IJCRT.ORG ISSN : 2320-2882

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

# Plant-Derived Exosome-Mimetic Nanocarriers For Oral And Vaginal Drug Delivery: A Comprehensive Review.

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**Abstract**

Plant-derived exosome-mimetic nanocarriers (PDENMs) represent a rapidly advancing class of bioinspired drug delivery systems that bridge the gap between natural extracellular vesicles and synthetic nanocarriers. These vesicles, derived from edible and medicinal plants or fabricated using plant lipid extracts, exhibit unique advantages such as excellent biocompatibility, low immunogenicity, biodegradability, scalability, and intrinsic affinity for biological membranes. Oral and vaginal routes of drug administration are particularly attractive due to their non-invasive nature; however, both routes present formidable physiological barriers that limit drug stability, absorption, and therapeutic efficacy. PDENMs have demonstrated the ability to protect encapsulated drugs from harsh biological environments, enhance mucosal penetration, and enable targeted or sustained drug release. This comprehensive review critically examines the current state of research on PDENMs, covering their sources, isolation and fabrication techniques, physicochemical characterization, drug loading and functionalization strategies, and mechanisms of cellular uptake. Special emphasis is placed on oral and vaginal drug delivery applications, supported by preclinical evidence. Safety, toxicity, regulatory considerations, and future research directions are discussed to provide a translational perspective on the clinical potential of PDENMs.

**Keywords**

Plant-derived nanocarriers; Exosome-mimetic vesicles; Oral drug delivery; Vaginal drug delivery; Nanomedicine; Mucosal delivery

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Overview of Nanocarriers in Drug Delivery

Nanocarriers have transformed modern drug delivery by enabling controlled release, targeted delivery, and improved pharmacokinetic profiles of therapeutic agents. Systems such as liposomes, polymeric nanoparticles, solid lipid nanoparticles, and dendrimers have been extensively investigated for enhancing solubility, stability, and bioavailability of drugs. Despite these advances, synthetic nanocarriers often suffer from limitations including toxicity, immunogenicity, complex manufacturing processes, and poor acceptance for mucosal delivery routes.

Nanocarriers are nanoscale materials used to transport drugs safely and effectively to specific sites in the body. They typically range in size from 1 to 1000 nanometers and play a crucial role in modern drug delivery systems. The main goal of using nanocarriers is to improve the therapeutic effectiveness of drugs while reducing side effects and toxicity.

Traditional drug delivery methods often face problems such as poor solubility, low bioavailability, rapid degradation of drugs, and lack of target specificity. Nanocarriers help overcome these limitations by protecting drugs from degradation, improving their solubility, controlling their release, and delivering them directly to the target tissue or cells.

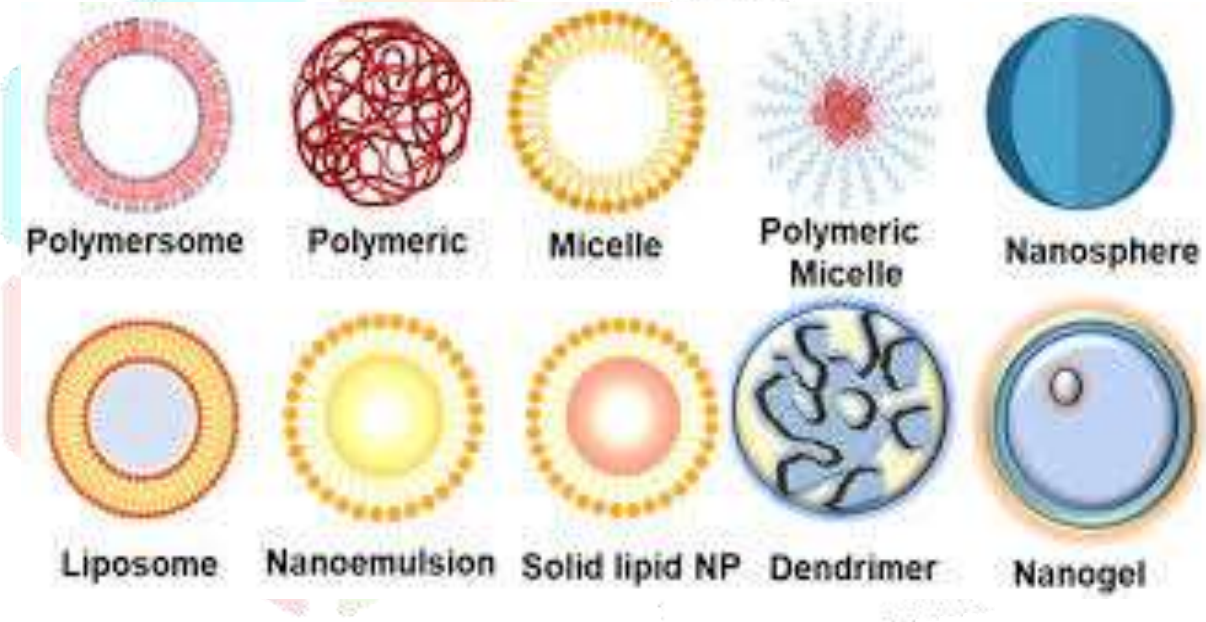


**Fig.1 Nanocarriers in Drug Delivery**

There are different types of nanocarriers, each with unique properties. Lipid-based nanocarriers, such as liposomes and solid lipid nanoparticles, are widely used because of their biocompatibility and ability to carry both water-soluble and fat-soluble drugs. Liposomes consist of one or more lipid bilayers surrounding an aqueous core, making them suitable for delivering a wide range of drugs.

Polymeric nanocarriers, including polymeric nanoparticles, micelles, and dendrimers, are another important category. These carriers are made from natural or synthetic polymers and are valued for their stability and controlled drug release properties. Polymeric micelles are especially useful for delivering poorly water-soluble drugs.

Inorganic nanocarriers, such as gold nanoparticles, silica nanoparticles, and magnetic nanoparticles, offer advantages like high stability and ease of surface modification. Magnetic nanoparticles can be guided to specific locations using an external magnetic field, making them useful for targeted therapy.

Nanocarriers can deliver drugs through passive targeting or active targeting. Passive targeting relies on natural body characteristics, such as leaky blood vessels in tumor tissues, which allow nanocarriers to

accumulate at the disease site. Active targeting involves modifying the surface of nanocarriers with ligands like antibodies or peptides that bind specifically to target cells, increasing treatment precision.

