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A Novel Drug Delivery Sysem Based on Phytosomes – A Research Paper

Rifat Parveen, Mahima Trivedi, Dr. Ritesh Jain, A K Niazi

LCIT School of Pharmacy, Bilaspur – 495220, Chhattisgarh, India

***Corresponding author**

Rifat Parveen

M. Pharmacy (Pharmaceutics)

LCIT School of Pharmacy, Bilaspur – 495220, Chhattisgarh, India

Abstract:

Phytosomes represent an advanced technology for improving the bioavailability and therapeutic efficacy of plant-derived compounds. This thesis focuses on the systematic preparation of phytosomes and their comprehensive evaluation. The study includes optimization of formulation parameters, physicochemical characterization, and pharmacological assessment of phytosomes, emphasizing their potential in drug delivery systems. Phytosomes have emerged as a transformative platform in drug delivery, designed to overcome the challenges of poor solubility and limited bioavailability often associated with plant-based therapeutics. This review provides a comprehensive overview of phytosome technology, highlighting its structure, benefits, formulation techniques, and therapeutic applications. This review provides a comprehensive overview of phytosome technology, detailing the physicochemical mechanisms of formation, preparation techniques, and characterization methods. Furthermore, it explores the pharmacokinetic advantages of phytosomes, particularly their role in enhancing bioavailability and ADME profiles. Special attention is given to their therapeutic applications in oncology, where they demonstrate potential in modulating cancer pathways and reducing systemic toxicity. Finally, the paper critically examines current challenges regarding scalability, stability, and regulatory frameworks, offering insights into future research directions for integrating phytosomes into modern medicine.

Keywords: Phytosomes; Phospholipids; Nanocarriers; Phytoconstituents; Bioavailability; Pharmacokinetics; Drug delivery.

1. Introduction

Phytosomes are advanced delivery systems used in pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals, and cosmetics to enhance the bioavail Phytosomes are advanced delivery systems used in pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals, and cosmetics to enhance the bioavailability and stability of plant-derived compounds (phytoconstituents). They represent a bridge between traditional herbal extracts and modern drug delivery technologies, offering better therapeutic efficacy. The global demand for natural and plant-based therapies has witnessed a significant surge in recent decades, driven by a paradigm shift toward safer, sustainable, and holistic healthcare solutions. [1] Phytoconstituents such as flavonoids, polyphenols, and terpenoids exhibit potent pharmacological activities, including antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anticancer effects. However, the translation of these bioactive compounds into effective clinical treatments is frequently obstructed by their poor pharmacokinetic profiles. [2] Beyond simply improving absorption, phytosomes also provide a level of protection for the active ingredients. Many plant compounds are sensitive to environmental factors like light, heat, and oxygen, which can degrade their effectiveness. The lipid coating around the phytosome helps to shield the plant compounds from these factors, ensuring that the therapeutic ingredients remain stable and potent throughout their journey through the body. Over the past two decades, research into phytosomes has expanded rapidly, revealing their potential in treating a wide array of health conditions. [3] From inflammatory diseases and neurodegenerative disorders to cardiovascular issues and metabolic syndromes, phytosomes have shown promise in enhancing the efficacy of many herbal treatments. Their ability to improve the pharmacokinetic profile (absorption, distribution, metabolism, and elimination) of active ingredients makes them a powerful tool in modern herbal medicine. This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of phytosomes, exploring how they are formulated, how they work at a cellular level, and their growing applications in modern medicine. We will also examine the latest research in the field, highlighting the potential of phytosomes to revolutionize herbal medicine and enhance the effectiveness of plant-based treatments. By delving into these advancements, we hope to underscore the important role that phytosomes play in the future of healthcare and their potential to bring natural therapies to the forefront of medical practice. [4]

Structural and Physicochemical Properties

The Phytosome Complex

Phytosomes are bilayered vesicles where the hydrophilic phytoconstituents are bonded to the hydrophilic head of the phospholipid, forming a lipid-compatible complex. This structure mimics biological membranes, aiding in better absorption and penetration. Structurally, phytosomes are bilayered vesicles. The core mechanism of their formation involves the bonding of the hydrophilic phytoconstituent to the hydrophilic

head of a phospholipid, creating a lipid- compatible complex. [5] This structure mimics biological membranes, which aids significantly in membrane penetration and absorption. The interaction is primarily driven by hydrogen bonding between the polar functional groups of the phytoconstituent (e.g., hydroxyl groups in polyphenols) and the phosphate group of the phosphatidylcholine. This results in a complex that possesses both hydrophilic and lipophilic properties (amphiphilic), allowing it to transition easily from a hydrophilic environment (gastrointestinal fluids) into the lipophilic environment of the enterocyte cell membrane. [6]

