Journal of Chemical Health Risks

www.jchr.org

JCHR (2024) 14(01), 3358-3364 | ISSN: 2251-6719

Unlocking the Future: Nanoparticles Revolutionizing Ulcerative Colitis Treatment

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(Received: 14 December 2023 Revised: 26 January 2024 Accepted: 09 March 2024)

KEYWORDS

Nanoparticles, Ulcerative Colitis, Polymeric Nanoparticles, Stimuli responsive nanoparticles.

ABSTRACT:

Delve into the cutting-edge realm of ulcerative colitis (UC) management, where nanoparticles emerge as transformative agents. From polymeric wonders to lipid-based marvels, metallic innovations, and mesoporous magic, this review explores the arsenal of nanoparticles. Witness the synergy of biologics and nanotech at the molecular frontier, targeting UC with unparalleled precision. Stimuli-responsive strategies and co-delivery systems add depth, promising personalized, efficient solutions. As we glimpse the horizon, emerging trends unveil nanotechnology's role in preventive strategies, heralding a new era in UC research. Brace for a future where nanoparticles redefine the narrative, promising enhanced treatments and brighter tomorrows.

1. Introduction

Ulcerative colitis is one of the long-term inflammatory bowel diseases that often results in colon and rectum inflammation.[1] Its epidemiology reveals a variable global distribution, with higher prevalence in Western countries than in Asia and Africa. The disease typically manifests in young adults, with a peak incidence between 15 and 30 years of age, although it can occur at any age. Recent data suggest an increasing incidence and prevalence worldwide, possibly due to changes in environmental exposures and lifestyle factors. Some studies show a slight male predominance, while others report no significant gender difference. Familial aggregation and genetic susceptibility are significant risk factors, indicating a complex interaction between genetic and environmental factors in UC's etiology.[2]

Its pathophysiology involves an inappropriate immune response to gut microbiota in genetically predisposed individuals underpinned by environmental factors. The disease begins by disrupting the intestinal epithelial barrier, facilitating the penetration of luminal antigens, and triggering an exaggerated immune response. This often leads to the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines, such as tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), interleukins (ILs), and interferons, perpetuating inflammation and mucosal injury. The characteristic features include continuous lesions starting from the rectum, extending proximally, and presenting as ulceration, bleeding, and potentially leading to colon cancer in long-standing cases.[1, 3]

The current standard treatments for ulcerative colitis (UC) aim to reduce inflammation, achieve and maintain remission, and prevent complications. These include aminosalicylates (e.g., mesalamine) for mild to moderate UC, corticosteroids (e.g., prednisone) for moderate to severe flares, and immunomodulators (e.g., azathioprine, 6-mercaptopurine) for reducing steroid dependence and

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maintaining remission. For patients with moderate to severe UC, especially those unresponsive to conventional therapies, biologics targeting specific components of the immune response, such as tumor necrosis factor (TNF) inhibitors (e.g., infliximab, adalimumab) and newer agents like vedolizumab (a gut-selective integrin receptor antagonist) and ustekinumab (an interleukin-12 and -23 inhibitor), are options. Despite these treatments, many patients experience refractory disease, relapses, and side effects such as increased infection risk, lymphoma, and non-melanoma skin cancers associated with long-term immunosuppression. Additionally, a significant proportion of patients may ultimately require surgical intervention, including colectomy, due to the failure of medical management or the development of dysplasia/cancer. This highlights the necessity for tailored treatment plans and the continuous pursuit of safer and more effective therapies.[4]

Nanotechnology in Medicine

Nanotechnology offers a promising frontier in treating ulcerative colitis (UC) by enabling targeted drug delivery, reducing systemic side effects, and enhancing therapeutic efficacy. Due to their small size and modifiable surface properties, nanoparticles can be engineered to accumulate selectively in inflamed tissues of the colon, thereby increasing the local concentration of drugs and reducing their systemic absorption. For example, polymeric nanoparticles can encapsulate anti-inflammatory drugs like budesonide, ensuring controlled release directly at the site of inflammation. Lipid-based nanoparticles, such as liposomes, have been used to deliver immunosuppressive agents like tacrolimus, offering a targeted approach that minimizes exposure to non-affected tissues. Metallic and gold nanoparticles have been explored for their anti-inflammatory and wound-healing properties. Innovative approaches also involve nanoparticles that can carry biological agents, such as nucleic acids, targeting specific molecular pathways involved in UC pathogenesis. Additionally, nanoparticle systems can be designed to respond to the acidic pH of the inflamed colon or specific enzymes overexpressed in UC, further refining the precision of drug delivery. These advancements highlight the potential of nanotechnology to revolutionize UC treatment, making therapies more efficient, with fewer adverse effects, and allowing for the remission of this chronic condition.[5]

