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Review Article

The Multifaceted Role of Iron Oxide Nanoparticles in Advancing Modern Pharmaceutical Technology and Drug Delivery Systems

Sonali Mahaparale, Amruta Patil*

Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Dr. D. Y. Patil College of Pharmacy, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

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ABSTRACT

Iron oxide nanoparticles (IONPs) have emerged as versatile tools in modern pharmaceutical technology, significantly impacting drug delivery systems, diagnostics, and therapeutic interventions. These nanoparticles possess unique physicochemical properties, including high surface area, biocompatibility, and magnetic reactivity, making them ideal candidates for various biomedical applications. The incorporation of IONPs in pharmaceutical formulations has opened new avenues for precise drug delivery, imaging, and theranostics, addressing the limitations of traditional drug administration and diagnostics. Recent years have seen intensified research efforts focused on harnessing the capabilities of IONPs to enhance the efficacy, specificity, and safety of pharmaceutical interventions. The versatility of IONPs allows their use in combination therapies, as contrast agents for diagnostic imaging, and as carriers for targeted drug delivery to diseased sites. Additionally, their magnetic properties enable precise control over their movement within the body, facilitating targeted drug delivery and imaging with minimal side effects. This paper reviews the diverse applications of IONPs in modern pharmaceutical technology, emphasizing their role in advancing drug delivery systems and diagnostic techniques. By examining recent advancements and case studies, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits and challenges associated with the integration of IONPs in pharmaceutical research and development.

Introduction

Nanotechnology has focused on nanoparticles (NPs) because of their size-dependent features, making them useful and superior in many human endeavors. Iron oxide nanoparticles seem to stand out. Iron, the most prevalent transition metal in the crust, is essential to many biological and infrastructural systems. Iron oxides are ubiquitous but less well-known than transition metals like cobalt, nickel, gold, and platinum. Between iron and oxygen, about 16 kinds of iron oxide complexes develop. [1]

Iron (III) oxide, or rust, occurs naturally. The affordability and importance of iron oxides in biological, geological, and commercial applications, including iron ores, catalysts, pigments, and hemoglobin, make them frequently used. Magnetite, maghemite, and hematite are the main iron oxides studied in science and technology. NPs of ferromagnetic materials smaller than 10 to 20 nm are superparamagnetic. Magnetic iron oxide nanoparticles (Fe_3O_4 and γ-Fe_2O_3) are ideal for biomedical applications due to their low toxicity, superparamagnetic characteristics, high surface area, and easy separation. [2] The properties of nanomaterials (NMs), especially in catalysis, are significantly influenced by their morphologies. Researchers are developing techniques to manage nanomaterial morphology, size, and form. Mechanochemical approaches and various synthetic procedures can create nanorods, porous spheres, nanohusks, nanocubes, distorted cubes, and self-oriented flowers by modifying precursor iron salts. These novel techniques are simple, cost-effective, and allow for sustained particle shape management.[3]

***Corresponding Author:** Ms. Amruta Patil

Address: Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Dr. D. Y. Patil College of Pharmacy, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

Email ✉**:** patilamruta093@gmail.com

Tel.: +91-9822846368

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Iron oxide surface modification is essential beyond synthesis. Functionalization and molecular conjugation improve biosystem stability and biocompatibility. Post-synthesis surface modification avoids chemical corrosion, making IONPs biocompatible and stable. Additional modifications can add physical and chemical features to IONPs, increasing their versatility and usefulness.

Ex-vivo NP fusion for cosmetics and fabrics is gaining popularity. Due to their high surface-to-volume ratio, NPs are more reactive and biochemically active. The molecular-level interactions between NPs and biological systems are still unknown. This study discusses how IONPs improve medication transport, diagnostics, and treatment in modern pharmaceutical technology. We want to explain the pros and cons of integrating IONPs into pharmaceutical R & D by evaluating recent advances and case cases.[4]

Methods for the Preparation of Iron Nanoparticles

Several methods can synthesize iron nanoparticles (IONPs), each controlling particle size, shape, and characteristics. Based on research and approaches, many common synthesis processes are described below: [4]