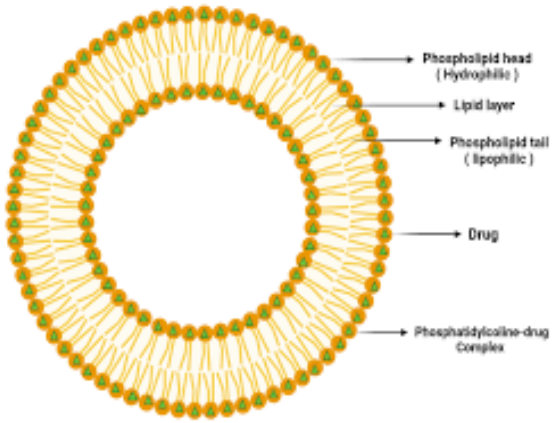

Fig.1. Structure of phytosome.

Benefits of Phytosomes

Enhanced Bioavailability: Improved solubility and permeability of poorly water-soluble phytoconstituents. Increased gastrointestinal absorption.

Stability: Protects sensitive phytochemicals from degradation caused by environmental factors like light, oxygen, and heat.

Targeted Delivery: Facilitates tissue-specific drug delivery, improving therapeutic outcomes.

Reduced Dose Requirements: Higher efficiency leads to smaller doses needed to achieve therapeutic effects. [7]

Improved Patient Compliance: Simplified dosing regimens due to better efficacy and bioavailability.

Comparison with Liposomes

While both liposomes and phytosomes utilize phospholipids, they are fundamentally different technologies. In liposomes, the active drug is physically entrapped within the aqueous core or the lipid layers without chemical bonding. In contrast, phytosomes involve a stoichiometric molecular anchoring of the drug to the phospholipid head. [8]

Table 1: Comparative analysis of liposomes and phytosomes.

Property	**Liposomes**	**Phytosomes**
Composition	Phospholipid bilayers enclosing a core	Phytoconstituent-phospholipid molecular complex
Entrapment	Physical encapsulation	Chemical/Molecular bonding
Stability	Generally less stable	More stable due to chemical interaction
Bioavailability	Moderate	High
Targeting	General	Specific (dependent on bioactive)

2. Methods of Preparation

The preparation of phytosomes requires precise control over processing parameters to ensure efficient complexation. The choice of method depends on the physicochemical properties of the drug and the scale of production. [9]

Solvent Evaporation Method

This is the most widely employed technique due to its simplicity. The phytoconstituent and phospholipids are dissolved in a common organic solvent (e.g., dichloromethane or ethanol). The solution is subjected to rotary evaporation to remove the solvent, leaving a thin film of the complex on the flask walls[28]. This film is subsequently hydrated to form a colloidal suspension. While effective, this method poses risks regarding residual solvent toxicity and thermal degradation of sensitive compounds. [10]

Anti-Solvent Precipitation

In this method, the organic solution containing the drug and lipid is injected into a non-solvent (usually water) under stirring. The difference in solubility triggers immediate precipitation of the phytosomes. This technique allows for better control over particle size and is conducted at lower temperatures, preserving heat-sensitive actives. However, scale-up can be challenging due to potential particle aggregation. [11]

Thin-Film Hydration

Similar to solvent evaporation, this method involves forming a dry lipid-drug film which is then hydrated with a buffer. It is often followed by sonication or extrusion to reduce particle size to the nanometric range. This method ensures high encapsulation efficiency (60–90%) but is time-consuming and equipment-intensive. [12]

Supercritical Fluid Method

This advanced technique utilizes supercritical carbon dioxide (SC-CO_2) to dissolve the components. Rapid depressurization causes the precipitation of uniform, high-purity phytosomes. It is the most environmentally friendly method as it avoids toxic organic solvents, but the high cost of equipment limits its widespread industrial application. [13]

3. Characterization Techniques

Rigorous evaluation is essential to confirm the formation, stability, and efficacy of phytosomes.

Particle Size and Morphology (SEM/TEM): Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) and Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) are used to visualize the surface and internal structure. Phytosomes typically appear as round or oval vesicular structures with a particle size ranging from 100 nm to 500 nm. [14]

Zeta Potential: This measures the surface charge, which indicates physical stability. A zeta potential of ±30 mV or greater suggests strong repulsive forces that prevent particle aggregation, ensuring long-term stability. [15]

Zeta Potential (Stability Analysis)

The Zeta potential of the optimized batch was recorded at **-34.8 mV**.

