Mouth Dissolving Film (MDF) of Polmacoxib: A Novel Strategy for Enhanced Rapid Analgesia and Patient Compliance.

[1]Mohammad Arsh Shaikh Khairu, [2]Aijaz A. Sheikh, [3]Kailash R. Biyani

[1,2,3]**Anuradha College of Pharmacy, Anuradha Nagar, Sakegaon Road, Chikhli, Dist Buldana, Maharastra (India) 443201**

Abstract: The management of osteoarthritis (OA) requires sustained and effective analgesia, typically managed through Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). Polmacoxib, a novel dual-acting COX-2 inhibitor, offers a promising safety profile but faces challenges related to oral bioavailability and onset of action in conventional solid dosage forms. This review explores the development of Mouth Dissolving Films (MDF) as a strategic delivery system for Polmacoxib. By leveraging the vascularity of the oral mucosa, MDFs offer the potential for rapid absorption, reduced gastric irritation, and improved compliance among geriatric populations suffering from dysphagia.

1. Introduction

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a degenerative joint disease affecting millions globally, characterized by chronic pain and inflammation. The primary pharmacological intervention remains NSAIDs; however, their long-term use is associated with gastrointestinal (GI) and cardiovascular (CV) risks (McAlindon et al., 2014).

Recent advancements in pharmaceutical chemistry have led to the development of **Polmacoxib**, a next-generation NSAID designed to minimize these risks. Despite its therapeutic potential, the conventional oral delivery of Polmacoxib (capsules/tablets) is limited by the "lag time" of gastric disintegration and the "pill burden" faced by elderly patients (Cho et al., 2018).

Mouth Dissolving Films (MDFs)—thin, flexible strips that dissolve on the tongue within seconds without water—have emerged as a solution. This review critically analyzes the rationale, formulation strategies, and therapeutic advantages of encapsulating Polmacoxib into an MDF dosage form to achieve rapid analgesia and enhanced patient compliance.

2. Profile of Polmacoxib: Chemistry and Pharmacology

2.1 Mechanism of Action

Polmacoxib (formerly CG100649) is unique among coxibs. While it selectively inhibits cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2), it also possesses a high affinity for carbonic anhydrase (CA) in erythrocytes.

This dual affinity allows erythrocytes to act as a "drug reservoir," transporting high concentrations of Polmacoxib to inflamed tissues where CA activity is high, thereby maximizing efficacy at the site of inflammation while maintaining low systemic exposure (Lee et al., 2017).

2.2 Physicochemical Limitations

Polmacoxib is a Biopharmaceutics Classification System (BCS) Class II drug, characterized by low aqueous solubility and high permeability. Its poor solubility is the rate-limiting step in absorption, leading to variable bioavailability when administered as a standard solid oral dosage form (Kim et al., 2015). This necessitates a formulation strategy that not only delivers the drug but enhances its solubility—a key capability of MDF technology.

3. Mouth Dissolving Films (MDF): The Technology

MDFs, also known as oral wafers or strips, typically consist of a hydrophilic polymer matrix that rapidly hydrates upon contact with saliva.

3.1 Advantages Over Conventional Dosage Forms

- **Rapid Onset:** The film disintegrates in <60 seconds, releasing the drug for immediate absorption through the highly vascularized oral mucosa (buccal and sublingual routes), potentially bypassing hepatic first-pass metabolism (Dixit & Puthli, 2009).
- **Dysphagia Friendly:** Approximately 35% of the general population, and a higher percentage of the geriatric OA population, experience difficulty swallowing tablets (dysphagia). MDFs eliminate the need for water and swallowing (Bala et al., 2013).
- **Precision Dosing:** Unlike syrups where measurement errors occur, MDFs provide a precise unit dose.