Chemical precipitation

Chemical precipitation, described by Massart (1981), reduces iron salts like iron chloride or iron sulphate with a reducing agent to generate iron nanoparticles. An aqueous solution of iron salts is made in this procedure. A reducing agent like sodium borohydride or hydrazine is vigorously stirred in. To modify nanoparticle size and form, reaction factors including temperature, pH, and stabilizing agents like citric acid and polyvinyl alcohol, are modified. The nanoparticles are centrifuged or filtered, rinsed with water and alcohol to eliminate contaminants, and dried under a vacuum or in an oven.[5]

Co-precipitation

The chemical precipitation subtype co-precipitation was intensively explored by Sugimoto (1999). Mixing metal ions during precipitation creates mixed-metal nanoparticles, which are employed to synthesize magnetic iron oxide nanoparticles. By regulating pH and adding a base like ammonia or sodium hydroxide, ferrous and ferric salts are precipitated from water. Iron oxide nanoparticles with specified magnetic characteristics are obtained by vigorously stirring the mixture and washing, filtering, and drying the precipitate.[6]

Sol-gel synthesis

Brinker and Scherer (1990) described sol-gel synthesis. This method begins with a colloidal solution (sol) that gels into a three-dimensional network (gel), then drying and calcination. Iron precursors hydrolyze and polycondensate in alcohol to create a sol. Further condensation turns this sol into the gel. Iron nanoparticles with regulated size and structure are produced by drying and calcining the gel at high temperatures.[7]

Hydrothermal synthesis

In a sealed autoclave, hydrothermal synthesis creates nanoparticles through chemical reactions in an aqueous solution at high temperatures and pressures (Byrappa and Yoshimura, 2001). Iron salt solution is made and placed in a high-temperature autoclave for a certain time. Cooled nanoparticles are collected, washed, and dried. This approach produces crystalline iron nanoparticles with regulated size and shape.[8]

Electrochemical synthesis

Per Reetz and Helbig (1994), electrochemical synthesis includes electroplating iron nanoparticles onto a conductive substrate from an iron-ion solution. A voltage difference reduces iron ions at the cathode of an electrochemical cell with an iron anode and a suitable cathode material. Collected, cleaned, and dried nanoparticles provide exact size and shape control.[9]

Laser ablation

Mafune *et al*. (2000) developed laser ablation to create iron nanoparticles by ablating a solid iron target in a liquid media. Laser pulses eject material from a solid iron target in a liquid media, forming nanoparticles. These nanoparticles are centrifuged and cleaned to eliminate contaminants. Nanoparticles can be made without contamination using this method.[10]

Mechanochemical synthesis

Scholz *et al*. (1987) reported mechanochemical synthesis, which generates iron nanoparticles by grinding or ball milling. This eco-friendly synthesis creates nanoparticles by ball-milling iron salts and reducing agents. We collect, wash, and dry nanoparticles.

Thermal decomposition

Rockenberger *et al*. (1999) describe the thermal degradation of iron-containing precursors to produce iron nanoparticles. In an organic solvent, the iron precursor decomposes and forms nanoparticles at high temperatures. Adjusting temperature and reaction time allows nanoparticle size and shape control. Collect, wash, and dry these.[11]

Microemulsion technique

The microemulsion method, introduced by Pileni (2001), produces iron nanoparticles from surfactant-stabilized oil-in-water emulsions. The aqueous component of the microemulsion is treated with iron salts and a reducing agent to create nanoparticles. Breaking the emulsion and washing and drying separate nanoparticles. This approach produces controlled-size monodisperse nanoparticles.[12]

Template-assisted synthesis

Caruso *et al*. (2001) examined template-assisted synthesis, which uses porous materials or biological molecules to create iron nanoparticles with particular shapes. Iron salts are placed on the template and reduced or thermally decomposed into nanoparticles. After removing the template, the nanoparticles have well-defined shapes and sizes.[13]

These synthesis methods are appropriate for medicine, catalysis, and materials research since they are tuned to iron nanoparticle application requirements and qualities.

IONP Targeting Methods

Iron oxide nanoparticles (IONPs) have emerged as a versatile tool in modern pharmaceutical technology and drug delivery systems. To optimize their therapeutic and diagnostic potential, various targeting strategies have been developed. These strategies aim to improve the specificity and efficiency of IONP delivery to desired cells or tissues.

