- Batch identification, manufacturing date, and expiry date

Claims such as “boosts energy,” “enhances performance,” or “supports stamina” must be supported by scientifically validated data. The inclusion of unsubstantiated or misleading claims may result in regulatory penalties, product withdrawal, or reputational damage. Therefore, accurate labelling and evidence-based claims are essential for regulatory compliance and consumer trust.

9.4 Intellectual Property and Patent Protection

Securing intellectual property rights is a critical aspect of safeguarding innovation and establishing a competitive edge in the pharmaceutical and nutraceutical sectors. Patent applications may be pursued for:

- Novel combinations of herbal bioactive
- Distinct transdermal delivery systems or specialized polymer matrices
- Innovative manufacturing techniques or solvent systems

Patent protection not only preserves proprietary technological advancements but also contributes to the commercial valuation of the product. It enhances the formulation's appeal to potential investors, collaborators, and licensing entities, thereby facilitating strategic market positioning.

9.5 Market Trends and Consumer Demand

The global transdermal patch market is witnessing significant growth, primarily driven by consumer preference for non-invasive, user-friendly, and sustained-release drug delivery systems. Within this evolving landscape, herbal and natural formulations are gaining considerable attention owing to increased awareness of clean-label products and holistic wellness approaches. The fitness and sports nutrition sector, in particular, offers promising commercial prospects for herbal pre-workout patches. Key market drivers include:

- Rising gym memberships and adoption of active lifestyles
- Growing demand for stimulant-free and plant-based energy enhancement solutions
- Expansion of wearable health technologies that synergize with transdermal delivery platforms.

10. Future Perspectives

The advancement of herbal transdermal pre-workout patches signifies a strategic integration of traditional botanical therapeutics with contemporary transdermal drug delivery systems. With increasing consumer interest in personalized, non-invasive, and performance-oriented health solutions, the continued evolution of this innovation depends on its ability to progress across scientific, technological, and commercial domains. This section delineates the prospective directions that may enhance the functional efficacy, consumer appeal, and market relevance of herbal transdermal delivery platforms.

10.1 Integration with Smart Wearable Technologies

A notable advancement in transdermal drug delivery is the integration of patch systems with smart wearable devices. These enhanced patches may incorporate micro-sensors capable of monitoring key physiological parameters such as heart rate, hydration levels, body temperature, and sweat biomarkers. The collected data can be transmitted in real time to mobile applications or fitness tracking platforms, enabling users to optimize workout intensity and adjust patch usage accordingly. This convergence of biosensing and transdermal delivery transforms the patch from a passive administration tool into an interactive, responsive health management system.

10.2 Expansion of Herbal and Nutraceutical Portfolios

While the current formulation emphasizes key bioactive such as caffeine, Ashwagandha, ginger, and zinc acetate, future versions may be optimized through the inclusion of additional adaptogenic and ergogenic botanicals. Medicinal herbs like *Rhodiola rosea*, *Panax ginseng*, *Maca root*, and *Cordyceps sinensis* exhibit complementary pharmacological effects, including improved oxygen utilization, mood enhancement, and stimulation of cellular ATP synthesis. Furthermore, the integration of performance-supporting nutraceuticals such as L-citrulline, beta-alanine, and branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs) may expand the formulation's relevance and appeal within the athletic and fitness-oriented consumer segment.

10.3 Personalized Formulation and Dosing

Recent advancements in genomics, metabolomics, and wearable diagnostic technologies have enabled the development of personalized transdermal patches tailored to individual physiological profiles and performance objectives. By evaluating genetic markers, hormonal levels, and metabolic parameters, customized formulations can be designed to deliver targeted doses of bioactive that align with the specific needs of each user. This personalized approach is consistent with the emerging paradigm of precision sports nutrition, offering enhanced therapeutic efficacy and improved user satisfaction.

10.4 Sustainable and Biodegradable Patch Materials

Environmental sustainability has emerged as a pivotal factor in the design and development of modern healthcare products. Future iterations of transdermal patches may incorporate biodegradable polymers sourced from natural materials such as starch, cellulose, and chitosan. These eco-friendly polymers contribute to reduced environmental burden and resonate with the growing consumer demand for sustainable product alternatives. Furthermore, the adoption of minimalist packaging designs, recyclable backing materials, and carbon-neutral manufacturing practices can significantly enhance the overall environmental profile of the formulation.