Nanoparticles for Ulcerative Colitis:

Enhanced permeability and retention (EPR) effect in inflamed tissues

The Enhanced Permeability and Retention effect is particularly advantageous in the targeted treatment of inflamed tissues, such as those found in ulcerative colitis (UC). It refers to the increased permeability of blood vessels in diseased tissues, which allows nanoparticles to pass more quickly through the vessel walls and accumulate in the targeted area. Additionally, the impaired lymphatic drainage in inflamed tissues contributes to the retention of these nanoparticles, enhancing the local concentration of therapeutic agents. For example, in the context of UC, nanoparticles designed to deliver anti-inflammatory drugs can exploit the EPR effect to achieve higher drug concentrations directly at the site of inflammation. This is particularly effective for delivering corticosteroids or immunosuppressants, which, when encapsulated in nanoparticles, can more effectively penetrate the inflamed mucosal layers of the colon. Similarly, nanoparticles carrying biological agents, like anti-TNF-α antibodies, can accumulate in inflamed intestinal tissues, providing localized suppression of inflammation without the systemic side effects typically associated with these drugs. The EPR effect thus underpins a key mechanism by which nanoparticle-based therapies improve the targeting and efficacy of treatments for inflammatory diseases like UC, illustrating the potential for more efficient and safer therapeutic strategies.[6]

Nanoparticles for mucosal healing

Nanoparticles play a crucial role in promoting mucosal healing in ulcerative colitis (UC), offering innovative solutions to enhance the recovery of inflamed intestinal tissues. For instance, mesalamine-loaded polymeric nanoparticles have shown promise in facilitating mucosal healing by delivering the drug directly to the affected areas in a controlled manner. Mesalamine, an established therapeutic for UC, is known for its anti-inflammatory and mucosal protective effects. When encapsulated in nanoparticles, mesalamine can be delivered precisely to the inflamed mucosa, promoting healing and reducing the risk of relapse. Lipid-based

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JCHR (2024) 14(01), 3358-3364 | ISSN: 2251-6719

nanoparticles, such as liposomes, have also been explored for their ability to enhance mucosal healing. These nanoparticles can encapsulate various therapeutic agents, including growth factors or anti-inflammatory compounds, promoting targeted delivery to the inflamed mucosa. The controlled release of these agents at the site of inflammation contributes to tissue repair and regeneration. Additionally, nanoparticles can be engineered to carry specific biomolecules that aid mucosal healing, such as peptides or proteins involved in tissue repair processes.[7] By leveraging the unique properties of nanoparticles, these delivery systems enhance the bioavailability and effectiveness of therapeutic agents, facilitating mucosal healing in UC (Figure 1).

