MANTECH Publications
Journal of Dravyaguna Vigyan, Rasashastra & Bhaishajya Kalpana
Volume 4, Issue 2, July-December, 2025

Pharmacokinetics (ADME) and Bioavailability of Key Ayurvedic Actives from Classical Formulations and Novel Carriers: An Integrated Approach towards Scientific Validation and Therapeutic Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, relies heavily on herbal formulations and polyherbal combinations. The therapeutic potential of Ayurvedic actives is well documented; however, their clinical translation often faces limitations due to poor pharmacokinetic profiles, low solubility, instability, and poor oral bioavailability. The pharmacokinetic aspects—Absorption, Distribution, Metabolism, and Excretion (ADME)—are critical in determining therapeutic success. Modern analytical approaches have begun to unravel the complexities of Ayurvedic actives like curcumin, piperine, withanolides, and boswellic acids. Classical formulations such as Chyawanprash, Triphala, and Dashmool combine synergistic herbs to enhance bioavailability, while novel delivery systems such as nanoparticles, liposomes, phytosomes, and nanoemulsions are being developed to overcome pharmacokinetic limitations. This paper critically reviews pharmacokinetics and bioavailability of key Ayurvedic actives, highlighting the integration of traditional knowledge with modern drug delivery strategies to enhance therapeutic outcomes.

KEYWORDS: *Pharmacokinetics, ADME, Ayurveda, Bioavailability, Herbal actives, Classical formulations, Novel carriers, Nanotechnology*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the traditional system of medicine that has evolved in the Indian subcontinent for over 3,000 years, emphasizes holistic health through the balance of body, mind, and spirit. It relies primarily on herbal formulations, minerals, and polyherbal combinations that are carefully designed for therapeutic efficacy and safety. With globalization and rising interest in natural therapies, Ayurvedic medicines are increasingly recognized worldwide. However, one of the primary barriers to their widespread clinical acceptance lies in the limited scientific understanding of their pharmacokinetics—specifically absorption, distribution, metabolism, and excretion (ADME)—and their systemic bioavailability.

Importance of Pharmacokinetics in Ayurveda

Pharmacokinetics governs the fate of a drug molecule inside the body. For herbal actives, understanding ADME is essential for correlating pharmacological activity with plasma concentrations and tissue distribution. Many Ayurvedic actives such as curcumin, boswellic acids, and withanolides demonstrate remarkable effects in preclinical studies but show poor systemic exposure due to low solubility, poor permeability, and rapid metabolism. This pharmacokinetic gap contributes to inconsistencies in clinical efficacy and limits their therapeutic translation.

Ayurvedic Concepts Parallel to Pharmacokinetics

Interestingly, Ayurveda already recognizes the importance of drug transport and metabolism through unique concepts. The role of *Agni* (digestive fire) in assimilation, *Rasa Dhatu* in systemic circulation, and *Mala* in excretion show conceptual parallels to modern ADME. Additionally, the concept of *Anupana* (vehicle) and *Yogavahi* (bioenhancers such as piperine) reflect ancient knowledge of enhancing bioavailability, which modern pharmacology has only recently validated. These correlations provide a valuable platform for bridging traditional wisdom with modern biomedical sciences.

Challenges in Bioavailability of Herbal Actives

A large proportion of Ayurvedic actives are lipophilic, unstable in gastrointestinal conditions, or subject to extensive first-pass metabolism. For instance, curcumin exhibits less than 1% oral bioavailability, while boswellic acids show poor gastrointestinal absorption. Such limitations

not only reduce therapeutic efficacy but also hinder standardization and dose optimization in clinical settings.

Need for Novel Approaches

To address these challenges, modern research focuses on integrating advanced drug delivery systems with Ayurvedic formulations. Nanoparticles, phytosomes, liposomes, and nanoemulsions are being increasingly studied to overcome limitations of poor solubility and rapid elimination. Comparative studies between classical polyherbal formulations like Chyawanprash or Triphala and modern carriers reveal synergistic opportunities for optimizing therapeutic outcomes.

