The Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (TJMDR)

Content Available www.saap.org.in ISSN: 2583-0317

POLYMERIC NANOPARTICLES IN MODERN OPTHALMIC FORMULATION

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Article History: Received: 26 Feb 2026 Revised: 19 Mar 2026 Accepted: 04 May 2026

Abstract: Ophthalmic drug delivery presents significant therapeutic challenges due to anatomical and physiological barriers that restrict drug penetration into ocular tissues. Conventional dosage forms such as eye drops and ointments exhibit limited drug retention and rapid precorneal elimination, resulting in poor therapeutic outcomes. Nanotechnology-based delivery systems have emerged as promising approaches to enhance ocular drug bioavailability and therapeutic effectiveness through improved drug penetration and targeted delivery. Nanocarriers including dendrimers, polymeric nanoparticles, and nanofibers enable sustained drug release and protection of therapeutic agents from degradation. Nanomedicine-based systems also provide improved ocular penetration, reduced dosing frequency, and minimized toxicity, thereby enhancing patient compliance.

Keywords: Nano technology, ophthalmic drug delivery, nano carriers, polymeric nanoparticles.

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Produced and Published by
South Asian Academic Publications

INTRODUCTION

Ocular diseases are a major cause of visual impairment and blindness worldwide, necessitating the development of effective drug delivery strategies to improve therapeutic outcomes. The eye possesses complex anatomical and physiological barriers that limit drug penetration and reduce drug bioavailability, making ocular drug delivery particularly challenging. The cornea, conjunctiva, and sclera act as physical and biological barriers that regulate the entry of therapeutic agents into ocular tissues [1]. The ocular surface is continuously exposed to environmental conditions and physiological defense mechanisms such as tear secretion and blinking reflex, which contribute to rapid drug elimination. Tear turnover and nasolacrimal drainage significantly reduce drug residence time, resulting in decreased drug absorption and therapeutic efficacy. Furthermore, blood-ocular barriers including the blood-aqueous barrier and blood-retinal barrier restrict systemic drug entry into ocular tissues and limit drug delivery to the posterior segment of the eye.Traditional ophthalmic formulations such as eye drops, gels, and ointments exhibit low drug retention and require frequent administration to maintain therapeutic drug concentration. Frequent dosing may reduce patient compliance and increase the risk of systemic side effects due to drug drainage into systemic circulation [2].These limitations highlight the need for advanced drug delivery approaches capable of improving drug bioavailability and therapeutic efficiency in ocular tissues Nanotechnology-based drug delivery systems have gained considerable attention in recent years due to their ability to overcome conventional drug delivery barriers. Nanocarriers possess unique physicochemical properties including nanoscale size, large surface area, and enhanced drug loading capacity, which facilitate improved drug penetration and targeted delivery .These properties enable controlled and sustained drug release, thereby reducing dosing frequency and improving therapeutic effectiveness Various nanocarrier systems such as dendrimers, polymeric micelles, nanofibers, and nanoparticles have demonstrated promising results in ocular drug delivery applications. Dendrimers have shown potential in enhancing drug solubility and cellular uptake due to their branched molecular structure and surface functionalization capability.

1. OCULAR PROTECTIVE MECHANISMS

The eye is a highly specialized sensory organ responsible for photoreception and visual signal transmission to the brain. Its structural organization ensures precise light refraction, phototransduction, and neural processing. In addition to its optical function, the eye possesses multiple protective barriers that regulate molecular transport and maintain ocular homeostasis [3].

1.1. Gross anatomy of eye

Anatomically, the eye can be divided into three principal layers (tunics) and two internal segments (anterior and posterior compartments).

1.1.1. Fibrous tunic layer [outer layer]

The fibrous coat forms the external supportive framework of the globe and consists of;

a.cornea

The cornea is a transparent, avascular tissue located at the anterior portion of the eye. It serves as the primary refractive surface, contributing significantly to the eye's focusing power. Histologically, it comprises five layers:

Corneal epithelium
Bowman's membrane
Stroma
Descemet's membrane
Endothelium

a.sclera

The sclera is a dense connective tissue structure that provides mechanical strength and maintains the spherical shape of the eye. It also serves as the attachment site for extraocular muscles.

