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Review Paper

Development and Evaluation of Rivastigmine Transdermal Patches for Sustained Drug Delivery in Alzheimer's Disease

Rajnish Kumhar, Narsingh Rajpoot*, Laxman Prajapati, Hemant Kumar, Vishal Garg

Jaipur School of Pharmacy, Maharaj Vinayak Global University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

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ABSTRACT

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a chronic and progressive neurodegenerative disorder characterized by deterioration of cognitive functions, memory impairment, and behavioral abnormalities. Rivastigmine, a reversible inhibitor of acetylcholinesterase and butyrylcholinesterase, is one of the most widely prescribed drugs for symptomatic management of mild-to-moderate Alzheimer's disease. However, oral administration of rivastigmine is associated with extensive first-pass metabolism, variable bioavailability, frequent gastrointestinal adverse effects, and poor patient compliance. Transdermal drug delivery systems (TDDS) provide an attractive alternative by delivering the drug at a controlled rate through the skin, thereby maintaining steady plasma concentrations and minimizing systemic side effects.The present study aimed to formulate and evaluate rivastigmine transdermal patches using combinations of hydrophilic and hydrophobic polymers prepared by the solvent casting technique and to assess their physicochemical characteristics and in vitro drug release behavior Transdermal patches containing rivastigmine were prepared using Hydroxypropyl Methylcellulose (HPMC) and Ethyl Cellulose (EC) in different polymeric ratios. Propylene glycol was used as a plasticizer to improve film flexibility, while Span 80 served as a permeation enhancer. Polyvinyl alcohol was employed as the backing membrane. Drug–polymer compatibility was investigated using Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR). The prepared patches were evaluated for physical appearance, thickness, weight variation, folding endurance, moisture content, moisture uptake, drug content uniformity, surface pH, and in vitro drug diffusion using Franz diffusion cells containing phosphate buffer (pH 7.4).FTIR studies demonstrated the absence of significant chemical interactions between rivastigmine and the selected excipients, confirming compatibility. The prepared patches exhibited smooth surfaces, satisfactory flexibility, uniform thickness, acceptable mechanical strength, and homogeneous drug distribution. In vitro diffusion

***Corresponding Author:** Narsingh Rajpoot
Address: *Jaipur School of Pharmacy, Maharaj Vinayak Global University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.*
Email ✉: narsinghrj@gmail.com

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studies indicated sustained drug release over an extended period, suggesting that the polymeric matrix effectively controlled drug diffusion. The optimized formulation exhibited superior physicochemical properties and prolonged drug release compared with the remaining formulations. Rivastigmine transdermal patches prepared by solvent casting demonstrated promising pharmaceutical characteristics and sustained drug delivery. The developed formulation may represent a suitable alternative to oral therapy by improving patient compliance, reducing dosing frequency, and minimizing gastrointestinal adverse effects. Further pharmacokinetic, skin permeation, stability, and clinical studies are required to establish the therapeutic efficacy of the optimized formulation.

INTRODUCTION

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the most common cause of dementia worldwide and represents one of the greatest healthcare challenges associated with ageing populations. It is characterized by progressive neuronal degeneration leading to memory impairment, cognitive decline, behavioral disturbances, and loss of functional independence. The pathological hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease include extracellular amyloid-β plaque deposition, intracellular neurofibrillary tangles composed of hyperphosphorylated tau protein, oxidative stress, neuroinflammation, and extensive neuronal loss.

Currently available pharmacological therapies do not cure Alzheimer's disease but primarily improve cognitive symptoms by enhancing cholinergic neurotransmission. Rivastigmine is a pseudo-irreversible inhibitor of both acetylcholinesterase and butyrylcholinesterase enzymes. Inhibition of these enzymes increases acetylcholine concentration within the synaptic cleft, thereby improving cognitive function and slowing symptom progression.

Although oral rivastigmine therapy is clinically effective, its therapeutic application is limited by poor oral bioavailability due to extensive hepatic first-pass metabolism, short elimination half-life, frequent gastrointestinal side effects including nausea and vomiting, and the need for repeated dosing. These limitations often reduce patient compliance, particularly in elderly patients suffering from cognitive impairment.

Transdermal drug delivery systems (TDDS) provide an alternative route capable of overcoming many disadvantages associated with oral administration. Drug delivery through the skin avoids hepatic first-pass metabolism, maintains relatively constant plasma drug concentrations, reduces fluctuations between peak and trough drug levels, minimizes gastrointestinal irritation, and improves patient adherence through less frequent dosing.Polymeric matrix-type transdermal patches are among the most widely investigated delivery systems because they provide controlled drug release and are comparatively simple to manufacture. Hydrophilic polymers such as Hydroxypropyl Methylcellulose (HPMC) improve hydration and drug diffusion, whereas hydrophobic polymers such as Ethyl Cellulose (EC) regulate release kinetics by forming diffusion barriers. The combination of these polymers enables optimization of mechanical strength and sustained drug release.