Another key benefit of nanocarriers is controlled and sustained drug release. Instead of releasing the drug all at once, nanocarriers can release it slowly over time, maintaining a steady drug concentration in the body and reducing the need for frequent dosing.

### 1.2 Limitations of Conventional Drug Delivery Systems

Traditional oral and vaginal dosage forms face multiple barriers such as enzymatic degradation, poor mucosal permeability, rapid clearance, and non-specific distribution. Many drugs, particularly peptides, proteins, and nucleic acids, exhibit low bioavailability when administered orally. Similarly, vaginal formulations often suffer from short residence time and inconsistent drug absorption. These challenges necessitate the development of novel delivery systems that can overcome biological barriers while maintaining safety and efficacy.

Conventional drug delivery systems refer to traditional methods of administering drugs such as oral tablets, capsules, injections, and topical formulations. Although these systems have been used successfully for many years, they suffer from several limitations that can reduce therapeutic effectiveness and patient compliance. With the advancement of medical science, these drawbacks have become more evident, leading to the development of advanced drug delivery approaches.

One major limitation of conventional drug delivery systems is poor bioavailability. Many drugs, especially those taken orally, are poorly absorbed in the gastrointestinal tract due to low solubility, instability in acidic environments, or enzymatic degradation. Additionally, first-pass metabolism in the liver can significantly reduce the amount of active drug reaching systemic circulation, resulting in reduced therapeutic effect.

Another significant drawback is lack of target specificity. Conventional systems deliver drugs throughout the body rather than to a specific disease site. This non-specific distribution can cause damage to healthy tissues and lead to adverse side effects. For example, anticancer drugs often affect both cancerous and normal cells, resulting in toxicity and severe side effects.

Frequent dosing and fluctuating drug levels are also common problems. Many conventional formulations release drugs rapidly after administration, causing a high initial concentration followed by a rapid decline below the therapeutic level. This fluctuation can reduce drug efficacy and increase the risk of toxicity. To maintain effective drug levels, frequent dosing is required, which can reduce patient adherence to treatment.

Conventional drug delivery systems also suffer from poor drug stability. Many drugs are sensitive to light, heat, moisture, or enzymes and may degrade before reaching the target site. Peptide- and protein-based drugs are especially vulnerable to enzymatic degradation, making their delivery challenging using traditional methods.

Limited control over drug release is another important limitation. Conventional formulations generally release drugs immediately after administration, offering little or no control over the rate and duration of release. This lack of controlled release can result in suboptimal therapeutic outcomes and increased side effects.

### 1.3 Exosomes and Exosome-Mimetic Nanocarriers

Exosomes are nanosized extracellular vesicles (30–150 nm) secreted by cells and involved in intercellular communication. Their natural role in transporting biomolecules has inspired their use as drug carriers. However, mammalian exosomes present challenges related to low yield, expensive production, and safety concerns. Exosome-mimetic nanocarriers have been developed to replicate the structure and function of exosomes while allowing greater control over composition and scalability.

Exosomes are naturally occurring nanosized extracellular vesicles, typically ranging from 30 to 150 nanometers in diameter, that are released by almost all types of cells. They play an important role in cell-to-cell communication by transferring biological molecules such as proteins, lipids, DNA, and RNA between cells. Because of their unique biological properties, exosomes have gained significant attention as promising carriers in advanced drug delivery systems.

One of the key advantages of exosomes is their natural origin and biocompatibility. Since they are derived from the body's own cells, exosomes show low immunogenicity and minimal toxicity compared to synthetic drug carriers. This makes them highly suitable for clinical applications. Exosomes can naturally cross biological barriers such as the blood–brain barrier, which is a major challenge for conventional drug delivery systems. This property makes them especially useful for treating neurological disorders.

Exosomes also exhibit inherent targeting ability. They carry surface proteins and ligands that allow them to recognize and bind to specific recipient cells. This natural targeting capability improves the efficiency of drug delivery and reduces unwanted side effects by limiting drug exposure to healthy tissues. Additionally, exosomes protect their cargo from enzymatic degradation, increasing the stability and effectiveness of the delivered therapeutic agents.

Despite their advantages, exosomes have certain limitations. These include low yield during isolation, complex purification processes, variability depending on the source cell, and challenges in large-scale production. To overcome these issues, researchers have developed exosome-mimetic nanocarriers.

Exosome-mimetic nanocarriers are synthetic or semi-synthetic nanoparticles designed to imitate the structure and function of natural exosomes. They are engineered to have similar size, shape, and surface characteristics, allowing them to replicate the beneficial properties of exosomes while addressing their limitations. These nanocarriers can be produced in larger quantities with better control over composition and quality.

### 1.4 Advantages of Plant-Derived Nanocarriers

Plant-derived nanocarriers offer distinct advantages over mammalian counterparts, including ease of sourcing, low risk of pathogen transmission, cost-effectiveness, and inherent biocompatibility. Plants such as ginger, grape, grapefruit, and lemon naturally produce vesicle-like nanoparticles rich in lipids and bioactive molecules. These properties make PDENMs particularly attractive for oral and vaginal delivery applications.

Plant-derived nanocarriers are an emerging class of drug delivery systems obtained from plant sources such as fruits, vegetables, seeds, and medicinal plants. These nanocarriers include plant-derived extracellular vesicles, lipid nanoparticles, and biopolymer-based nanoparticles extracted or synthesized from plant materials. Due to their natural origin, sustainability, and biological compatibility, plant-derived nanocarriers have gained increasing attention in modern pharmaceutical and biomedical research.

One of the most important advantages of plant-derived nanocarriers is their excellent biocompatibility and safety. Since they originate from edible or medicinal plants, they are generally non-toxic and well tolerated by the human body. This significantly reduces the risk of immune reactions and adverse side effects

compared to synthetic nanocarriers. Their natural composition makes them especially suitable for long-term therapeutic applications.

Another key advantage is their low immunogenicity. Plant-derived nanocarriers do not usually trigger strong immune responses, making them ideal for repeated administration. This property is particularly beneficial in chronic disease treatment, where frequent dosing is required. Their ability to safely interact with biological systems enhances patient compliance and therapeutic effectiveness.

Plant-derived nanocarriers also demonstrate high stability in physiological conditions. They can protect encapsulated drugs from degradation caused by enzymes, pH changes, and harsh gastrointestinal environments. This feature is especially useful for oral drug delivery, as many plant-based nanocarriers can survive the digestive system and improve drug bioavailability.