Rationale of the Study

Thus, investigating the pharmacokinetics and bioavailability of Ayurvedic actives in both classical formulations and novel carriers is crucial. It not only validates traditional therapeutic claims but also paves the way for global recognition of Ayurveda as a scientifically robust healthcare system. This integrative approach holds promise for developing safe, effective, and evidence-based natural medicines in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pharmacokinetics of Ayurvedic Actives

Table 1: Pharmacokinetic Limitations of Key Ayurvedic Actives

Ayurvedic Active	**Major Pharmacological Activity**	**Limitation in ADME**	**Reported Bioavailability**
Curcumin (*Curcuma longa*)	Anti-inflammatory, anticancer	Poor solubility, rapid metabolism	<1% (oral)
Piperine (*Piper nigrum*)	Bioenhancer, antioxidant	Low water solubility	Variable, enhances others up to 2000%
Withanolides (*Withania somnifera*)	Neuroprotective, immunomodulatory	Low solubility, poor systemic distribution	Limited plasma concentration

Ayurvedic Active	Major Pharmacological Activity	Limitation in ADME	Reported Bioavailability
Boswellic acids (*Boswellia serrata*)	Anti-arthritic, anti-inflammatory	Poor GI absorption	<5% oral
Guggulsterones (*Commiphora mukul*)	Hypolipidemic, anti-inflammatory	Low bioavailability due to metabolism	Variable

- **Curcumin (*Curcuma longa*):** Exhibits poor aqueous solubility and rapid metabolism, leading to negligible oral bioavailability. Despite potent anti-inflammatory and anticancer properties, curcumin shows minimal systemic levels unless combined with piperine or incorporated into lipid-based carriers.
- **Piperine (*Piper nigrum*):** Enhances absorption of several drugs by inhibiting cytochrome P450 enzymes. Acts as a natural bioenhancer in Ayurveda, validating its role in improving systemic exposure of actives.
- **Withanolides (*Withania somnifera*):** Show immunomodulatory and neuroprotective activities. Their lipophilic nature results in low solubility and poor systemic distribution.
- **Boswellic acids (*Boswellia serrata*):** Known for anti-arthritic and anti-inflammatory effects but suffer from poor gastrointestinal absorption.
- **Guggulsterones (*Commiphora mukul*):** Used in lipid regulation but demonstrate poor oral bioavailability.

Classical Formulations and ADME Relevance

Classical polyherbal formulations are inherently designed to overcome pharmacokinetic limitations:

- **Triphala** improves gut health and enhances absorption due to tannins and phenolics.
- **Chyawanprash** employs a lipid-rich base (ghee, sesame oil) aiding solubilization of fat-soluble actives like curcumin.
- **Dashmool** combines roots that synergize metabolism and systemic distribution.

Novel Carriers and Delivery Systems

Table 2: Comparison of Classical Formulations vs Novel Carriers

Parameter	**Classical Formulations (e.g., Chyawanprash, Triphala)**	**Novel Carriers (e.g., nanoparticles, liposomes)**
Solubility enhancement	Use of ghee, honey, oils as Anupana	Use of lipid nanoparticles, emulsions
Bioavailability strategy	Synergistic herbs, bioenhancers like piperine	Encapsulation, sustained release, enzyme inhibition
Stability	Natural antioxidants protect actives	Improved by protective polymer/lipid coating
Targeting	Non-specific, systemic	Can be engineered for tissue/cell-specific delivery
Cost & accessibility	Low, traditional preparation	Higher, requires technology

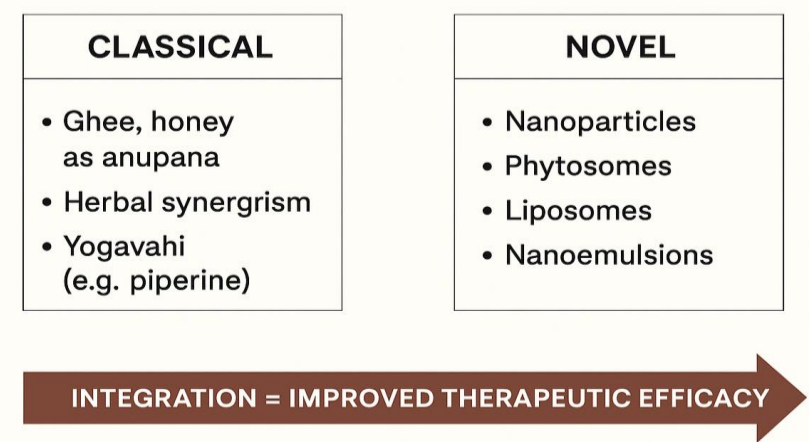

Figure 1: Classical vs Novel Bioavailability Enhancement Strategies

Nanotechnology-driven carriers are increasingly used to overcome ADME challenges:

- **Nanoparticles** enhance solubility and stability of actives.
- **Liposomes and phytosomes** improve membrane permeability.
- **Solid lipid nanoparticles (SLNs)** provide sustained release.