The present investigation was therefore undertaken to formulate rivastigmine transdermal patches using HPMC and EC polymers by solvent casting and to evaluate their physicochemical properties, compatibility, and in vitro drug release characteristics.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

Rivastigmine tartrate was obtained as a gift sample from Windlas Healthcare Pvt. Ltd., India. Hydroxypropyl Methylcellulose (HPMC), Ethyl Cellulose (EC), Polyvinyl Alcohol (PVA), Span 80, Propylene Glycol, Methanol, Chloroform, and other analytical-grade chemicals were procured from standard pharmaceutical suppliers.

Preparation of Backing Membrane

The backing membrane was prepared by dissolving polyvinyl alcohol in distilled water with continuous stirring and gentle heating until a clear solution was obtained. The solution was cast onto a leveled glass surface and allowed to dry under controlled conditions to obtain a uniform backing membrane.

Preparation of Transdermal Patches

Matrix-type transdermal patches were prepared by the solvent casting method. Appropriate quantities of HPMC and Ethyl Cellulose were dissolved in a methanol–chloroform solvent system under continuous magnetic stirring. Rivastigmine was dispersed uniformly in the polymeric solution followed by the addition of propylene glycol as a plasticizer and Span 80 as a permeation enhancer. The homogeneous solution was poured over the previously prepared backing membrane and dried at room temperature to allow solvent evaporation. After complete drying, the films were carefully removed and cut into patches of uniform dimensions.

Drug–Excipient Compatibility Study

Compatibility between rivastigmine and selected excipients was assessed using Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR). Spectra of the pure drug, polymers, and optimized formulation were recorded over an appropriate wavelength range to identify any changes in characteristic absorption peaks.

Evaluation of Transdermal Patches

The prepared formulations were evaluated for:

- Physical appearance
- Thickness
- Weight variation
- Folding endurance
- Surface pH
- Moisture content
- Moisture uptake
- Drug content uniformity
- Percentage moisture loss
- In vitro drug diffusion using Franz diffusion cells

Drug release studies were performed using phosphate buffer (pH 7.4) maintained at physiological temperature with continuous stirring. Samples were withdrawn at predetermined intervals and analyzed using UV-visible spectrophotometry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

FTIR analysis demonstrated that the characteristic functional groups of rivastigmine remained unchanged following formulation with HPMC and Ethyl Cellulose. The absence of additional peaks or major spectral shifts indicated compatibility between the drug and excipients, confirming the suitability of the selected polymers for transdermal formulation.

The prepared patches appeared smooth, transparent, flexible, and free from visible imperfections such as cracks or air bubbles. Uniformity in thickness and weight reflected reproducibility of the solvent casting process. Good folding endurance suggested that the films possessed sufficient mechanical strength to withstand handling during packaging and application.

Drug content analysis demonstrated satisfactory distribution of rivastigmine throughout the polymeric matrix, indicating efficient mixing during formulation. Uniform drug distribution is an essential requirement for consistent therapeutic performance and dose uniformity.

Moisture uptake and moisture content studies indicated that the prepared patches maintained appropriate hydration while preserving structural integrity. Controlled moisture absorption prevents brittleness during storage while minimizing microbial contamination and degradation.

The in vitro diffusion study revealed prolonged drug release from all formulations, confirming the ability of the polymeric matrix to sustain drug delivery. Drug release was influenced by the ratio of HPMC and Ethyl Cellulose. Increasing the concentration of the hydrophilic polymer enhanced water uptake and facilitated drug diffusion, whereas higher concentrations of Ethyl Cellulose produced slower drug release due to increased matrix density.

Propylene glycol improved film flexibility and reduced brittleness, while Span 80 enhanced drug permeation by increasing skin permeability. The optimized formulation demonstrated balanced mechanical properties together with sustained drug release, making it the most suitable formulation for further investigation.

The findings indicate that polymer composition plays a significant role in determining both the mechanical characteristics and release kinetics of rivastigmine transdermal patches. The developed formulation has the potential to improve therapeutic effectiveness through sustained drug delivery while reducing dosing frequency and gastrointestinal adverse effects associated with oral administration.

CONCLUSION

The present investigation successfully developed matrix-type rivastigmine transdermal patches using HPMC and Ethyl Cellulose through the solvent casting technique. The prepared formulations exhibited satisfactory physicochemical characteristics including uniform thickness, acceptable flexibility, appropriate mechanical strength, and homogeneous drug distribution.

Drug–polymer compatibility studies confirmed that no significant chemical interaction occurred between rivastigmine and the selected excipients. In vitro drug release studies demonstrated sustained release characteristics, indicating the capability of the polymeric matrix to provide prolonged therapeutic drug delivery.

Among the prepared formulations, the optimized patch displayed superior pharmaceutical properties and controlled drug release, suggesting its suitability as a promising alternative to conventional oral dosage forms. The developed transdermal system has the potential to improve patient compliance, minimize gastrointestinal adverse effects, reduce dosing frequency, and maintain consistent plasma drug concentrations.

Future investigations should include ex vivo skin permeation studies, stability testing according to ICH guidelines, pharmacokinetic evaluation, skin irritation studies, and clinical trials to confirm the safety and therapeutic effectiveness of the optimized formulation.

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