10.5 Regulatory Innovation and Global Harmonization

With the growing acceptance of herbal transdermal delivery systems, existing regulatory frameworks must evolve to address their distinct formulation characteristics and therapeutic positioning. Collaborative initiatives among global regulatory bodies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), European Medicines Agency (EMA), and India's Ministry of AYUSH can facilitate the development of harmonized guidelines pertaining to safety, efficacy, and labelling standards. The implementation of standardized testing methodologies, digital traceability mechanisms, and blockchain-enabled supply chain verification can significantly enhance transparency and foster consumer confidence. Regulatory innovation will play a pivotal role in enabling global market access and accelerating the adoption of these novel therapeutic platforms.

10. Future Perspectives

The progression of herbal transdermal pre-workout patches is expected to be shaped by the integration of advanced technologies and the broadening of therapeutic applications. The incorporation of biosensor-enabled smart patches may facilitate real-time monitoring of physiological parameters, thereby enabling personalized dosing and dynamic feedback mechanisms. Expanding the phytochemical portfolio to include adaptogenic herbs such as *Rhodiola rosea* and *Panax ginseng* may further enhance performance-related outcomes. Formulations tailored through genetic and metabolic profiling represent a promising avenue for precision sports nutrition. Moreover, the adoption of biodegradable polymers and environmentally sustainable packaging materials aligns with the growing consumer demand for eco-conscious health solutions. Regulatory harmonization and the implementation of digital traceability systems will be instrumental in promoting global commercialization and strengthening consumer confidence.

11. Conclusion

The development of a herbal transdermal pre-workout patch signifies a noteworthy advancement in the domains of drug delivery and sports nutrition. By incorporating scientifically validated herbal actives—namely natural caffeine, *Withania somnifera* (Ashwagandha) extract, *Zingiber officinale* (ginger) extract, and zinc acetate—into a biocompatible polymeric matrix, the formulation offers a novel, non-invasive alternative to conventional oral supplementation. The utilization of hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC) and polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) as film-forming agents, in conjunction with glycerine, oleic acid, and a 1:1 ethanol–water solvent system, contributes to optimal film flexibility, skin adhesion, and effective transdermal permeation of active constituents.

The transdermal route offers multiple therapeutic advantages, including the circumvention of first-pass hepatic metabolism, minimization of gastrointestinal side effects, and provision of sustained and controlled release of bioactive. In vitro and ex vivo evaluations confirm the patch's capacity to deliver consistent and

therapeutically relevant doses, while pharmacodynamic studies indicate its potential to enhance physical endurance, mitigate fatigue, and support cognitive performance. Safety assessments, including dermatological patch testing and histopathological analysis, affirm the formulation's skin compatibility and long-term tolerability.

From a regulatory and commercial perspective, the formulation aligns with the increasing consumer demand for clean-label, plant-based, and wearable wellness solutions. With appropriate adherence to regulatory standards, intellectual property protection, and strategic market positioning, the product demonstrates strong potential for commercialization in both fitness and therapeutic sectors.

Future advancements may include the integration of biosensor-enabled smart technologies, personalized formulations based on genetic and metabolic profiling, and the adoption of biodegradable polymers and sustainable packaging. As further research substantiates the safety and efficacy of such systems, herbal transdermal patches may redefine the landscape of performance enhancement and holistic health management.

11. PATENT POTENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL OUTLOOK:

The herbal pre-workout transdermal patch presents a novel fusion of ethnopharmacology and modern drug delivery. While synthetic stimulant patches are well-documented, herbal, adaptogenic, and caffeine-free systems remain underrepresented in patent literature, offering a unique opportunity for intellectual property protection.

Key innovation areas include: formulation of synergistic herbal actives (*Withania somnifera*, *Panax ginseng*, *Camellia sinensis*, *Paullinia cupana*, *Capsicum annuum*); design of sustained-release polymeric matrices (Eudragit, HPMC, PVP); integration of smart patch features (QR-coded tracking); and nano-herbal technologies for enhanced permeation.

Future research should focus on clinical validation, skin permeation studies, and safety profiling. The convergence of wearable sensors with herbal patches may enable personalized fitness solutions, aligning with digital therapeutics.

This concept holds strong potential for patentability, scalable production, and global commercialization in the nutraceutical and sports performance sectors.

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