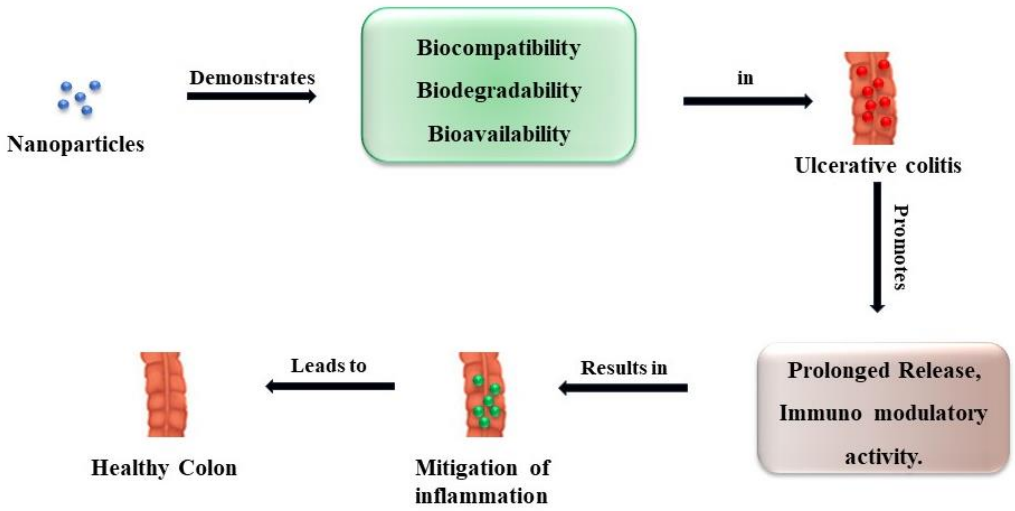

Figure 1. Role of Nanoparticles in the Ulcerative colitis treatment

Types of Nanoparticles in Ulcerative Colitis Treatment

Polymeric nanoparticles

Recently, Polymeric nanoparticles emerged as a promising tool in treating ulcerative colitis (UC), offering a versatile platform for targeted drug delivery and enhanced therapeutic outcomes. One example is using poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid) (PLGA) nanoparticles to encapsulate anti-inflammatory drugs such as mesalamine. Mesalamine-loaded PLGA nanoparticles exhibit controlled release properties, allowing for sustained drug delivery directly to the inflamed colon. This targeted approach enhances drug bioavailability, reduces systemic side effects, and improves patient compliance. Moreover, chitosan-based nanoparticles have demonstrated efficacy in UC treatment. Chitosan, derived from crustacean shells, possesses mucoadhesive properties that enhance nanoparticle retention on the mucosal surface. This property is valuable for sustained drug release and improved contact with inflamed tissues. Polymeric nanoparticles can also be tailored to respond to specific environmental cues. For instance, pH-responsive nanoparticles can release their payload selectively in the acidic environment of inflamed tissues, ensuring precision in drug delivery.[8]

Lipid-based nanoparticles

Lipid-based nanoparticles have demonstrated significant potential in treating ulcerative colitis (UC), effectively targeting drug delivery and minimizing systemic side effects. One notable example is the utilization of liposomes to encapsulate corticosteroids for UC therapy. These lipid-based vesicles can carry drugs like prednisolone, facilitating their controlled release in the inflamed colon. This targeted delivery approach enhances the therapeutic efficacy of corticosteroids while reducing their systemic exposure and associated

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JCHR (2024) 14(01), 3358-3364 | ISSN: 2251-6719

adverse effects. Furthermore, solid lipid nanoparticles (SLNs) have been explored for their application in UC treatment. SLNs, composed of lipids in a solid state, offer improved stability and controlled drug release. Encapsulating anti-inflammatory agents within SLNs can enhance drug bioavailability and ensure sustained delivery to the inflamed mucosa. Nanostructured lipid carriers (NLCs) also present a novel lipid-based nanoparticle system. NLCs combine solid and liquid lipids, offering advantages in drug loading capacity and stability. These carriers have been investigated for delivering drugs like mesalamine, showcasing their potential in targeted therapy for UC.[9]

Metallic nanoparticles

Metallic nanoparticles have emerged as innovative candidates in treating ulcerative colitis (UC), offering unique properties that can be harnessed for targeted therapy. One notable example is the use of gold nanoparticles (AuNPs). Gold nanoparticles have been explored for their anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. When functionalized with drugs like curcumin, which exhibits potent anti-inflammatory effects, these AuNPs can be effective carriers for targeted drug delivery to inflamed colonic tissues in UC. The gold nanoparticles enhance the stability and bioavailability of curcumin while minimizing systemic exposure.

Additionally, silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) have shown potential in UC treatment. Due to their antimicrobial properties, AgNPs can contribute to controlling infections associated with UC, promoting a more favorable environment for mucosal healing. The silver nanoparticle-controlled release can be achieved through various formulations, providing a sustained therapeutic effect. While the use of metallic nanoparticles in UC treatment is still in the early stages of research, their unique physicochemical properties hold promise for addressing inflammation and promoting healing. Continued exploration of metallic nanoparticles, their formulations, and targeted drug delivery strategies may offer new avenues for improving therapeutic outcomes in ulcerative colitis.[10, 11]

Mesoporous silica nanoparticles

Mesoporous silica nanoparticles (MSNs) have garnered attention in treating ulcerative colitis (UC) due to their versatile drug delivery capabilities and biocompatibility. These nanoparticles possess a unique mesoporous structure, allowing for high drug-loading capacity and controlled release, making them ideal candidates for targeted therapy. In UC, MSNs can be loaded with anti-inflammatory drugs such as mesalamine, enhancing drug stability and facilitating its sustained release in the inflamed colon. One example of MSN application in UC treatment involves the encapsulation of curcumin, a natural anti-inflammatory compound. The mesoporous structure of silica nanoparticles protects curcumin from degradation, ensuring its effective delivery to the inflamed mucosa. Curcumin-loaded MSNs have demonstrated enhanced therapeutic efficacy in preclinical studies, showcasing the potential of this approach for managing UC. Moreover, MSNs can be surface-functionalized to improve targeting and biocompatibility. Functionalizing the outer surface with ligands that recognize specific markers overexpressed in inflamed tissues enhances the nanoparticles' specificity for UC sites, ensuring precise drug delivery and minimizing off-target effects.[12]

