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# Smart Herbal Hydrogel for Diabetic Wound Healing

**Mrs. Mayuri Mokal[1], Dr. Bhagwan M Kale[2], Ashwini S Wadhekar[3], Asmita K Wagh[4], Bhagyashree D Tayde[5]**
Assistant Professor[1], Principal[2], [3-5]Students
Shri Goraksha College of Pharmacy and Research Centre, Khamgaon, Maharashtra, India
*Corresponding Author: Ashwini S Wadhekar
Email ID: wadhekarashwini631@gmail.com

**Abstract :** *Diabetic wounds are a major complication of diabetes mellitus, often resulting in delayed wound healing due to poor blood circulation, high blood glucose levels, and increased risk of infection. Conventional wound dressings may not provide all the essential conditions required for effective wound repair. Therefore, the development of a smart herbal hydrogel offers a promising approach for diabetic wound management.*

*The present study focuses on the formulation and evaluation of a smart herbal hydrogel incorporated with natural herbal extracts possessing antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and wound-healing properties. The hydrogel acts as a moisture-retaining wound dressing that maintains an optimal environment for tissue regeneration. Natural polymers such as chitosan, aloe vera gel, and other biocompatible materials can be used to prepare the hydrogel formulation.*

*The smart hydrogel is designed to provide controlled release of herbal bioactive compounds at the wound site. Its moisture-responsive and biocompatible properties may help improve wound healing while protecting the affected area from external contamination. The formulation can also be evaluated for pH sensitivity, swelling capacity, drug release, spreadability, stability, and antimicrobial activity.*

*The proposed herbal hydrogel aims to reduce inflammation, prevent microbial growth, promote collagen formation, and support faster tissue regeneration. Its potential application may improve patient comfort and reduce the need for frequent dressing changes.*

*In conclusion, smart herbal hydrogel represents a promising and innovative approach for diabetic wound care by combining the therapeutic benefits of medicinal plants with advanced hydrogel technology. Further experimental and clinical studies are required to establish its safety, effectiveness, and suitability for practical medical applications..*

**Keywords:** Smart Herbal Hydrogel, Diabetic Wound Healing, Diabetes Mellitus, Chitosan, Aloe Vera, Herbal Extracts, Natural Polymers, Antimicrobial Activity, Anti-inflammatory Activity, Antioxidant Activity, Controlled Drug Release, Wound Dressing, Hydrogel Formulation, Tissue Regeneration, Collagen Formation, Biocompatibility, Moisture Retention, pH Sensitivity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic metabolic disorder associated with persistent elevation of blood glucose. One important complication is the development of diabetic foot ulcers (DFUs). Neuropathy, reduced blood supply, repeated pressure, impaired immune response and delayed tissue repair can contribute to ulcer formation and slow healing. These wounds require careful assessment and multidisciplinary management. A wound dressing is intended to protect the wound, manage exudate and support a suitable healing environment. Hydrogels are three-dimensional, water-rich polymer networks. Their high water content, softness and ability to retain moisture make them useful candidates for wound-dressing research. A “smart” hydrogel is designed to respond to local changes such as pH, enzymes, temperature or

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reactive oxygen species (ROS). This project reviews the concept of a smart herbal hydrogel for diabetic wound healing. It discusses the biological basis of delayed healing, hydrogel materials, selected plant-derived bioactives, formulation considerations, evaluation parameters, limitations and future scope. The project is a literature-based academic proposal; it does not claim that a herbal hydrogel is an established or approved treatment[1]

## DIABETES AND DIABETIC WOUNDS

Diabetes can damage peripheral nerves and blood vessels. Loss of protective sensation may mean that minor injuries or pressure areas go unnoticed. Peripheral arterial disease can reduce oxygen and nutrient delivery. High glucose, persistent inflammation, oxidative stress and impaired immune function can further interfere with tissue repair. Common risk factors include long duration of diabetes, neuropathy, poor circulation, foot deformity, unsuitable footwear, previous ulceration and smoking. A diabetic foot ulcer may become infected and, in severe cases, threaten the limb. Early clinical assessment is important. People with diabetes should seek professional care for any foot wound, redness, swelling, discharge, fever or change in foot colour or temperature. Standard care is broader than dressing selection. It can include professional wound assessment, pressure offloading, appropriate debridement, infection management, vascular assessment, glucose management and patient education. A hydrogel is not a substitute for these measures[2]

## PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF DELAYED HEALING

Normal wound healing is commonly described in overlapping phases: haemostasis, inflammation, proliferation and remodelling. In diabetes, these phases may be prolonged or dysregulated. Persistent hyperglycaemia can contribute to advanced glycation end products and oxidative stress. Excess reactive oxygen species may damage cells and extracellular matrix. Prolonged inflammation can delay the transition to tissue-building activity. Reduced angiogenesis may limit formation of new blood vessels. Fibroblast and keratinocyte functions may also be impaired. These mechanisms help explain why a dressing intended for diabetic wounds is often designed to maintain moisture, manage exudate, protect fragile tissue and, in research settings, deliver bioactive agents in a controlled way[3]

## HYDROGEL: DEFINITION AND PROPERTIES

A hydrogel is a hydrophilic polymer network capable of absorbing and retaining substantial quantities of water without dissolving completely. The network may be formed by physical interactions, chemical crosslinking or a combination of both. Important properties include: • High water content and moisture retention. • Softness and conformability to irregular surfaces. • Porous network that may permit diffusion of dissolved substances. • Potential to incorporate drugs or plant-derived compounds. • Tunable swelling, degradation and mechanical properties. • Potential for controlled or stimulus-responsive release. Hydrogels are not all interchangeable. Their suitability depends on wound type, exudate level, formulation quality, sterility, biocompatibility and clinical assessment. Excessively wet or heavily exuding wounds may require a different dressing strategy[4]

## TYPES OF HYDROGELS

Hydrogels may be classified by origin, structure and response. Natural-polymer hydrogels: prepared from materials such as alginate, chitosan, gelatin, cellulose derivatives or hyaluronic acid. They may offer biocompatibility advantages, but their properties can vary by source and processing. Synthetic-polymer hydrogels: prepared from polymers such as polyethylene glycol (PEG) or polyvinyl alcohol (PVA). They can provide reproducible and adjustable properties, although residual reagents and degradation products must be assessed. Composite hydrogels: combine two or more polymers or include particles/bioactive materials to adjust strength, swelling or release. Smart/stimuli-responsive hydrogels: are designed to change their behaviour in response to pH, temperature, enzymes, glucose, light or oxidative conditions. The response must be characterized experimentally; the word “smart” alone does not establish clinical benefit[5]

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## HERBAL BIOACTIVE INGREDIENTS

REVIEW Plant-derived compounds are investigated for antioxidant, anti-inflammatory or antimicrobial properties. Examples frequently discussed in biomaterials research include curcumin from turmeric, aloin or acemannan-containing fractions from Aloe vera, and selected neem-derived constituents. These examples are research candidates, not recommendations for applying household plant preparations to wounds. Potential advantages: plant-derived molecules may provide multiple biological activities and can be incorporated into polymer matrices for research on local delivery. Important limitations: plant extracts vary with species, plant part, growing conditions, extraction method and storage. They may contain contaminants, cause irritation or allergy, degrade during processing, or interact with the polymer. A standardized extract, chemical fingerprinting, microbial quality testing and cytotoxicity assessment are essential. Clinical guidelines have cautioned against using topical herbal preparations for diabetic foot-ulcer healing because the available clinical evidence is low-certainty and heterogeneous. Therefore, this project treats herbal incorporation as an investigational research concept, not a proven clinical treatment[6]

## SMART HYDROGEL CONCEPT

A smart herbal hydrogel may be designed to respond to selected features of the wound environment. For example, some chronic wounds can show altered pH, elevated protease activity or oxidative stress. A responsive polymer network may be engineered to change swelling, degradation or release behaviour under a defined stimulus. Conceptual components: 1. Polymer matrix: provides the hydrated three-dimensional network. 2. Crosslinking system: provides structural integrity. 3. Standardized plant-derived bioactive: selected after safety and compatibility screening. 4. Optional sensing or responsive component: designed to respond to a defined wound-related signal. 5. Packaging and sterilization strategy: developed to maintain quality and stability. A proposed design should target one clearly defined response and demonstrate it with reproducible measurements. Combining many ingredients without compatibility evidence can make a formulation harder to standardize[7]