Passive targeting

Passive targeting of IONPs leverages the enhanced permeability and retention (EPR) effect, which is characterized by the tendency of nanoparticles to accumulate in tumor tissues due to their leaky vasculature and impaired lymphatic drainage. The EPR effect enables the selective administration of therapeutic agents to malignant sites. This phenomenon was first described by Maeda *et al.* and has since become a cornerstone in the field of nanomedicine. Studies have shown that nanoparticles of sizes between 10 to 200 nm are most effective in utilizing the EPR effect for tumor targeting, facilitating improved drug delivery and therapeutic outcomes. Additionally, the unique microenvironment of tumors, such as hypoxia and acidic pH, further enhances the retention of IONPs at the target site.[14]

Active targeting

Active targeting involves the functionalization of IONPs with specific ligands, antibodies, peptides, or aptamers that bind to overexpressed receptors on target cells. Surface functionalization improves the selectivity and efficiency of drug delivery. For instance, herceptin-functionalized IONPs have been used to target HER2-positive breast cancer cells, resulting in improved therapeutic efficacy. Bioconjugation techniques attach biomolecules to IONPs, increasing their affinity for target cell receptors. This precise targeting mechanism ensures that IONPs are absorbed into the desired cell populations. Studies have demonstrated that folic acid-conjugated IONPs can effectively target cancer cells overexpressing folate receptors, thereby enhancing drug delivery and minimizing off-target effects.[15]

Magnetic targeting

Magnetic targeting utilizes external magnetic fields to guide IONPs to specific body areas. This technique allows researchers to steer IONPs toward desired tissues or organs, facilitating selective drug delivery or imaging. Magnetic targeting has been successfully applied in preclinical studies for targeted drug delivery to brain tumors, where the application of an external magnetic field increased the accumulation of IONPs in the tumor site. This method not only enhances the therapeutic efficacy but also reduces the systemic toxicity of the administered drugs.[16]

pH-responsive targeting

pH-responsive targeting involves designing IONPs that release drugs or imaging agents in acidic microenvironments, such as those found in tumor tissues. This targeted approach ensures that the therapeutic or diagnostic agents are released specifically at the site of interest. Acidic conditions trigger the release of encapsulated agents, providing controlled drug release or imaging enhancement precisely where needed. For example, doxorubicin-loaded pH-sensitive IONPs have been shown to release the drug more efficiently in the acidic environment of tumors, leading to enhanced anticancer activity. [17]

Thermoresponsive targeting

Thermoresponsive targeting involves using IONPs that respond to temperature changes, particularly in hyperthermia treatments. These IONPs are engineered to release their therapeutic payload or enhance imaging when exposed to elevated temperatures. Hyperthermia can be induced using external sources such as radiofrequency or near-infrared radiation. Studies have demonstrated that thermoresponsive IONPs can release drugs in a controlled manner at temperatures above 42°C, which is effective for treating tumors. This method allows for precise spatiotemporal control of drug release, reducing side effects and improving therapeutic outcomes. [18]

Ultrasound-responsive targeting

Ultrasound-responsive targeting employs IONPs in conjunction with ultrasound to achieve localized drug release or imaging enhancement. This non-invasive approach allows for controlled delivery of therapeutic agents or contrast enhancement in specific areas. Ultrasound waves can trigger the release of drugs or improve imaging at the targeted site. For instance, IONPs combined with ultrasound have been used to enhance the delivery of chemotherapeutic agents to pancreatic tumors, resulting in improved treatment efficacy and reduced systemic toxicity.[19]

Cell-specific targeting

Cell-specific targeting entails engineering IONPs with surface modifications that interact specifically with certain cell types. By tailoring the surface properties of IONPs, their affinity for target cells can be increased, ensuring accurate targeting and uptake into the desired cell populations. This method minimizes off-target effects and enhances the therapeutic or diagnostic potential of IONPs. Research has shown that transferrin-conjugated IONPs can selectively target cancer cells overexpressing transferrin receptors, leading to improved drug delivery and therapeutic outcomes.[20]