Nanoparticle-mediated Drug Delivery

Conventional drugs encapsulated in nanoparticles

Encapsulation of conventional drugs within nanoparticles has emerged as a promising strategy for promoting therapeutic efficacy and reducing side effects in treating ulcerative colitis (UC). Mesalamine, a commonly used anti-inflammatory drug in UC, has been successfully encapsulated in nanoparticles to improve its targeted delivery. For instance, polymeric nanoparticles or liposomes loaded with mesalamine can protect the drug from premature degradation, enhance its stability, and enable controlled release at inflamed colonic sites. This approach ensures a higher local drug concentration, improving its effectiveness while minimizing systemic exposure and associated adverse effects. Similarly, corticosteroids, another class of conventional drugs used in UC treatment, have been encapsulated within nanoparticles to enhance their therapeutic profile. Nanoparticle formulations of prednisolone, for example, offer controlled release, prolonging drug action in the inflamed mucosa and reducing systemic exposure, thereby mitigating the risk of systemic side effects. The encapsulation of conventional drugs in nanoparticles provides a platform for optimizing drug delivery,

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www.jchr.org
JCHR (2024) 14(01), 3358-3364 | ISSN: 2251-6719

maximizing therapeutic benefits, and minimizing the drawbacks associated with systemic drug administration.[13] This innovative approach holds promise for advancing the treatment options for individuals with ulcerative colitis (Figure 2).

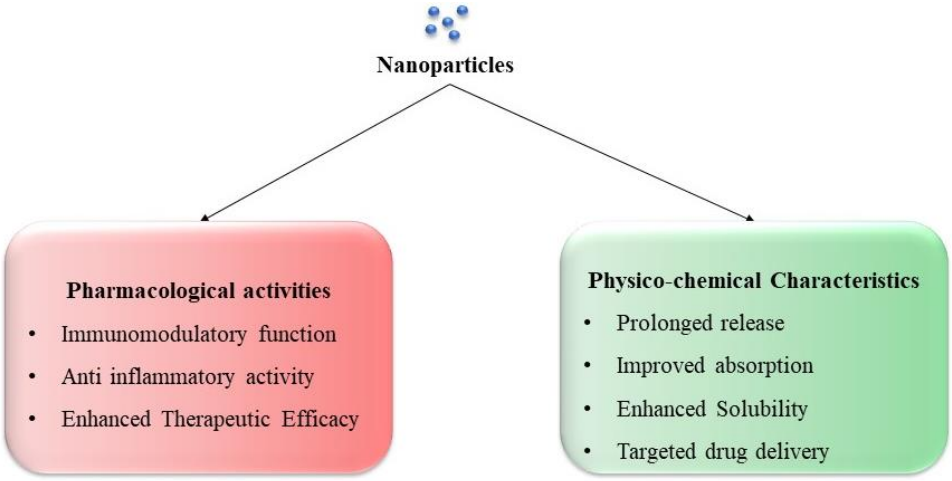

Figure 2. Depicts the Pharmacological activities and Physico-chemical characteristics of the Nanoparticles that plays a significant role in the treatment of ulcerative colitis.

Biologics and nanoparticles: targeting inflammation at the molecular level

Combining biologics with nanoparticles represents an innovative approach to target inflammation at the molecular level in treating ulcerative colitis (UC). Biologics, such as monoclonal antibodies targeting specific inflammatory pathways, have revolutionized UC therapy by offering precision in addressing molecular targets. When coupled with nanoparticles, the therapeutic potential can be further optimized. For example, tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α) inhibitors, a class of biologics widely used in UC, can be encapsulated in nanoparticles for controlled release at the inflamed mucosa. This approach ensures sustained drug exposure, potentially reducing the frequency of administration and minimizing systemic side effects. In addition, nanoparticle-mediated delivery of RNA-based biologics, such as small interfering RNA (siRNA) targeting essential inflammatory genes, holds promise in modulating molecular pathways involved in UC pathogenesis. By encapsulating siRNA within nanoparticles, targeted and efficient delivery can be achieved, potentially downregulating inflammatory cascades with high specificity. The synergy between biologics and nanoparticles offers a multifaceted strategy for precise molecular intervention in UC, providing a platform to improve drug stability, optimize therapeutic concentrations, and reduce off-target effects. This convergence of biologics and nanotechnology holds significant potential for advancing the treatment landscape for UC at the molecular and cellular levels.[14]