4. Rationale for Polmacoxib MDF

Combining Polmacoxib with MDF technology addresses three critical clinical needs:

1. **Speed of Analgesia:** In breakthrough pain associated with OA, the 30-45 minute onset typical of enteric-coated tablets is suboptimal. MDFs can facilitate direct transmucosal absorption, potentially reducing Tmax (time to peak plasma concentration).
2. **Solubility Enhancement:** The manufacturing of MDFs often involves solid dispersion. When Polmacoxib is dissolved in the polymeric casting solution and dried, it can be trapped in an amorphous state within the film matrix, significantly increasing its dissolution rate compared to the crystalline drug (Nagaraju et al., 2013).
3. **Gastric Safety:** By facilitating partial absorption in the mouth, the direct contact time of the NSAID with the gastric lining is reduced, potentially lowering the risk of local irritation.

5. Formulation Strategies

Developing a Polmacoxib MDF requires a delicate balance of mechanical strength and disintegration speed.

5.1 Polymer Selection

The backbone of the MDF is the polymer. For Polmacoxib, hydrophilic polymers with low molecular weight are preferred to ensure rapid dissolution.

- **HPMC E5/E15:** Hydroxypropyl Methylcellulose is widely used for its excellent film-forming properties and compatibility with NSAIDs.
- **Pullulan:** A natural polymer that produces transparent, high-elegance films with rapid disintegration times, though at a higher cost.
- **PVA (Polyvinyl Alcohol):** Often used in combination to improve mechanical flexibility (Kaur et al., 2014).

5.2 Solubility Enhancement Techniques

Since Polmacoxib is hydrophobic, simply adding it to the film might result in precipitation or rough texture.

- **Inclusion Complexes:** Cyclodextrins (e.g., β-cyclodextrin) can be used to encapsulate the hydrophobic Polmacoxib molecule, rendering it water-soluble before incorporation into the film matrix.
- **Cosolvents:** The use of PEG 400 or Propylene Glycol in the casting solution acts as both a plasticizer and a solubilizer.

5.3 Method of Preparation: Solvent Casting

The most commercially viable method for Polmacoxib MDF is Solvent Casting.

1. **API Dissolution:** Polmacoxib is dissolved in a solvent (ethanol/water).
2. **Polymer Addition:** Hydrophilic polymers and plasticizers are added to form a viscous homogenous solution.
3. **Deaeration:** Removal of air bubbles to ensure uniform mass.
4. **Casting & Drying:** The solution is cast onto a backing liner and dried to form a thin sheet.
5. **Cutting:** The sheet is cut into specific dimensions (e.g., 2×2 cm) containing the precise dose (e.g., 2mg).

6. Evaluation and Quality Control

To ensure the safety and efficacy of Polmacoxib MDFs, rigorous evaluation parameters are required (USP, 2023).

6.1 Mechanical Properties

- **Folding Endurance:** The number of times the film can be folded without breaking. High endurance ensures the film does not snap in the packaging.
- **Tensile Strength:** Measures the maximum stress the film can withstand.

6.2 Physicochemical Properties

- **Surface pH:** Must be neutral ($pH ~6.8$) to prevent irritation of the oral mucosa.
- **Disintegration Time:** Ideally <30 seconds.
- **In-vitro Dissolution:** Due to the limited volume of saliva, dissolution testing often uses modified apparatus to simulate oral cavity conditions.

7. Challenges and Future Perspectives

While promising, the Polmacoxib MDF presents challenges:

- **Dose Loading:** MDFs are generally limited to low-dose drugs (<30 mg). Fortunately, Polmacoxib is potent (standard dose 2mg), making it an ideal candidate.
- **Taste Masking:** Polmacoxib, like many NSAIDs, may have a bitter taste. Effective taste masking using sweeteners (sucralose, aspartame) or ion-exchange resins is critical for compliance.
- **Stability:** Amorphous solid dispersions in films can revert to crystalline forms over time (recrystallization), reducing solubility. Stability testing under ICH guidelines is mandatory.

8. Conclusion

The development of a Mouth Dissolving Film for Polmacoxib represents a synergistic convergence of novel pharmacology and advanced drug delivery systems. By overcoming the solubility hurdles of Class II drugs and addressing the practical challenges of dysphagia in geriatric patients, this strategy offers a viable pathway for "Rapid Analgesia." Future research should focus on long-term stability studies and in-vivo pharmacokinetic evaluations to confirm the superiority of the transmucosal route for this specific NSAID.

9. References

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