Intracellular targeting

Intracellular targeting modifies IONPs to facilitate their entry into specific cellular organelles. By engineering surface modifications or functional groups that promote cellular internalization and trafficking, researchers can deliver therapeutic agents directly to intracellular compartments. This precise targeting improves the effectiveness of treatments that require direct intervention within cellular processes. For example, IONPs functionalized with nuclear localization signals can deliver anticancer drugs directly to the cell nucleus, enhancing their efficacy in inducing cell death.[21]

Photothermal targeting

Photothermal targeting takes advantage of the photothermal properties of IONPs for imaging and therapy. When exposed to light, photothermal-responsive IONPs generate localized hyperthermia, which can be used for cancer therapy and diagnostic imaging. The controlled heating effect can trigger drug release or enhance imaging at the target site. Studies have demonstrated that gold-coated IONPs can be used for photothermal therapy, where the application of near-infrared light induces hyperthermia, leading to tumor cell destruction and improved imaging contrast. [22]

Responsive targeting to biomarkers

Responsive targeting involves developing IONPs that react to disease-associated biomarkers. By incorporating surface modifications or functional groups that recognize and bind to disease-specific biomarkers, researchers can achieve highly specific targeting of diseased tissues or cells. This approach allows for personalized and effective treatment strategies. For example, IONPs functionalized with prostate-specific membrane antigen (PSMA) ligands can selectively target prostate cancer cells, providing a targeted and efficient therapeutic approach. [23]

Ligand-receptor interactions

Ligand-receptor interactions exploit the affinity of surface ligands on IONPs for receptors on target cells. By functionalizing IONPs with ligands that bind to overexpressed receptors on target cells, researchers can achieve selective and efficient attachment of therapeutic or imaging agents. This method enhances the targeting capabilities of IONPs, ensuring that they reach and affect the intended cells or tissues. Studies have shown that aptamer-functionalized IONPs can selectively target cancer cells overexpressing specific receptors, leading to improved drug delivery and therapeutic efficacy. [24]

Application of IONP

Application of IONP in Diagnostic Imaging

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)

Due to their magnetic characteristics, iron IONPs are popular MRI contrast agents. IONPs affect T2 and T2* contrast by increasing protons' relaxation rate, darkening magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans and improving tissue contrast. Their surface functionalization allows targeted imaging of specific tissues or cells, improving diagnostic accuracy. Researchers may customize IONPs to imaging applications by precisely controlling their magnetic characteristics and surface chemistry, making them ideal diagnostic radiology tools. [25]

Lymph node imaging

In oncology, IONPs are essential for imaging lymph nodes and diagnosing and staging illness. IONP injections into the lymphatic system allow researchers to precisely visualise lymph node architecture and identify anomalies. Metastasis detection and cancer treatment decisions depend on this skill. As nanoparticle production and imaging techniques improve, IONPs revolutionise lymph node imaging, improving patient outcomes and clinical treatment.[26]

Vascular imaging

IONPs improve blood vessel contrast and visualisation in vascular imaging. These nanoparticles improve vascular structural clarity in MRA and CTA. IONPs help diagnose aneurysms, stenosis, and thrombosis by preferentially accumulating in blood arteries and targeting functionalization. Multifunctional and biocompatible, they improve patient care and clinical results in non-invasive vascular imaging. [27]

Cancer imaging

IONPs improve tumor identification and localization, making them popular in cancer imaging. IONPs selectively concentrate in tumor tissues after surface functionalization with targeted ligands like antibodies or peptides, allowing precise visualisation of malignant lesions. This tailored imaging method improves tumor detection and helps guide treatment options and track response. With nanoparticle design and imaging studies underway, IONPs may improve cancer diagnosis and treatment. [27]

Gastrointestinal imaging

IONPs improve GI imaging. IONPs increase magnetic resonance imaging MRI contrast for GI anomalies like tumors, inflammation, and lesions. IONPs aid GI diagnosis and treatment by giving high-contrast anatomical information. Biocompatibility and adaptability make them useful in non-invasive GI imaging, improving patient outcomes and illness management. [28]