A major advantage is their ability to carry diverse therapeutic agents. Plant-derived nanocarriers can encapsulate both hydrophilic and hydrophobic drugs, as well as biomolecules such as proteins, nucleic acids, and antioxidants. This versatility allows them to be used in a wide range of therapeutic applications, including cancer treatment, inflammatory diseases, and gene therapy.

### 1.5 Scope and Objectives of the Review

This review aims to systematically summarize current knowledge on PDENMs, focusing on their preparation, characterization, and application in oral and vaginal drug delivery. Key challenges, regulatory aspects, and future research opportunities are also discussed.

## 2. Plant-Derived Exosome-Mimetic Nanocarriers (PDENMs)

### 2.1 Definition and Classification

PDENMs are nanoscale vesicular systems derived from plant materials or engineered using plant lipid extracts to mimic natural exosomes. They are typically composed of phospholipids, glycolipids, and sterols arranged in a bilayer structure capable of encapsulating hydrophilic and hydrophobic drugs.

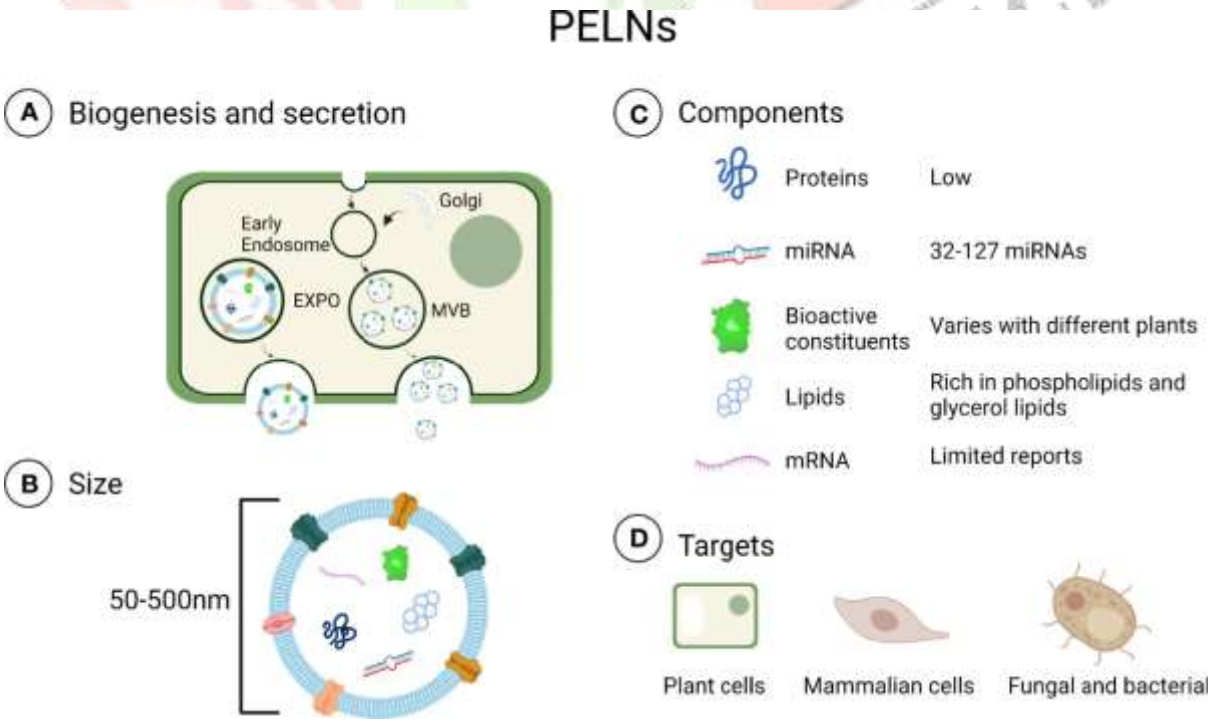


**Fig.2 Plant-Derived Exosome-Mimetic Nanocarriers (PDENMs)**

### 2.2 Natural Plant Extracellular Vesicles vs Exosome-Mimetics

Natural plant extracellular vesicles are isolated directly from plant tissues or juices, whereas exosome-mimetics are artificially assembled using extracted plant lipids. While natural vesicles retain native biomolecules, mimetics offer better control over size, composition, and drug loading efficiency.

Natural plant extracellular vesicles (PEVs) and exosome-mimetic nanocarriers are two emerging nanotechnology-based systems widely studied for drug delivery and therapeutic applications. Although both share similarities in size and function, they differ significantly in origin, composition, production, and practical advantages. Understanding these differences helps in selecting the most suitable system for biomedical use.

Natural plant extracellular vesicles are nanosized lipid bilayer vesicles naturally released by plant cells. They are commonly isolated from edible plants such as ginger, grapes, citrus fruits, and carrots. PEVs contain bioactive molecules including lipids, proteins, RNA, and metabolites that contribute to their therapeutic potential. One of the strongest advantages of PEVs is their natural biocompatibility and safety. Since they are derived from plants consumed in the human diet, they show very low toxicity and immunogenicity, making them suitable for long-term and repeated administration.

PEVs are also known for their excellent stability, especially in harsh physiological environments like the gastrointestinal tract. This makes them highly promising for oral drug delivery, where conventional carriers often fail. Additionally, plant extracellular vesicles possess intrinsic biological activity, such as anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects, which can enhance therapeutic outcomes even without additional drug loading.

However, natural plant extracellular vesicles have some limitations. Their isolation and purification processes can be complex, and the yield may vary depending on the plant source, growth conditions, and extraction method. Moreover, controlling their composition and drug-loading efficiency is challenging, which can affect reproducibility and large-scale production.

Exosome-mimetic nanocarriers, on the other hand, are artificially engineered nanoparticles designed to mimic the structure and function of natural exosomes. They are typically produced using synthetic lipids, polymers, or cell-derived membranes. One major advantage of exosome-mimetics is their high scalability and reproducibility. Unlike natural vesicles, exosome-mimetics can be manufactured in large quantities with controlled size, composition, and surface properties.

### 2.3 Common Plant Sources

Several edible plants have been investigated as sources of PDENMs. Ginger-derived nanovesicles have demonstrated anti-inflammatory properties and excellent oral stability. Grapefruit and grape-derived vesicles have been widely studied for targeted drug delivery due to their favorable lipid composition. Lemon and broccoli-derived vesicles have also shown potential in cancer therapy and mucosal delivery.