- **Nanoemulsions** enhance gastrointestinal absorption.

PHARMACOKINETIC PROCESSES (ADME) IN AYURVEDIC ACTIVES

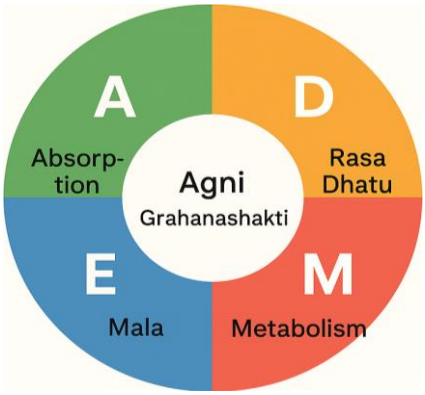

Figure 2: Ayurvedic Concept of ADME

Absorption

Many Ayurvedic actives face poor oral absorption due to large molecular size and low solubility. Use of bioenhancers (piperine, gingerols) in formulations reflects ancient strategies to improve absorption.

Distribution

Lipophilic actives exhibit poor systemic distribution due to rapid metabolism. Encapsulation in lipid-based carriers enhances tissue distribution.

Metabolism

First-pass hepatic metabolism reduces active concentrations. Piperine inhibits drug-metabolizing enzymes, thus prolonging systemic half-life of curcumin and resveratrol.

Excretion

Herbal actives often undergo rapid renal excretion, limiting therapeutic duration. Modern carriers slow down elimination, providing sustained plasma concentrations.

CHALLENGES IN PHARMACOKINETIC EVALUATION

- **Complexity of polyherbal formulations** makes it difficult to trace pharmacokinetics of individual actives.
- **Standardization issues** in herbal products lead to variable ADME outcomes.
- **Analytical limitations** in detecting plant metabolites hinder accurate profiling.
- **Inter-individual variability** in gut microbiota influences metabolism of phytochemicals.
- **Ethical and regulatory hurdles** in conducting clinical pharmacokinetic trials for Ayurvedic drugs.

SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Integration of **modern analytical tools** (LC-MS/MS, NMR, metabolomics) to trace actives and metabolites.
- Development of **standardized extracts** to reduce variability.
- Use of **nanocarriers** to enhance systemic availability.
- Application of **systems biology and pharmacogenomics** to predict individual variations.
- Combining **traditional Anupana with modern carriers** for optimized delivery.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Table 3: Comparison of Classical Formulations vs Novel Carriers

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Parameter	Classical Formulations (e.g., Chyawanprash, Triphala)	Novel Carriers (e.g., nanoparticles, liposomes)
Targeting	Non-specific, systemic	Can be engineered for tissue/cell-specific delivery
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Future research should focus on:

- Designing **hybrid formulations** combining classical Ayurvedic principles with nanotechnology.
- Establishing **biopharmaceutical classification** of herbal actives.
- Conducting **comparative pharmacokinetic studies** between classical and novel formulations.
- Developing **personalized Ayurvedic medicine** through integration of pharmacogenomics and Ayurveda's *Prakriti* concept.

CONCLUSION

Pharmacokinetic evaluation of Ayurvedic actives is essential to bridge traditional wisdom with modern science. While classical formulations inherently employ strategies to enhance absorption and bioavailability, novel carriers further optimize systemic exposure. The ADME profile of herbal actives such as curcumin, piperine, withanolides, and boswellic acids highlights both challenges and opportunities. A combined approach integrating classical Ayurvedic wisdom, modern analytical technologies, and innovative drug delivery systems can ensure better therapeutic outcomes and global acceptance of Ayurveda.

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