Innovations in Nanoparticle Formulations

Stimuli-responsive nanoparticles for targeted release

Stimuli-responsive nanoparticles represent an innovative approach to treating ulcerative colitis (UC) by allowing the controlled and targeted release of therapeutic agents. These nanoparticles can respond to specific environmental cues, such as changes in pH or enzymes in the inflamed colon, facilitating precision in drug delivery. For instance, pH-responsive nanoparticles can be designed to release their payload selectively in the acidic environment associated with inflamed tissues in UC. This strategy ensures the drug is delivered predominantly to the affected areas, minimizing systemic exposure and potential side effects. Polymeric nanoparticles with temperature-sensitive properties can also be engineered for targeted release. These nanoparticles respond to the elevated temperature in inflamed tissues, enabling controlled drug delivery precisely where needed. This approach enhances the therapeutic efficacy while minimizing the impact on

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healthy tissues. Furthermore, enzyme-responsive nanoparticles, designed to be triggered by specific enzymes overexpressed in inflamed mucosa, provide another avenue for targeted release. For example, matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs) are enzymes associated with inflammation; nanoparticles responsive to MMPs can release their cargo specifically in response to these enzymatic signals, ensuring a localized and controlled therapeutic effect.[15]

Co-delivery of drugs and diagnostic agents

The co-delivery of drugs and diagnostic agents using nanoparticles is a promising strategy for treating ulcerative colitis (UC), providing a multifunctional approach to therapy and monitoring. For instance, nanoparticles are engineered to encapsulate therapeutic drugs, such as anti-inflammatory agents, and diagnostic agents, such as imaging contrast agents. This co-loaded system allows for simultaneous treatment and real-time monitoring of disease progression. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) contrast agents, like gadolinium-based nanoparticles, can be co-delivered with anti-inflammatory drugs, enabling non-invasive monitoring of therapeutic response and disease activity. Similarly, near-infrared fluorescence imaging agents co-delivered with therapeutic nanoparticles offer a dual-purpose system. These imaging agents enable visualization of the inflamed tissues, aiding in diagnostic assessments, while the therapeutic payload addresses the underlying inflammation. This approach provides a comprehensive strategy for tailoring treatment plans and assessing their real-time efficacy. The co-delivery of drugs and diagnostic agents using nanoparticles streamlines treatment and offers a personalized and efficient approach to managing UC. Combining therapeutic and diagnostic functionalities within a single nanocarrier holds the potential for optimizing treatment outcomes and monitoring disease progression with greater precision.[16]

Future Perspectives

Emerging trends in nanoparticle research for ulcerative colitis

Emerging trends in nanoparticle research for ulcerative colitis (UC) focus on refining drug delivery and therapeutic outcomes. Smart nanoparticles with stimuli-responsive properties, tailored for precision targeting in the inflamed colon, are gaining prominence. Advances include co-delivery systems combining therapeutic agents and diagnostic tools for real-time monitoring. Additionally, personalized nanotherapeutics, designed based on individual patient characteristics, are being explored for enhanced efficacy. Incorporating novel materials and bioengineering techniques, researchers aim to overcome existing challenges, paving the way for more effective, targeted, and patient-specific nanoparticle-based treatments in the evolving landscape of UC research.[17]

Role of nanotechnology in preventive strategies

Nanotechnology is pivotal in preventive strategies for various diseases, including ulcerative colitis (UC). Innovative nanomaterials and delivery systems contribute to early detection and intervention, reducing the risk of disease onset. Nanoparticles functionalized with specific ligands can be designed to detect molecular markers associated with UC early, offering a non-invasive diagnostic approach. Moreover, nanoparticle-based vaccines are being explored for UC prevention by modulating the immune response. These vaccines may target specific antigens associated with UC pathogenesis, potentially mitigating inflammation. Nanotechnology's precise and targeted nature provides a platform for developing preventive strategies, ushering in a new era in disease management and public health.[18]

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of nanoparticle research in the context of ulcerative colitis (UC) holds tremendous promise for advancing therapeutic interventions. Exploring polymeric nanoparticles, lipid-based carriers, metallic nanoparticles, mesoporous silica nanoparticles, and their applications in drug delivery underscores the potential for enhanced treatment precision, efficacy, and reduced side effects. Additionally, integrating biologics with nanoparticles exemplifies a molecular-level targeting strategy, while stimuli-responsive and co-delivery systems showcase innovative approaches for personalized and multifunctional treatments. As emerging trends focus on preventive strategies using nanotechnology, the future of UC management seems poised for more effective, patient-tailored interventions, ultimately improving

therapeutic outcomes and the quality of life for patients affected by this chronic condition.

Acknowledgments

The authors are thankful to, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (VISTAS) & GRT group of Educational Institutions for the facilities extended.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

Funding Support

The authors declare that they have no funding for this study.

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