## 3. Isolation, Preparation, and Scale-Up

### 3.1 Isolation Techniques

Isolation of plant-derived vesicles typically involves differential centrifugation, filtration, and ultracentrifugation. Density gradient centrifugation improves purity, while polymer-based precipitation offers a cost-effective alternative for large-scale preparation.

Isolation techniques are essential methods used to separate and purify nanoparticles, extracellular vesicles, or bioactive compounds from complex biological sources. The choice of isolation technique directly

affects the purity, yield, functionality, and reproducibility of the isolated material, making it a critical step in research and therapeutic applications.

One of the most commonly used methods is differential centrifugation, which separates particles based on size and density through sequential centrifugation steps at increasing speeds. This technique is simple and cost-effective but may result in lower purity due to co-isolation of contaminants. Ultracentrifugation is a more advanced form that enables isolation of nanoscale vesicles with higher efficiency, though it requires expensive equipment and can cause structural damage if not carefully optimized.

Density gradient centrifugation improves purity by separating particles within a density gradient medium, such as sucrose or iodixanol. This method is more precise but time-consuming. Filtration and size-exclusion chromatography are also widely used, allowing separation based on particle size while preserving biological activity.

Additionally, polymer-based precipitation techniques offer simplicity and high yield but may introduce impurities. More recently, immunoaffinity capture methods have been developed, using specific antibodies to isolate target vesicles with high specificity.

### 3.2 Exosome-Mimetic Fabrication Methods

Exosome-mimetic nanocarriers are often prepared by extracting lipids from plant tissues followed by reassembly into nanosized vesicles using sonication or extrusion. Microfluidic techniques have recently emerged as precise and reproducible methods for PDENM fabrication.

Exosome-mimetic nanocarriers are engineered nanoparticles designed to imitate the structure and function of natural exosomes while overcoming limitations such as low yield and poor scalability. Various fabrication methods are used to produce these systems, depending on the desired properties and application.

One common method is cell membrane extrusion, where cells are forced through membranes with defined pore sizes to generate vesicles similar in size and composition to natural exosomes. This technique produces high yields and preserves membrane proteins, which helps maintain targeting ability. However, careful control is required to ensure uniform size.

Another widely used approach is lipid self-assembly, in which synthetic or natural lipids spontaneously form nanoscale vesicles in aqueous environments. This method allows precise control over composition, size, and drug loading, making it suitable for large-scale production.

Polymer-based fabrication methods use biodegradable polymers to create nanoparticles that mimic exosome behavior. These carriers offer excellent stability and controlled drug release but may lack natural membrane proteins.

Additionally, hybrid fabrication methods combine natural cell membranes with synthetic cores, integrating the biocompatibility of biological materials with the tunability of synthetic systems.

### 3.3 Industrial Scale-Up Challenges

Despite promising laboratory results, large-scale production of PDENMs remains challenging due to batch-to-batch variability, purification complexity, and lack of standardized protocols.

## 4. Physicochemical Characterization of PDENMs

### 4.1 Particle Size and Morphology

Particle size typically ranges from 50 to 300 nm and is measured using dynamic light scattering, while morphology is examined using transmission or scanning electron microscopy.

Particle size and morphology are critical parameters that influence the behavior and performance of nanocarriers in drug delivery systems. Typically, nanocarriers range from 10 to 200 nanometers, a size suitable for enhanced cellular uptake and prolonged circulation time. Smaller particles can penetrate tissues more effectively, while larger particles may be cleared rapidly by the immune system. Morphology, including shape and surface structure, affects stability, biodistribution, and drug release. Spherical and uniform particles are generally preferred because they provide consistent drug loading, predictable release profiles, and improved biological interactions.

### 4.2 Surface Charge (Zeta Potential)

Zeta potential influences stability and mucosal interaction. PDENMs generally exhibit a negative surface charge, contributing to colloidal stability.

Surface charge, commonly measured as zeta potential, is an important characteristic of nanocarriers that influences their stability and interaction with biological systems. Zeta potential indicates the degree of electrostatic repulsion between particles; values higher than +30 mV or lower than −30 mV generally suggest good colloidal stability. Nanocarriers with suitable surface charge are less likely to aggregate during storage and circulation. Surface charge also affects cellular uptake, biodistribution, and protein adsorption. Positively charged particles often show enhanced cell membrane interaction, while negatively charged or neutral particles tend to exhibit better circulation stability and reduced toxicity.

### 4.3 Lipid and Protein Composition

Lipidomics and proteomics analyses reveal that PDENMs are rich in phosphatidic acid, phosphatidylcholine, and bioactive proteins that contribute to their biological activity.

The lipid and protein composition of nanocarriers plays a vital role in determining their stability, functionality, and biological interactions. Lipids form the structural framework of vesicular nanocarriers, influencing membrane fluidity, permeability, and drug encapsulation efficiency. Specific lipids can enhance stability and facilitate fusion with target cell membranes. Proteins present on the surface or within nanocarriers contribute to targeting, cellular recognition, and internalization. They can also affect immune response and circulation time. Together, lipid and protein composition governs biodistribution, targeting efficiency, and overall therapeutic performance of nanocarrier-based drug delivery systems.

### 4.4 Stability Studies

Stability under gastrointestinal and vaginal pH conditions is crucial. PDENMs have shown superior stability compared to conventional liposomes.

Stability studies are conducted to evaluate the ability of nanocarriers or drug delivery systems to maintain their physical, chemical, and biological properties over time under various storage and physiological conditions. These studies assess parameters such as particle size, zeta potential, morphology, drug content, and release profile during storage. Stability testing also examines sensitivity to temperature, pH, light, and moisture. Maintaining stability is essential to ensure consistent therapeutic efficacy, safety, and shelf life. Well-designed stability studies help in selecting suitable formulations, packaging, and storage conditions, and are crucial for regulatory approval and clinical application.

### 4.5 Drug Encapsulation Efficiency

Encapsulation efficiency depends on drug properties and loading method, with hydrophobic drugs generally showing higher loading.

Drug encapsulation efficiency (EE) refers to the percentage of a drug successfully loaded or entrapped within a nanocarrier relative to the total amount of drug used during formulation. High encapsulation efficiency ensures that a sufficient therapeutic dose reaches the target site while minimizing drug wastage. EE is influenced by factors such as nanocarrier composition, particle size, surface charge, drug solubility, and preparation method. Measuring encapsulation efficiency typically involves separating free drug from the loaded nanocarriers using techniques like centrifugation, filtration, or chromatography, followed by quantification. High EE is crucial for effective, controlled, and sustained drug delivery.