1.1.2 Vascular tunic [middle layer]

Iris
Ciliary body
Choroid

1.1.3.Neutraltunic[inner layer]

Retina
Bipolar cells
Ganglion cells

1.2.Internal compartments of eye

1.2.1.Anterior segment

The anterior segment includes:

cornea
Anterior chamber (aqueous humor-filled space between cornea and iris)
Posterior chamber (between iris and lens)
lens

The aqueous humor maintains intraocular pressure and provides nutrients to avascular structures.

1.2.2. Posterior segment

The posterior segment comprises:

Vitrous humour
Retina
Choroid
Optic nerve

1.2.OCULAR BARRIERS

1.2.1. Tea film barrier

The precorneal tear film is the first protective interface encountered by topically administered agents. It consists of:

Lipid layer
Aqeous layer
Mucin layer.

1.2.2. Corneal barrier

The cornea epithelium presents a biphasic permeability barrier:

The acts as a lipophilic barrier due to tight junctions.
The stroma is hydrophilic and restricts lipophilic substances.
This dual nature limits drug penetration unless compounds possess balanced solubility characteristics.

1.2.3.Conjuctival barrier

The conjunctiva is a vascularized mucous membrane with relatively higher permeability than the cornea. However, systemic absorption via conjunctival blood vessels may reduce intraocular drug availability [4-5].

1.2.4..Blood aqueous barrier [BAB]

The blood–aqueous barrier regulates solute exchange between systemic circulation and aqueous humor. It is formed by:

Tight junctions in the non-pigmented ciliary epithelium
Endothelial cells of iris vasculature

This barrier maintains anterior chamber immune privilege and biochemical stability.

1.2.5.. Blood retinal barrier[BRB]

The blood–retinal barrier preserves retinal microenvironment integrity and is structurally comparable to the blood–brain barrier.

The BRB strictly controls molecular transport, significantly limiting systemic drug entry into theretina.

2. OPTHALMIC PATHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS

A broad spectrum of disorders can compromise the structure and function of the visual apparatus, with several hundred clinical entities reported to date. The prevalence of these ophthalmic conditions continues to rise owing to aging populations, lifestyle changes, and increased visual strain. Collectively, such diseases represent a substantial global health.

2.1 Progressiveoptic neuropathy due to glaucoma

Glaucoma is a chronic neurodegenerative condition characterized by progressive damage to the optic nerve and gradual loss of the visual field. Elevated intraocular pressure is considered a principal risk factor contributing to retinal ganglion cell degeneration and vascular compromise [6].

2.2. Age related degenerative macular disease [AMD]

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a degenerative retinal disorder affecting the central macula and is a major cause of severe vision loss among the elderly. The disease is clinically classified into early and advanced forms, with the latter including neovascular and atrophic variants.

2.3Hyperglycemia-associated retinal microvascular disease

Diabetic retinopathy represents a microvascular consequence of chronic hyperglycemia and is one of the leading causes of preventable blindness worldwide. Progressive vascular leakage, ischemia, and pathological revascularization contribute to retinal dysfunction [7].

3. OBSTACLES IN OCULAR DRUG ADMINISTARATIOON

Ocular drug delivery is significantly limited by several anatomical, physiological, and biochemical constraints that reduce drug bioavailability and therapeutic efficacy. These barriers can be broadly classified as follows;

3.1Pre -corneal constraints

Rapid tear turnover, reflex blinking, nasolacrimal drainage, and tear dilution markedly decrease the contact time of topically administered drugs on the ocular surface, resulting in poor drug absorption.

3.2. Corneal epithelial barrier

The cornea acts as a selective permeability barrier due to its multilayered structure. The lipophilic epithelium restricts hydrophilic drugs, while the hydrophilic stroma limits lipophilic drug penetration, thereby reducing transcorneal absorption

3.3.Conjuctival barrier

Although more permeable than the cornea, the conjunctiva possesses tight junctions and a rich blood supply that facilitate systemic absorption, lowering ocular drug availability.

3.5. Blood retinal barrier [BRB]

The inner and outer BRB significantly limit drug penetration into the posterior segment of the eye, making retinal drug delivery particularly challenging [8].