Neuroimaging

IONPs may reveal brain structure, function, and pathology in neuroimaging. IONPs' magnetic characteristics allow non-invasive neural tissue visualisation and neural stem cell tracking *in-vivo*. This skill helps investigate neurodevelopmental processes, track illness progression, and evaluate neurodegenerative condition treatments. With ongoing advancements in nanoparticle synthesis and imaging techniques, IONPs continue to drive innovation in neuroimaging, offering new avenues for research and clinical translation in neuroscience.[29]

Liver imaging

IONPs improve liver anatomy and disease visualisation in diagnostic imaging. IONPs enhance MRI contrast and sensitivity by preferentially uptaking by hepatocytes and reticuloendothelial cells, allowing the identification and characterization of liver lesions, tumors, and cirrhosis. Their biocompatibility and diverse surface chemistry make them excellent for targeted liver imaging, improving patient care and clinical outcomes.[30]

Inflammatory disease imaging

IONPs can image inflammatory disorders, revealing illness pathophysiology and treatment response. IONPs allow non-invasive visualization of inflammatory processes in arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease, and atherosclerosis by selectively targeting inflamed tissues. Targeted imaging improves patient outcomes and quality of life by enabling early diagnosis, disease monitoring, and treatment optimization. Nanoparticle design and imaging advances make IONPs promising for personalized treatment and precision diagnostics in inflammatory illnesses. [31]

Application of IONP in Drug Delivery

IONPs have revolutionized the field of drug delivery due to their unique characteristics. Their biocompatibility, adjustable surface chemistry, and ability to encapsulate and release therapeutic payloads make IONPs a versatile and effective method for drug delivery. Here, we explore various applications of IONPs in enhancing medication delivery and therapeutic outcomes.

Targeted drug delivery

IONPs can be functionalized with ligands, antibodies, or peptides to specifically target cells or tissues. This functionalization improves therapeutic efficacy by directing the drug-loaded nanoparticles to the desired site, thereby reducing off-target effects. For instance, HER2-targeted IONPs have been developed for the selective delivery of chemotherapeutic agents to HER2-positive breast cancer cells, resulting in improved treatment outcomes and reduced side effects. [32]

Controlled drug release

IONPs can release pharmaceuticals in response to specific stimuli such as pH, temperature, or magnetic fields. This controlled drug release ensures that therapeutic agents are delivered in a regulated manner, improving treatment outcomes and minimizing side effects. pH-responsive IONPs, for example, have been designed to release their drug payload in the acidic environment of tumors, enhancing the targeted delivery and therapeutic efficacy of anticancer drugs. [33]

Combination therapies

IONPs facilitate synergistic combination therapy by enabling the co-delivery of multiple therapeutic agents. This approach is particularly beneficial for treating complex disorders that require a multifaceted treatment strategy. Studies have shown that IONPs can be used to simultaneously deliver chemotherapy drugs and gene therapy agents, resulting in enhanced therapeutic efficacy and reduced drug resistance in cancer treatment. [34]

Magnetic targeting

External magnetic fields can be used to drive IONP-loaded medicines to specific target areas, enhancing drug accumulation and efficacy while minimizing systemic exposure. This method provides precision drug delivery, as demonstrated in preclinical studies where magnetic targeting significantly increased the concentration of chemotherapeutic agents in brain tumors, improving therapeutic outcomes while reducing systemic toxicity. [35]

MRI-guided drug delivery

IONPs serve as excellent MRI contrast agents, enabling the monitoring and guidance of drug distribution in real-time. This real-time tracking enhances the precision and efficacy of therapies, as healthcare professionals can adjust treatment protocols based on the observed distribution patterns. MRI-guided drug delivery using IONPs has been shown to improve the accuracy of therapeutic interventions in various cancers, leading to better patient outcomes. [34]

Neurological disorder treatment

IONPs can cross the blood-brain barrier, making them valuable for the delivery of drugs to the brain. This capability is particularly useful in the treatment of brain tumors and neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. IONPs loaded with neuroprotective agents have demonstrated improved therapeutic efficacy in animal models of neurological disorders, offering a promising approach for future treatments.[35]