## 5. Drug Loading and Functionalization Strategies

### 5.1 Passive Drug Loading

Passive drug loading is a method of incorporating therapeutic agents into nanocarriers without the use of external energy or chemical reactions. In this approach, drugs are loaded based on their natural affinity for the carrier's components, such as hydrophobic drugs associating with lipid bilayers or hydrophilic drugs partitioning into aqueous cores. This technique is simple, mild, and preserves the biological activity of sensitive drugs like proteins or nucleic acids. However, loading efficiency may be limited and dependent on the physicochemical properties of both the drug and the nanocarrier. Passive loading is commonly used in liposomes, polymeric nanoparticles, and plant-derived vesicles.

### 5.2 Active Loading Techniques

Active methods such as sonication, electroporation, and freeze–thaw cycles enhance loading efficiency for hydrophilic drugs and biomacromolecules.

Active loading techniques involve the use of external forces or chemical gradients to drive drugs into nanocarriers, resulting in higher loading efficiency compared to passive methods. Common strategies include pH gradient loading, where a difference in pH across the carrier membrane facilitates drug accumulation, and ion gradient loading, which uses concentration differences of ions to trap charged drugs inside vesicles. Other methods include remote loading with chemical complexation or electrostatic interactions to enhance encapsulation. Active loading is particularly useful for hydrophilic or weakly soluble drugs and ensures stable, controlled, and sustained release, making it ideal for liposomes, exosomes, and other nanocarrier systems.

### 5.3 Surface Modification and Targeting Ligands

Surface functionalization with polymers or ligands improves targeting and mucosal adhesion. Surface modification of nanocarriers involves altering their outer layer to improve stability, biocompatibility, and circulation time in the body. Common strategies include coating with polyethylene glycol (PEG) or other polymers to reduce immune recognition and prevent aggregation. Surface functionalization

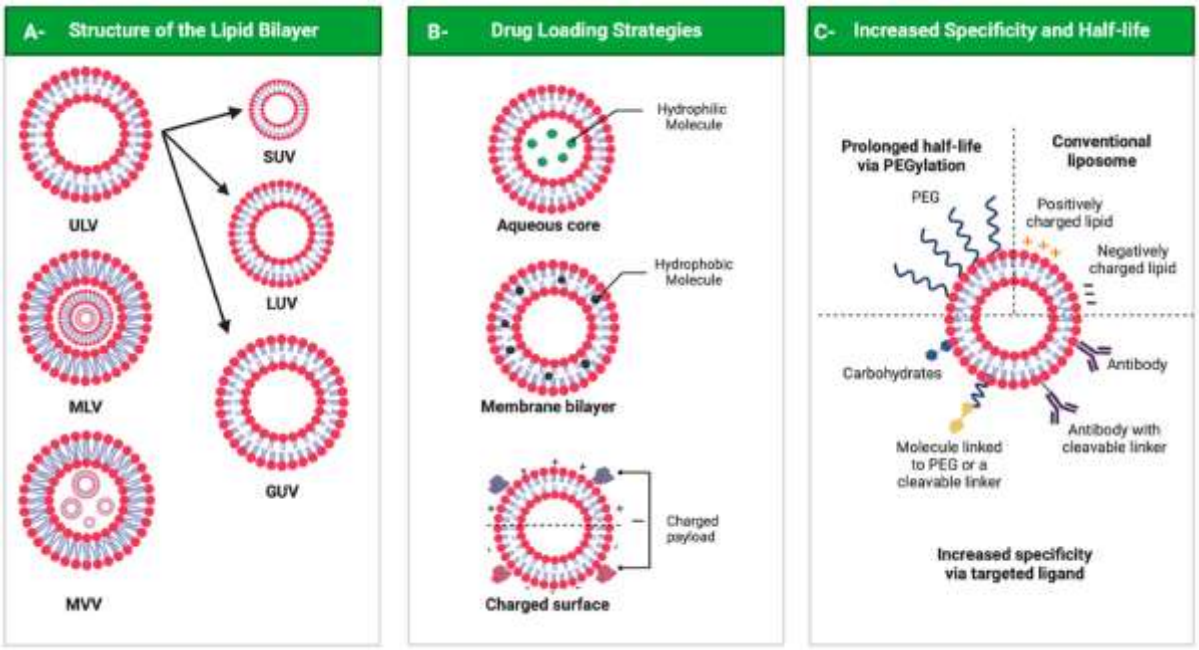


**Fig.3 Trends in drug delivery system.**

also allows the attachment of targeting ligands, such as antibodies, peptides, aptamers, or small molecules, which can recognize and bind to specific receptors on target cells or tissues. This targeted approach enhances drug accumulation at disease sites, minimizes off-target effects, and improves therapeutic efficacy. Surface modification combined with ligand targeting is a key strategy in precision nanomedicine.

### 5.4 Controlled and Stimuli-Responsive Drug Release

Controlled and stimuli-responsive drug release refers to strategies that regulate the timing, location, and rate of drug delivery from nanocarriers. Controlled release ensures a steady, sustained release of drugs over time, maintaining therapeutic levels and reducing dosing frequency. Stimuli-responsive release is triggered by specific internal or external signals, such as pH changes, temperature, redox conditions, enzymes, or light. For example, pH-sensitive nanocarriers release drugs in acidic tumor environments, while temperature-sensitive carriers respond to localized heating. These approaches enhance drug efficacy, reduce side effects, and enable precise targeting, making them highly valuable in advanced nanomedicine.

## 6. Mechanisms of Cellular Uptake and Transport

Nanocarriers enter cells through several mechanisms that determine their efficiency, targeting, and therapeutic effect. Endocytosis is the most common pathway, where cells engulf nanocarriers via vesicles. Endocytosis can be further classified into clathrin-mediated, caveolae-mediated, macropinocytosis, and phagocytosis, depending on particle size, shape, and surface properties. Direct fusion occurs when nanocarriers, such as lipid-based vesicles, merge with the cell membrane to release their cargo directly into the cytoplasm. After uptake, nanocarriers may follow intracellular trafficking pathways, including lysosomal degradation or endosomal escape, which affect drug release and efficacy. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for designing targeted and efficient drug delivery systems.