4. TRADITIONAL OPTHALMIC DRUG DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Ocular drug delivery remains a significant pharmaceutical challenge due to the complex anatomical and physiological barriers of the eye. The eye possesses protective mechanisms, including tear turnover, blinking reflex, nasolacrimal drainage, and corneal epithelial tight junctions, which collectively limit drug residence time and ocular bioavailability [9]..

4.1.Types of traditional ophthalmic drug delivery systems

4.1.1.Opthalmic solutions

Ophthalmic solutions are sterile, aqueous preparations containing one or more dissolved active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs). They represent the most commonly prescribed ocular dosage form due to their simplicity, convenience, and minimal interference with vision.

4.1.2 Opthalmic suspensions

Ophthalmic suspensions consist of finely dispersed insoluble drug particles in an aqueous vehicle. These formulations are particularly suitable for poorly water-soluble drugs. Suspensions may provide slightly prolonged drug residence compared to solutions [10].

4.1.3.Opthalmic emulsions

Ophthalmic emulsions are biphasic systems composed of oil and water phases stabilized by emulsifying agents. These formulations enhance solubility of lipophilic drugs and improve corneal penetration.

5. NANOMEDICINE - BASED OPHALMIC DELIVERY PLATFORMS

Nanotechnology-oriented drug delivery platforms have emerged as advanced strategies to enhance ocular therapeutics. These nanoscale carriers improve drug permeability, prolong retention time on the ocular surface, and increase bioavailability [11].

5.1.Nanoparticles

Nanoparticles are microscopic carriers typically ranging between 1–1000 nm in size and are commonly fabricated using biodegradable polymers. These systems enhance the stability of therapeutic agents

5.2. Liposomes

Liposomes are vesicular systems composed of phospholipid bilayers enclosing an aqueous core. Liposomes promote prolonged drug residence on ocular tissues, reduce toxicity, and enhance corneal permeability.

5.3.Nanoemulsion

Nanoemulsions are thermodynamically stable dispersions consisting of oil, water, surfactants, and co-surfactants with droplet sizes in the nanometer range. These systems improve solubility of poorly water-soluble drugs

5.4. Nanomicells

Nanomicelles are self-assembled amphiphilic structures that form when surfactant molecules arrange in aqueous environments. They are particularly useful for delivering hydrophobicdrugs. Nanomicelles enhance drug solubility, increase corneal permeability, and improve therapeutic efficiency while reducing ocular irritation [12].

6. NANOFORMULATION COMPONENTS FOR OPTHALMIC TREATMENT

Nanomedicine has emerged as a transformative approach in ocular therapeutics, offering innovative solutions to overcome the anatomical and physiological barriers of the eye. Conventional ophthalmic formulations often suffer from limited bioavailability [13].

6.1. Fundamental components of nanomedicine in ophthalmic treatment

6.1.1 Nanocarrier matrix materials

The structural framework of nanomedicine systems is formed by biodegradable and biocompatible materials that encapsulate or adsorb the therapeutic agent.

6.1.1.1 Polymeric materials

Biodegradable polymers such as poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid) (PLGA), chitosan, alginate, and polycaprolactone (PCL) are extensively utilized in nanoparticle fabrication. These polymers facilitate sustained drug release, protect labile drugs from degradation, and enhance corneal adhesion.

6.1.1.2 Lipid based materials

Lipid nanocarriers, including solid lipid nanoparticles (SLNs) and nanostructured lipid carriers (NLCs),

employ physiological lipids to enhance drug compatibility and minimize toxicity. These systems are particularly suitable for lipophilic drugs and offer improved ocular tolerance [14].

6.1.2 Active pharmaceutical ingredients

The therapeutic agent incorporated within nanocarriers may include:

- Anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g., corticosteroids, NSAIDs)
- Immunomodulators

Nano-encapsulation enhances drug solubility, protects unstable molecules, and allows sustained release, thereby reducing dosing frequency and systemic exposure.

6.1.3.Surface modifiers and targeting ligands

Surface engineering is a critical component of ophthalmic nanomedicine. Functionalization improves ocular residence time, cellular uptake, and tissue specificity [15].