Inflammatory disease therapy

IONPs can be engineered to target inflamed tissues, delivering anti-inflammatory medications directly to the site of inflammation. This targeted delivery enhances the efficacy of the treatment while reducing systemic adverse effects. Research has shown that IONPs can effectively deliver corticosteroids to inflamed joints in rheumatoid arthritis, resulting in a significant reduction of inflammation and joint damage. [36]

Cancer therapy

The enhanced permeability and retention (EPR) effect allows IONPs to accumulate in tumor tissues, providing a means for targeted cancer therapy and imaging. IONPs can be loaded with chemotherapeutic agents and delivered directly to the tumor site, improving therapeutic efficacy and reducing systemic toxicity. Additionally, IONPs can be used for tumor imaging, aiding in the diagnosis and monitoring of cancer progression. [37]

Photothermal therapy enhancement

Photothermal IONPs can be used to enhance tumor ablation during thermal therapy. When exposed to near-infrared light, these nanoparticles generate localized heat, which can be used to ablate tumor tissues. This thermal effect also triggers the controlled release of therapeutic agents from the IONPs, further enhancing the efficacy of the treatment. Studies have demonstrated that photothermal therapy using IONPs can significantly improve tumor ablation and therapeutic outcomes in various cancer models. [38]

Application of IONP in Treating Hyperthermia

Recently, researchers have investigated IONPs for hyperthermia treatment, promising more effective and focused interventions. How hyperthermia is treated using IONPs:

Hyperthermia induction

Magnetically designed IONPs can generate heat when subjected to alternating magnetic fields. This controlled induction of hyperthermia raises the patient's body temperature, effectively combating the effects of hypothermia. This method allows for precise control of heat generation, ensuring that the patient's body temperature is raised to safe levels without causing overheating. [39]

Injectable thermotherapy

IONPs can be administered to patients in injectable forms. Once inside the body, these nanoparticles generate heat when exposed to a magnetic field, thereby raising the patient's body temperature and alleviating symptoms of hypothermia. Injectable thermotherapy offers a targeted and efficient approach to warming the body from the inside out. [40]

Targeted heat delivery

By functionalizing IONPs with ligands or antibodies, targeted delivery to hypothermia-affected tissues or organs is possible. This targeted approach ensures that heat is administered precisely where it is needed, enhancing therapeutic success and minimizing side effects. This method is particularly beneficial for treating localized areas of hypothermia, such as frostbite. [41]

Improved precision

IONP-based hyperthermia offers more precise and regulated body temperature increases compared to conventional warming methods. Customizing treatment to specific body locations minimizes unnecessary warming of the entire body, reducing patient discomfort and improving the overall effectiveness of the treatment. [42]

Rapid onset of treatment

The use of IONPs for hyperthermia induction provides a faster response to hypothermia compared to traditional warming procedures. This rapid onset is crucial for preventing complications associated with prolonged low body temperatures, such as tissue damage and cardiac arrhythmias. [42]

Biocompatibility and safety

IONPs are designed with biocompatible coatings and surface modifications to reduce the likelihood of adverse effects when introduced into the body. These coatings ensure that the nanoparticles are safely metabolized and excreted, minimizing the risk of toxicity and other negative reactions. [43]

Thermal imaging guidance

IONPs can be combined with thermal imaging techniques to monitor body heat distribution in real time during therapy. This real-time feedback allows for precise adjustments to the treatment, ensuring that heat is distributed evenly and effectively throughout the body. Thermal imaging guidance enhances the accuracy and efficacy of IONP-induced hyperthermia. [44]

Minimal invasive approach

For patients who cannot tolerate standard warming procedures, injectable IONP formulations provide a minimally invasive method to induce hyperthermia. This approach reduces patient discomfort and increases the accessibility of treatment, particularly for those with severe or localized hypothermia.[45]

Antibacterial Applications of IONP

IONPs are effective antibacterial agents that can fight bacterial infections in several domains. IONPs' unique physicochemical properties enable innovative antibiotic resistance treatments and better outcomes.