## 7. Oral Drug Delivery Applications

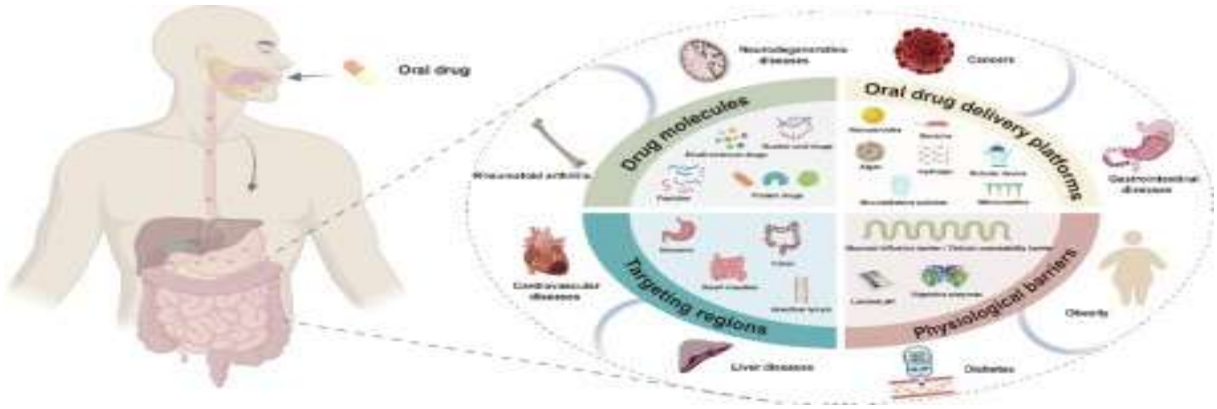


**Fig.4 Oral drug delivery system**

### 7.1 Challenges in Oral Drug Delivery

Oral drug delivery is the most common and convenient route of administration, but it faces several challenges that limit the effectiveness of drugs, especially advanced therapeutics like nanocarriers or biologics. One major issue is low bioavailability, caused by poor solubility, chemical instability in the acidic stomach environment, or degradation by digestive enzymes. Drugs may also undergo first-pass metabolism in the liver, reducing the amount of active drug reaching systemic circulation.

Another challenge is limited absorption, as drugs must cross the intestinal epithelium, which acts as a barrier to large molecules and nanoparticles. Variable gastrointestinal conditions, such as pH, transit time, and enzyme activity, can affect drug stability and absorption. Additionally, drug–food interactions can alter solubility or uptake.

For nanocarrier-based systems, mucus penetration is an added challenge; nanoparticles can become trapped in the mucus layer, reducing effective delivery to epithelial cells. Designing oral formulations that protect the drug, enhance absorption, and provide controlled release remains a critical focus in pharmaceutical research.

### 7.2 Stability in Gastrointestinal Environment

Stability in the gastrointestinal (GI) environment is a critical factor for effective oral drug delivery. The GI tract presents harsh conditions, including acidic pH in the stomach, digestive enzymes, bile salts, and variable ionic strength, all of which can degrade or inactivate drugs and nanocarriers. Poor stability can lead to premature drug release, reduced absorption, and low bioavailability.

Nanocarriers and advanced oral formulations are designed to protect the drug from these conditions using strategies such as pH-sensitive coatings, enzyme inhibitors, or encapsulation in lipid or polymeric matrices. Maintaining structural integrity in the GI tract ensures that the drug reaches the intestinal epithelium intact, where it can be absorbed efficiently, leading to improved therapeutic outcomes.

Ensuring stability in the GI environment is especially important for sensitive molecules such as proteins, peptides, nucleic acids, and plant-derived bioactives, which are otherwise prone to rapid degradation before reaching systemic circulation.

### 7.3 Intestinal Absorption and Bioavailability

Intestinal absorption is a key step in oral drug delivery that determines how much of a drug enters systemic circulation and becomes therapeutically active. Drugs must cross the intestinal epithelium, which acts as a selective barrier, via passive diffusion, active transport, or endocytosis. Nanocarriers can enhance

absorption by protecting drugs from degradation, improving solubility, and facilitating transport across epithelial cells.

Bioavailability refers to the fraction of the administered drug that reaches systemic circulation in an active form. Low bioavailability can result from poor solubility, enzymatic degradation in the GI tract, or first-pass metabolism in the liver. Strategies such as mucoadhesive formulations, lipid-based carriers, and permeation enhancers are used to improve both intestinal absorption and overall bioavailability, ensuring the drug exerts its intended therapeutic effect.

### 7.4 Therapeutic Applications

Nanocarriers have emerged as a powerful platform in modern medicine due to their ability to improve drug delivery, targeting, and efficacy. They are widely applied across various therapeutic areas:

1. Cancer Therapy: Nanocarriers can deliver chemotherapeutic drugs directly to tumor cells, enhancing drug accumulation at the tumor site while minimizing toxicity to healthy tissues. Targeted and stimuli-responsive nanocarriers improve treatment efficiency and reduce side effects.
2. Gene and Nucleic Acid Therapy: Nanocarriers protect sensitive molecules such as DNA, RNA, siRNA, or mRNA from enzymatic degradation and enable their delivery into target cells for gene regulation or protein expression.
3. Neurological Disorders: Certain nanocarriers, including lipid-based and plant-derived vesicles, can cross the blood–brain barrier to deliver drugs for Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and brain tumors.
4. Cardiovascular Diseases: Nanocarriers enhance the delivery of drugs to damaged heart tissue, improving therapeutic outcomes in conditions like myocardial infarction or atherosclerosis.
5. Infectious Diseases: Nanocarriers improve the stability and bioavailability of antimicrobial drugs and vaccines, enabling targeted and controlled delivery to infection sites.
6. Regenerative Medicine and Immunotherapy: Nanocarriers are used to deliver growth factors, anti-inflammatory agents, and immune modulators for tissue repair and immune system modulation.