7. NANO FORMULATION TYPES

These advanced systems enhance corneal permeability, increase precorneal residence time, and improve ocular bioavailability.

7.1.Polymeric nanoparticles

Polymeric nanoparticles are solid colloidal carriers in which drugs may either be entrapped within a polymer matrix (nanospheres) or encapsulated within a polymeric shell (nanocapsules). These systems enhance drug stability and provide sustained drug release across ocular tissues.

7.2.Liposomes

Liposomes are spherical vesicles composed of phospholipid bilayers capable of encapsulating both hydrophilic and lipophilic drugs. Due to their structural similarity to biological membranes, they exhibit good biocompatibility and enhanced ocular retention.

7.3 Niosomes

Niosomes are vesicular systems prepared using non-ionic surfactants and cholesterol. These systems improve drug stability and prolong contact time with ocular tissues.

8. THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL AND LIMITATIONS OF NANO SYSTEMS

These systems are designed to enhance drug biosvsilsbility, improve targeting efficiency and overcome physiological barriers associated with traditional formulations.

8.1 Therapeutic potential

- Enhanced ocular bioavailability
- Controlled and sustained drug release

8.2 Limitations

- Toxicological concerns
- Stability issues.

9. ADVANCED THERAPEUTIC USES OF NANOCARRIER BASED OPTHALMIC DISORDERS

They have shown significant potential in the management of various anterior and posterior segment ocular disorders. These advanced systems enhance drug bioavailability, prolong ocular residence time, and improve targeted delivery compared to conventional ophthalmic preparations.

9.1.Glaucoma

Nanoparticle-based formulations, liposomes, and nanoemulsions have been investigated for sustained intraocular pressure (IOP) reduction in glaucoma therapy. These nanoformulations improve corneal penetration and provide prolonged drug release, thereby reducing dosing frequency and improving patient compliance.

9.2. Inflammatory eye disorderss

Nanocarrier systems including polymeric nanoparticles and liposomes have been explored for delivering anti-inflammatory drugs in conditions such as uveitis and postoperative inflammation. Controlled drug release reduces irritation and systemic side effects.

9.3. Dry eye syndrome

Nanoemulsions and lipid-based nanosystems improve tear film stability and enhance the bioavailability of lubricants and anti-inflammatory agents used in dry eye management.

10. EMERGING TRENDS.

10.1. Precision targrtting through surface enginnering

Future research is increasingly directed toward surface-modified and ligand-functionalized nanoparticles capable of interacting specifically with ocular tissues. Such targeted nanocarriers may improve drug localization in retinal and corneal tissues while reducing systemic exposure and adverse reactions.

10.2.Advancement in lipid based nanocarriers

Solid lipid nanoparticles (SLNs) and nanostructured lipid carriers (NLCs) are projected to undergo further optimization to improve drug loading capacity, stability, and controlled release behavior [16].

10.3. Enhanced posterior segment delivery

One of the most significant future objectives is non-invasive delivery of therapeutics to the posterior segment of the eye. Overcoming barriers such as the corneal epithelium, blood–aqueous barrier, and blood-retinal barrier remains a major challenge.

11. CONCLUSION

Nanotechnology-based ocular drug delivery systems, also referred to as nano-enabled therapeutic platforms, nanocarrier-based systems, and nanoscale ophthalmic formulations, represent a significant advancement over conventional ophthalmic dosage forms. The reviewed articles emphasize that these systems improve corneal penetration, enhance drug bioavailability, prolong precorneal residence time, and enable controlled or sustained drug release. Various nanoformulations-including polymeric nanoparticles, liposomes,

nanoemulsions, solid lipid nanoparticles (SLNs), nanostructured lipid carriers (NLCs), dendrimers, and nanosuspensions-have demonstrated promising therapeutic potential in managing ocular disorders such as glaucoma, infections, inflammation, and posterior segment diseases. The articles further highlight that nano-based systems enhance drug solubility and targeting efficiency while reducing dosing frequency and minimizing systemic exposure .

12. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors are contributed equally.

13. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

None

14. DECLARATION COMPETING INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

15. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None

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