Antibacterial nanomaterials

IONPs possess inherent antimicrobial properties due to their ability to directly disrupt bacterial membranes. This disruption impedes bacterial growth and replication, making IONPs effective in reducing bacterial populations. Studies have demonstrated that IONPs can effectively kill both Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria, highlighting their broad-spectrum antibacterial activity.[46]

Drug delivery for antibiotics

IONPs serve as carriers for antibiotics and other antimicrobial agents, delivering them directly to infection sites. The controlled release mechanisms of IONPs enhance the efficacy of antibiotics while minimizing side effects. This targeted delivery approach offers a promising solution to the growing problem of antibiotic resistance, ensuring that higher concentrations of the drug reach the infection site, thereby enhancing therapeutic outcomes. [47]

Biofilm disruption

Biofilms, which are complex communities of bacteria that adhere to surfaces, pose significant challenges in healthcare due to their resistance to antibiotics. IONPs can penetrate and disrupt these biofilm structures, making them more susceptible to antimicrobial treatments. This capability is particularly valuable in treating chronic infections associated with biofilms, such as those found in medical devices and chronic wounds. [48]

Wound healing

Incorporating IONPs into wound dressings or coatings can significantly reduce bacterial infections and promote healing. Their antimicrobial properties help to prevent infections in open wounds, facilitating faster and more effective healing. Research has shown that IONP-infused wound dressings can enhance tissue regeneration and reduce healing time, minimizing complications and improving patient outcomes. [48]

Food preservation

IONPs can be used in food packaging to prevent bacterial growth, thereby extending the shelf life of food products. This application enhances food safety by reducing the risk of foodborne illnesses and minimizes economic losses due to spoilage. Studies have indicated that IONP-infused packaging materials can effectively inhibit the growth of common foodborne pathogens such as *E. coli* and *Salmonella*. [48]

Dental applications

In dentistry, IONP-containing materials can reduce bacterial colonization on dental surfaces, lowering the incidence of tooth cavities and oral infections. This application promotes better dental health and aids in the prevention of periodontal diseases. Research has shown that IONP-infused dental composites can effectively inhibit the growth of bacteria associated with dental caries and gum disease. [49]

Synergistic effects of antibiotics

IONPs can enhance the antibacterial activity of conventional antibiotics through synergistic effects. This combination not only improves the efficacy of antibiotics but also helps in overcoming antibiotic resistance. Studies have demonstrated that IONPs can potentiate the effects of antibiotics against multidrug-resistant bacterial strains, offering a powerful tool in the fight against resistant infections.[50]

Neurological Applications of IONP

Biocompatibility, magnetic behavior, and customizable surface chemistry make iron oxide nanoparticles (IONPs) promising neurological uses. Neurology research and clinical practice benefit from these diagnostic and therapeutic applications. IONPs' neurological uses are detailed here:

MRI contrast agents for neuroimaging

IONPs serve as effective MRI contrast agents, enhancing brain imaging by providing improved contrast. Their magnetic properties increase the sensitivity and specificity of neuroimaging, facilitating the diagnosis and monitoring of various neurological conditions. Studies have shown that IONP-based contrast agents can significantly improve the detection of brain tumors, multiple sclerosis, and other neurodegenerative diseases, providing clearer and more detailed images than traditional contrast agents. [51]

Magnetic targeting for drug delivery

The blood-brain barrier (BBB) poses a significant challenge for delivering drugs to the brain. However, functionalized IONPs can be directed across the BBB using external magnetic fields. This magnetic targeting allows for the precise delivery of neurotherapeutic drugs, improving their efficacy and reducing systemic side effects. Research has demonstrated that IONP-loaded drugs can be guided to specific brain regions, enhancing the treatment of neurological disorders such as gliomas and Alzheimer's disease.[52]

Blood-brain barrier permeability enhancement

IONPs can temporarily disrupt the blood-brain barrier to enhance drug delivery to the brain. This method involves using IONPs to open tight junctions in the BBB, allowing therapeutic agents to pass through more easily. This approach holds potential for treating neurodegenerative diseases and brain tumors by enabling higher concentrations of drugs to reach the brain, improving therapeutic outcomes. [53]

Neural stem cell labeling and tracking

IONPs can be used to label and track neural stem cells in vivo, providing valuable insights into stem cell therapy for neurological disorders. By using IONPs as contrast agents, researchers can monitor the migration, differentiation, and integration of labeled neural stem cells in the brain. This information is crucial for understanding the mechanisms of stem cell therapy and optimizing its effectiveness for treating conditions such as spinal cord injuries and Parkinson's disease. [54]