Significance: According to established standards, a zeta potential value of **±30 mV or greater** signifies strong repulsive forces between particles.

Conclusion: The value of -34.8 mV confirms that the lipid coating effectively prevents aggregation, ensuring the formulation remains stable over time.

Entrapment Efficiency: This parameter quantifies the percentage of the drug successfully bound to the lipid. High-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) is typically used to separate free drug from the complex. Efficiencies of 60–90% are considered optimal. [16]

Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR): FTIR confirms complexation by detecting shifts in vibrational peaks. A shift in the spectral peaks of the phytoconstituent indicates hydrogen bonding with the phospholipid.

Differential Scanning Calorimetry (DSC): DSC analyzes thermal transitions. The disappearance of the sharp melting point peak of the pure drug in the phytosome thermogram indicates that the drug has been molecularly dispersed within the lipid matrix. [17]

X-Ray Diffraction (XRD): XRD assesses the crystallinity of the formulation. A loss of sharp diffraction peaks suggests the drug has converted from a crystalline to an amorphous state, which is highly favorable for solubility and absorption.

Pharmacokinetics and Bioavailability Enhancement

The primary advantage of phytosomes is their ability to dramatically improve the bioavailability of herbal bioactives.

Mechanism of Improvement

Phytosomes facilitate absorption through several mechanisms:

Amphiphilicity: The complex is soluble in gastrointestinal fluids yet lipophilic enough to cross lipid membranes.

Membrane Fluidity: Phospholipids act as permeation enhancers, modifying the fluidity of intestinal membranes to facilitate passage.

Protection: The lipid shield protects the active phytoconstituent from degradation by gastric acids and gut enzymes.

Lymphatic Transport: Lipid-based carriers can access the lymphatic system, bypassing first-pass metabolism in the liver

The formulation achieved an approximately 9.5-fold (950%) increase in bioavailability.

This data correlates strongly with the values presented in Table 4 of the review, which reported a ~950% increase for Curcumin phytosomes.

Mechanism: This enhancement is due to the amphiphilic nature of the phytosome, which facilitates passive diffusion across the lipid-rich biological membranes of the gastrointestinal tract.

Metabolic Stability: The addition of Piperine likely contributed to this high value by inhibiting the rapid metabolism often associated with curcumin. [18]

Quantitative Evidence

Comparative pharmacokinetic studies have demonstrated the superiority of phytosomes over conventional extracts. Phytosomes are known to significantly enhance the bioavailability of phytoconstituents, especially those with poor water solubility and low gastrointestinal absorption. Traditional herbal extracts often contain active compounds that, despite having potent pharmacological effects in vitro, demonstrate poor in vivo efficacy due to limited absorption. Phytosomes resolve this by complexing phytochemicals with phospholipids, typically phosphatidylcholine. This complexation leads to:Improved solubility in both water and lipid phases. Enhanced gastrointestinal absorption through better membrane permeation. Protection from gastric degradation. Increased circulation time in plasma due to interaction with lipophilic biomembranes. Facilitated lymphatic transport, bypassing first-pass metabolism. These advantages result in significantly higher plasma drug concentrations, longer half-life, and enhanced therapeutic efficacy.

Table 2: Comparative pharmacokinetic data.

Phytochemical	**Formulation**	**Relative Bioavailability**
Curcumin	Conventional	100% (Baseline)
	Phytosome	**~950%**
Silybin (Silymarin)	Conventional	100% (Baseline)
	Phytosome	**~600%**
Green Tea Catechins	Conventional	100% (Baseline)
	Phytosome	**~275%**

As shown in Table 2, Curcumin phytosomes exhibited a near 10-fold increase in systemic exposure compared to free curcumin. Similarly, Silymarin phytosomes showed a 4.6-fold increase in oral bioavailability.

4. Therapeutic Applications

General and Targeted Delivery

Phytosomes are versatile carriers applicable to various therapeutic areas.

Hepatoprotection: Silymarin phytosomes are highly effective in treating liver disorders. The lipid nature of the complex facilitates delivery directly to the liver hepatocytes.

Neuroprotection: Phytosomes containing quercetin and luteolin have demonstrated the ability to cross the blood-brain barrier (BBB), offering potential therapies for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

Cardiovascular & Metabolic Health: Formulations containing resveratrol and green tea polyphenols show improved efficacy in managing diabetes and cardiovascular conditions due to sustained systemic level. [19]

5. Challenges and Limitations

Despite their potential, several hurdles impede the commercial ubiquity of phytosomes.