## 7. Vaginal Drug Delivery Applications

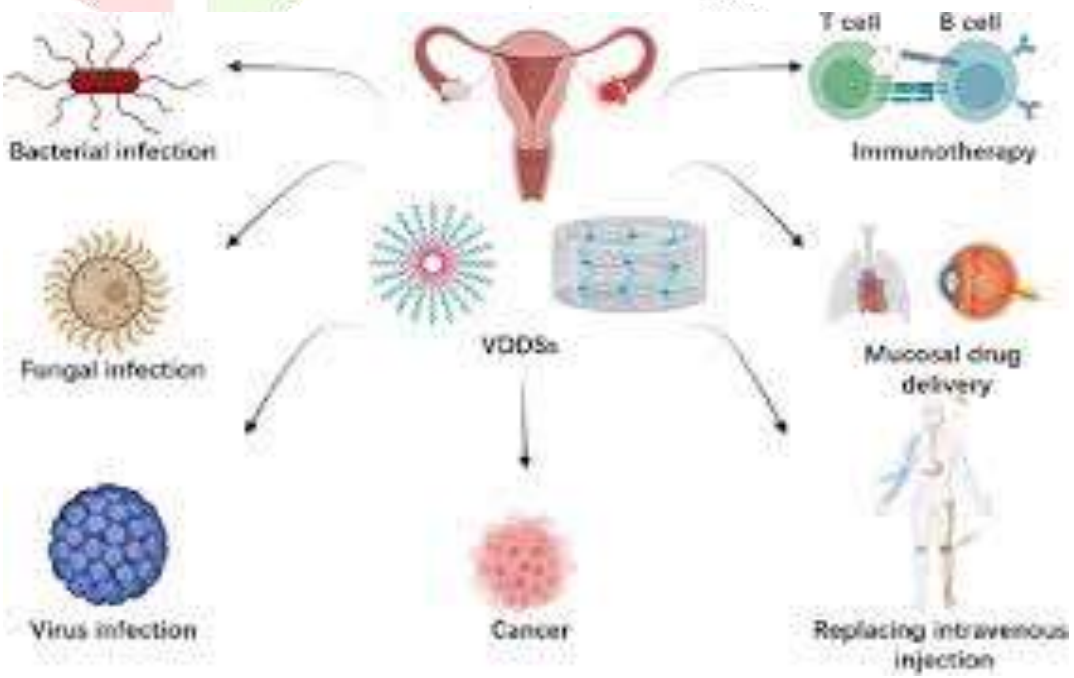


**Fig.5 Vaginal Drug Delivery**

### 8.1 Anatomy and Physiology of Vaginal Mucosa

The vaginal mucosa is the inner lining of the vagina and plays a crucial role in reproductive health, protection against infections, and drug absorption. It is composed of stratified squamous epithelium, which is non-keratinized in adults and multilayered to provide mechanical protection. Beneath the epithelium lies the lamina propria, a connective tissue layer rich in blood vessels, lymphatics, and immune cells, which supports tissue integrity and facilitates nutrient and drug absorption.

The mucosa is covered by a glycogen-rich environment, which is metabolized by resident lactobacilli to produce lactic acid, maintaining an acidic pH (around 3.5–4.5). This acidic environment serves as a natural barrier against pathogens. Vaginal secretions provide lubrication and contain antimicrobial proteins, enzymes, and immunoglobulins that contribute to mucosal immunity.

The vaginal mucosa is highly vascularized, allowing for efficient systemic and local drug absorption, making it an important site for drug delivery. Its permeability, thickness, pH, and enzymatic activity influence the efficacy of vaginal formulations such as gels, tablets, and nanocarrier-based therapeutics.

In summary, the vaginal mucosa is a dynamic tissue combining protective, absorptive, and immune functions, making it both a barrier and a target for localized and systemic drug delivery.

### 8.2 Barriers to Vaginal Drug Delivery

The vaginal route offers advantages for local and systemic drug delivery, but several physiological and anatomical barriers can limit drug absorption and therapeutic efficacy.

1. Mucus Layer: The vaginal mucosa is covered by a mucus layer composed of water, glycoproteins, and enzymes. This mucus can trap or hinder the diffusion of drugs and nanocarriers, reducing their contact with the epithelial surface.
2. Epithelial Barrier: The stratified squamous epithelium acts as a physical barrier, with tight junctions that restrict the passage of large or hydrophilic molecules.
3. Enzymatic Degradation: Vaginal secretions contain enzymes such as proteases and lipases that can degrade drugs, particularly peptides and proteins, before they reach target tissues.
4. pH and Microbiota: The acidic vaginal environment (pH 3.5–4.5) and the presence of resident lactobacilli can influence drug stability and activity. Certain formulations may be destabilized or metabolized by microbial activity.
5. Vaginal Fluid Volume and Clearance: Vaginal secretions, along with natural fluid turnover, can dilute or wash away formulations, reducing residence time and absorption.

### 8.3 Mucoadhesion and Retention of PDENMs

Plant-Derived Extracellular Nanovesicles and Mimetic Nanocarriers (PDENMs) rely on mucoadhesion to enhance retention and therapeutic efficacy in mucosal drug delivery, including vaginal applications. Mucoadhesion refers to the ability of nanocarriers to attach to the mucin layer covering the epithelium. By forming physical or chemical interactions with mucus glycoproteins—through hydrogen bonding, electrostatic interactions, or van der Waals forces—PDENMs can resist natural mucus clearance and prolong residence time at the target site.

Improved retention enhances drug absorption and bioavailability, allowing sustained release of therapeutic agents directly at the mucosal surface. Surface modification of PDENMs with cationic polymers, lectins, or bioadhesive ligands further strengthens their interaction with the negatively charged mucus layer. This strategy also helps overcome barriers such as vaginal fluid turnover and enzymatic degradation, ensuring that encapsulated drugs remain localized long enough to exert their desired effects.

In summary, mucoadhesive properties of PDENMs are critical for prolonged retention, enhanced local delivery, and increased therapeutic efficacy in mucosal drug delivery systems.

### 8.4 Therapeutic Applications

Plant-Derived Extracellular Nanovesicles and Mimetic Nanocarriers (PDENMs) have shown significant potential in various therapeutic applications due to their biocompatibility, stability, and ability to deliver bioactive compounds effectively.

1. Cancer Therapy: PDENMs can deliver chemotherapeutic agents directly to tumor sites, improving drug accumulation, minimizing systemic toxicity, and enhancing antitumor efficacy. Their natural targeting ability and potential for surface functionalization allow selective delivery to cancer cells.
2. Anti-Inflammatory and Immunomodulation: PDENMs carry plant-derived bioactive molecules such as polyphenols, flavonoids, and proteins, which can reduce inflammation, modulate immune responses, and protect tissues from oxidative stress in conditions like inflammatory bowel disease or vaginal infections.
3. Antimicrobial Therapy: PDENMs can transport antimicrobial compounds or natural plant extracts to infection sites, enhancing drug stability and retention while effectively targeting pathogenic bacteria, fungi, or viruses.
4. Regenerative Medicine: PDENMs support tissue repair and wound healing by delivering growth factors, antioxidants, and signaling molecules, promoting cell proliferation, angiogenesis, and tissue regeneration.