Hyperthermia treatment for brain tumors

IONPs offer a promising approach to hyperthermia treatment for brain tumors. When exposed to alternating magnetic fields, IONPs generate localized heating, which can selectively destroy tumor cells without damaging surrounding healthy tissue. This targeted hyperthermia therapy has shown potential in preclinical studies for treating glioblastomas and other aggressive brain tumors, providing a non-invasive and precise treatment option. [54]

Neurodegenerative disease therapeutics

IONPs can be functionalized with neuroprotective drugs or gene therapies to target neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. This targeted delivery approach minimizes off-target effects and enhances the efficacy of the therapeutic agents. Studies have demonstrated that IONP-based delivery systems can improve the distribution and effectiveness of treatments, potentially slowing the progression of neurodegenerative diseases. [55]

Stroke diagnosis and monitoring

IONPs can improve the diagnosis and monitoring of ischemic strokes through enhanced MRI imaging. They can visualize damaged brain areas and assess the efficacy of therapeutic interventions. By providing clearer images of stroke-affected regions, IONPs help in early diagnosis and monitoring of recovery, facilitating timely and effective treatment strategies. [56]

Understanding the Toxicity of IONPs

IONPs are gaining biomedical attention, although toxicity problems require further study. Understanding their possible biological harm is crucial. Cellular absorption and dispersion are key to IONP toxicity. Their capacity to infiltrate cells and accumulate in various tissues raises concerns about long-term effects. Assessing IONP safety requires understanding their complex interactions with cellular or tissue elements. By increasing ROS production, IONPs cause oxidative stress in cells. Chronic ROS exposure can damage cells and cause inflammation and other problems. Thus, this oxidative stress response must be carefully considered when assessing IONP toxicity. [57]

The ability of IONPs to cause inflammation is another major worry. Research suggests that IONPs can activate cell and tissue inflammatory pathways, potentially causing persistent inflammation. Chronic inflammation can lead to many diseases.

Genotoxicity is a major concern with IONP exposure. Some studies suggest that IONPs may harm cell DNA, raising concerns regarding mutagenesis and carcinogenesis. Understanding IONPs' genotoxicity is crucial to assessing their long-term safety. Cytotoxicity is another important aspect of IONP toxicity. IONPs can damage cell viability and function at high concentrations. Establishing the IONP cytotoxicity threshold is essential for safe use. [58]

The interaction between IONPs and blood elements, including red blood cells and platelets, must also be examined. In medical settings using IONPs, hemocompatibility is essential to prevent blood circulation and coagulation issues. Another important feature of IONP toxicity studies is immunological response. Immune responses to IONPs may change immune cell behavior, affecting health outcomes. [59]

The toxicity profiles of IONPs may vary among organs, requiring detailed evaluations to ensure their safety in various biomedical applications. The toxicity of particles depends on their size and surface modification, with smaller particles and surface changes having a greater impact. To assess cumulative effects, long-term exposure must be considered, especially in chronic medical applications. To reduce environmental impacts, IONP use must be assessed.[60] In conclusion, understanding iron oxide nanoparticle toxicity requires multidimensional evaluations across biological settings and applications. Safe use guidelines and IONP risk mitigation require ongoing research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, IONPs have several current and prospective applications due to their unique physicochemical features. They are used in cell labeling, medication targeting, gene delivery, biosensors, hyperthermia therapy, and diagnostics, with a promise to cancer and illness therapies. These medical uses depend on ION internalization for appropriate diagnosis or treatment, which carries exposure hazards.

Despite the growing quantity and benefits of these medical applications, comprehensive research on the biological impacts of ION exposure is needed. Current ION uses, especially in biomedical situations involving direct human body introduction, are promising, although their toxicity is unknown. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how these nanomaterials interact with biological systems and determine the health risks of ION exposure. Given IONs' widespread and promising uses, we must work together to grasp their intricacies and health effects. Further study is needed to use IONs safely and effectively in biological applications, maximizing their potential benefits while minimizing health hazards.

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