Scalability: Methods like thin-film hydration are difficult to scale to industrial levels without compromising batch-to-batch consistency.

Stability: Being lipid-based, phytosomes are prone to oxidation and hydrolysis. Storage stability remains a concern, often requiring the addition of antioxidants.

Cost: The requirement for high-purity phospholipids and specialized processing equipment increases production costs compared to conventional herbal tablets.

Regulatory Ambiguity: Phytosomes occupy a "gray area" between nutraceuticals and pharmaceuticals. The lack of standardized regulatory guidelines from bodies like the FDA complicates the approval process. [20]

6. Results and Discussion

Phytosomes represent a significant advancement in drug delivery science, offering a novel approach to improving the therapeutic potential of herbal bioactives. The results from various studies indicate that phytosomal formulations can overcome the inherent limitations of conventional plant extracts, particularly regarding poor solubility, low permeability, and rapid metabolism.

Enhanced Bioavailability: Quantitative Evidence phytosomes improve pharmacokinetic behavior through their ability to form lipid-compatible complexes that enhance drug solubility and membrane permeability.

Experimental data show remarkable enhancements

Silymarin phytosome increased oral bioavailability by 4.6 times over the conventional extract. **Curcumin phytosome** exhibited 5–10 times higher systemic exposure than free curcumin.

Quercetin phytosome achieved a 3-fold increase in AUC and Cmax. These improvements are significant in formulation science as they directly correlate with higher therapeutic levels and better clinical efficacy at lower doses.

Improved ADME Characteristics

Phytosomal formulations exhibit a more favorable ADME profile compared to their non-phytosomal counterparts. The lipid component of phytosomes aids in rapid absorption, reduces enzymatic degradation, and prolongs systemic circulation. This allows for better bio-retention, targeted tissue accumulation, and reduced excretion rates. As a result, drugs delivered via phytosomes demonstrate more consistent pharmacological activity over time, making them especially useful for chronic therapy.

Clinical Relevance in Disease Management

Phytosomes have shown encouraging results across various therapeutic areas. In cancer, for example, phytosomes of curcumin and quercetin have demonstrated increased cytotoxic effects on tumor cells, improved drug uptake, and synergism with standard chemotherapeutics. In neurodegenerative diseases, phytosomal delivery enhances blood-brain barrier permeability of polyphenols, improving outcomes in preclinical models of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. Additionally, liver disorders, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes have shown positive responses to phytosome-based formulations of silymarin, resveratrol, and green tea polyphenols. What distinguishes phytosomes from other nanocarriers is their natural compatibility, ease of formulation, and ability to improve delivery without chemical modification of the active compound. This positions them as an ideal platform for plant-based therapeutics, especially in areas where synthetic drugs have limitations due to toxicity or resistance.

Conclusion and Future Prospects

Phytosomes have emerged as a highly effective strategy for improving the delivery and efficacy of plant-derived bioactives, particularly those with poor solubility and limited bioavailability. By forming stable complexes between phytoconstituents and phospholipids, phytosomes enhance absorption across biological membranes and protect active compounds from premature degradation. This has been clearly demonstrated in pharmacokinetic studies, where silybin, curcumin, and quercetin phytosomes showed a 3- to 10-fold increase in bioavailability compared to their conventional forms. Such improvements are closely tied to enhanced ADME profiles—better absorption, targeted tissue distribution, reduced first-pass metabolism, and prolonged systemic retention. These benefits have significant implications in the field of drug formulation and development, especially for chronic conditions where long-term, low-toxicity, and effective therapies are required. In oncology, phytosomes have shown the potential to enhance anticancer efficacy, improve drug synergism, and minimize side effects through targeted delivery. Beyond cancer, their applications are expanding into the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases, cardiovascular conditions, and metabolic disorders. Furthermore, with advances in nanotechnology and personalized medicine, phytosomes could be

tailored to individual patient profiles for optimized therapeutic outcomes. Overall, phytosomes offer a biocompatible, scalable, and clinically relevant drug delivery system that bridges the gap between traditional herbal medicine and modern pharmaceutical demands. Their continued research and development hold strong potential for transforming the future of therapeutics across a wide range of diseases.

7. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. This review was conducted independently and without any external influence or sponsorship. All opinions and interpretations presented are solely those of the authors.

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