## 9. Safety, Toxicity, and Biocompatibility

Plant-Derived Extracellular Nanovesicles and Mimetic Nanocarriers (PDENMs) are considered highly biocompatible and safe due to their natural origin from edible or medicinal plants. Their lipid and protein composition closely resembles biological membranes, which minimizes immunogenicity and reduces the risk of inflammatory or allergic reactions.

Toxicity studies have shown that PDENMs generally exhibit low cytotoxicity in vitro and minimal adverse effects in vivo, even at relatively high doses. Unlike synthetic nanocarriers, they are biodegradable and metabolizable, preventing long-term accumulation in tissues. Their natural components, such as plant-derived lipids and bioactive molecules, can also provide antioxidant or protective effects, further enhancing safety.

However, biocompatibility can vary depending on the plant source, extraction method, and surface modifications, so careful characterization and standardized production are essential. Overall, PDENMs offer a promising and safe platform for drug delivery, combining effective therapeutic potential with low toxicity, making them suitable for clinical applications.

## 10. Regulatory and Translational Considerations

The translation of Plant-Derived Extracellular Nanovesicles and Mimetic Nanocarriers (PDENMs) from research to clinical applications requires careful consideration of regulatory, manufacturing, and safety standards. Regulatory authorities, such as the FDA and EMA, emphasize quality, reproducibility, and safety for approval of nanocarrier-based therapeutics. Key considerations include standardization of production, including consistent extraction, purification, and characterization methods to ensure uniform particle size, composition, and bioactivity.

Safety and toxicity assessment is critical, including in vitro cytotoxicity studies, immunogenicity evaluation, and in vivo pharmacokinetics and biodistribution. The scalability and stability of PDENMs must be demonstrated for large-scale manufacturing, storage, and distribution. Additionally, regulatory

guidelines require thorough documentation of encapsulation efficiency, drug release profiles, and batch-to-batch reproducibility.

Intellectual property, cost-effectiveness, and clinical trial design are also important for successful translation. Overcoming these challenges will enable PDENMs to move from laboratory research into therapeutic applications, offering safe, effective, and targeted drug delivery solutions.

**11. Comparison with Other Nanocarrier Systems**

Plant-Derived Extracellular Nanovesicles and Mimetic Nanocarriers (PDENMs) offer unique advantages compared to conventional nanocarriers such as liposomes, polymeric nanoparticles, and inorganic nanoparticles.

1. Biocompatibility and Safety: PDENMs are naturally derived from edible plants, which gives them low immunogenicity and toxicity, whereas synthetic carriers may trigger immune responses or long-term accumulation.
2. Stability and Protection: PDENMs inherently protect their cargo from enzymatic degradation and harsh physiological conditions, similar to liposomes, but with added bioactive properties from plant components.
3. Targeting and Uptake: Like engineered exosome-mimetic carriers, PDENMs can exhibit natural targeting abilities and enhanced cellular uptake, but without the complex modifications often required for synthetic carriers.
4. Drug Loading and Release: PDENMs allow encapsulation of both hydrophilic and hydrophobic drugs with controlled or sustained release, though polymeric nanoparticles may offer more precise control over release kinetics.
5. Sustainability and Cost: PDENMs are derived from renewable plant sources, making them more eco-friendly and cost-effective compared to synthetic or inorganic nanocarriers that require expensive materials and processes.

**12. Current Challenges and Limitations**

1. Low Yield and Scalability: Natural extraction of PDENMs from plants often produces low quantities, making large-scale production difficult. Standardized, high-yield methods are still under development.

2. Heterogeneity: PDENMs vary in size, composition, and bioactive content depending on the plant source, growth conditions, and extraction method, leading to batch-to-batch variability.

3. Stability Issues: While PDENMs protect encapsulated drugs, they may still be sensitive to storage conditions, temperature, pH, and enzymatic degradation, requiring optimized formulations for long-term stability.

4. Limited Understanding of Mechanisms: The cellular uptake, biodistribution, and pharmacokinetics of PDENMs are not yet fully understood, complicating prediction of therapeutic efficacy.

5. Regulatory Hurdles: Lack of standardized protocols and regulatory guidelines for plant-derived nanocarriers slows clinical translation and commercialization.

6. Drug Loading Limitations: Passive loading may result in low encapsulation efficiency for certain drugs, and active loading methods are still being optimized.

## 13. Future Perspectives and Research Directions

Plant-Derived Extracellular Nanovesicles and Mimetic Nanocarriers (PDENMs) represent a rapidly advancing field in nanomedicine, with immense potential for safe, targeted, and sustainable drug delivery. Future research is focused on overcoming current limitations and expanding their therapeutic applications.

1. Enhanced Production and Standardization: Developing scalable, reproducible extraction and fabrication techniques is crucial to produce PDENMs with uniform size, composition, and bioactivity. Biotechnological approaches and optimized plant cultivation could improve yield and quality.
2. Advanced Drug Loading Strategies: Combining passive and active loading methods, or engineering PDENMs with stimuli-responsive systems, could increase encapsulation efficiency and allow controlled, site-specific drug release.
3. Surface Engineering and Targeting: Functionalization with ligands, antibodies, or peptides can improve tissue-specific targeting and cellular uptake, enhancing therapeutic efficacy while minimizing off-target effects.
4. Mechanistic Studies: Comprehensive investigations into biodistribution, cellular uptake, intracellular trafficking, and pharmacokinetics will help optimize design and predict in vivo behavior.
5. Clinical Translation: Research must focus on long-term safety, immunogenicity, and regulatory compliance to facilitate clinical trials and commercialization.

## 14. Conclusion

Plant-derived exosome-mimetic nanocarriers (PDENMs) represent a promising and biologically safe platform for both oral and vaginal drug delivery. These naturally derived vesicles and their engineered mimetics combine the advantages of biocompatibility, biodegradability, low immunogenicity, and stability under physiological conditions, which make them particularly attractive for delivering a wide range of therapeutic agents—including small molecules, nucleic acids, and biologics. Their ability to withstand harsh environments such as the gastrointestinal tract and to interact effectively with mucosal tissues addresses critical barriers faced by conventional drug delivery systems and enhances drug absorption and bioavailability. PDENMs also offer the potential for targeted and controlled drug release through surface modification and functionalization strategies. Despite significant progress, real-world clinical translation requires standardization of isolation methods, scalable production processes, and comprehensive safety and regulatory evaluation. Future research that integrates advanced fabrication, functional targeting, and translational validation could enable PDENMs to revolutionize mucosal drug delivery for systemic and localized therapies.

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