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ISSN: 0975-0851
Journal of Bioequivalence & Bioavailability

Opinion Article

Liposomes in Pharmaceutical and Clinical Applications

Petra Siven*

Department of Pharmaceutical Analytical Chemistry, Tanta University, Tanta, Egypt

DESCRIPTION

Liposomes are spherical vesicular structures composed of one or more phospholipid bilayers surrounding an aqueous core, widely used as drug delivery systems in modern pharmaceutical sciences. Their unique architecture allows them to encapsulate both hydrophilic and lipophilic drugs, making them versatile carriers for a wide range of therapeutic agents. Liposomes have gained significant attention due to their ability to improve drug solubility, enhance bioavailability, and reduce toxicity, particularly in the treatment of chronic and complex diseases.

The fundamental structure of liposomes is based on phospholipids, which are amphiphilic molecules containing both hydrophilic and hydrophobic regions. When dispersed in an aqueous environment, these molecules spontaneously arrange themselves into bilayer membranes, forming closed vesicles. Depending on their size and number of bilayers, liposomes can be classified into unilamellar vesicles, which consist of a single lipid bilayer, and multilamellar vesicles, which contain multiple concentric bilayers. This structural diversity allows for tailored drug delivery applications based on therapeutic needs.

One of the most important advantages of liposomes is their ability to encapsulate drugs with varying physicochemical properties. Hydrophilic drugs are typically enclosed within the aqueous core, while lipophilic drugs are incorporated into the lipid bilayer. This dual capability enhances the stability of drugs and protects them from degradation in biological environments. Additionally, liposomes can be modified with surface ligands or polymers, such as polyethylene glycol, to improve circulation time and target specific tissues or cells.

Liposomes play a crucial role in targeted drug delivery. By modifying their surface with specific ligands, they can selectively bind to receptors on target cells, facilitating site-specific drug delivery. This is particularly beneficial in cancer therapy, where liposomal formulations can preferentially accumulate in tumor tissues through enhanced permeability and retention effects. Such targeted delivery minimizes damage to healthy tissues and reduces systemic side effects, improving the overall therapeutic index of the drug.

The preparation of liposomes involves various techniques, including thin-film hydration, reverse-phase evaporation, and solvent injection methods. Each method influences the size, encapsulation efficiency, and stability of the resulting liposomes. Advances in manufacturing technologies have enabled the production of liposomes with controlled size distribution and reproducibility, which are essential for clinical applications and regulatory approval.

Despite their advantages, liposomes also face certain challenges. Stability issues, such as leakage of encapsulated drugs and susceptibility to oxidation or hydrolysis, can affect their shelf life and performance. Additionally, large-scale production and cost considerations remain significant barriers to widespread commercialization. However, ongoing research is focused on overcoming these limitations through improved formulation strategies and advanced delivery technologies.

Liposomes have been successfully translated into clinical practice, with several approved formulations used in the treatment of cancer, fungal infections, and other diseases. These formulations demonstrate improved safety profiles and therapeutic efficacy compared to conventional drug delivery systems. The continued development of liposomal technologies is expected to expand their applications in areas such as gene therapy, vaccine delivery, and personalized medicine.

In conclusion, liposomes represent a powerful and flexible drug delivery platform that addresses many challenges associated with conventional pharmaceutical formulations. Their ability to enhance drug stability, improve targeting, and reduce toxicity makes them an essential component of modern therapeutics. With ongoing advancements in nanotechnology and formulation science, liposomes are poised to play an increasingly important role in the future of drug development and delivery.

Correspondence to: Petra Siven, Department of Pharmaceutical Analytical Chemistry, Tanta University, Tanta, Egypt, E-mail: petra@siven1324.eg

Received: 28-Jan-2026, Manuscript No. JBB-26-31388; **Editor assigned:** 30-Jan-2026, PreQC No. JBB-26-31388 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 13-Feb-2026, QC No. JBB-26-31388; **Revised:** 20-Feb-2026, Manuscript No. JBB-26-31388 (R); **Published:** 27-Feb-2026, DOI: 10.35248/0975-0851.26.18.680

Citation: Siven P. (2026). Liposomes in Pharmaceutical and Clinical Applications. J Bioequiv Availab. 18:680.