## PROPOSED FORMULATION DESIGN

The proposed academic design is a sterile, biocompatible polymer hydrogel containing a standardized plant-derived research ingredient. A natural polymer such as chitosan or cellulose derivative may be considered as a matrix candidate, while a second polymer may be explored to adjust mechanical strength and swelling. The plant extract should be selected based on published evidence, chemical standardization and preliminary safety data. Critical quality attributes include appearance, pH, homogeneity, gel strength, swelling behaviour, water-vapour transmission, bioactive content, release profile, microbial quality, packaging compatibility and stability. The selection of polymer, extract and crosslinking chemistry must be justified with literature and validated by laboratory testing. No single composition is presented as a clinically validated recipe. The final formula cannot be selected without compatibility, toxicity, stability and performance studies[8]

## MECHANISM OF ACTION: PROPOSED

The proposed mechanism is based on the physical function of the hydrogel and the possible biological activity of a standardized plant-derived compound. • Moist wound environment: the hydrated network may help prevent excessive drying. • Physical barrier: the dressing may protect the wound from external contamination when properly manufactured and applied. • Exudate interaction: swelling and absorption characteristics may help manage wound fluid, depending on the design. • Local delivery: the polymer network may control diffusion or release of an incorporated compound. • Research hypothesis: selected plant-derived constituents may influence oxidative or inflammatory pathways. These effects must be demonstrated in appropriate laboratory models and cannot be assumed from antioxidant tests alone. The dressing would be an adjunct to standard diabetic-foot care, not a replacement for offloading, infection treatment or vascular management[9]

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## DIAGRAMS AND FIGURES

Figure 1. Conceptual structure of a herbal hydrogel dressing. The diagram shows a hydrated polymer matrix with dispersed bioactive material. It is a simplified educational illustration, not a microscopic image. Figure 2. Main phases of normal wound healing. The phases overlap and do not occur as perfectly separate steps. Figure 3. Potential smart-hydrogel response concept. A stimulus-responsive network may alter release or material behaviour after sensing a defined local signal. The response must be tested experimentally

## PHARMACEUTICAL EVALUATION PARAMETERS

A research hydrogel may be evaluated using the following parameters: 1. Appearance and homogeneity: colour, clarity/opacity, visible particles and uniformity. 2. pH: measured using a calibrated instrument with a suitable sample preparation method. 3. Swelling ratio: change in mass after exposure to a defined medium and time. 4. Gel fraction or integrity: proportion of material remaining after a specified test. 5. Mechanical properties: firmness, tensile/compressive behaviour and handling. 6. Water-vapour transmission: helps characterize moisture-management behaviour. 7. Bioactive content: quantified using a validated analytical method. 8. In-vitro release: measures release over time in a justified test medium. 9. Biocompatibility: cytotoxicity and irritation-related testing using appropriate validated methods. 10. Microbial quality and sterility: assessed using applicable pharmacopeial/medical-device standards. 11. Stability: changes in appearance, pH, content, release and integrity during storage

**Evaluation parameters covered**

Figure no. 1.

| Evaluation parameter | Supporting reference |
|---|---|
| Appearance and homogeneity | 1, 3 |
| pH | 2, 3 |
| Swelling ratio | 1, 2, 3 |
| Gel fraction | 2 |
| Mechanical properties | 1, 2 |
| Water-vapour transmission | 1, 2, 3 |
| Bioactive/drug release | 2 |
| Biocompatibility | 1, 3 |
| Stability | Requires additional stability-specific research |
| Microbial quality and sterility | Requires separate testing standards |

## QUALITY CONTROL AND SAFETY

A wound dressing intended for clinical use must be manufactured under an appropriate quality system. Raw materials should be traceable and meet defined specifications. Plant extracts require identity, purity and contaminant controls. The manufacturing process must be controlled to reduce batch variation. Sterilization can alter polymer structure or

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bioactive stability; therefore, the selected method must be validated for the finished product. Packaging should maintain sterility and protect the product from moisture, light and contamination as appropriate. Shelf-life claims require stability data. Safety assessment should consider cytotoxicity, irritation, sensitization, degradation products, residual crosslinkers and microbial contamination. A material that appears natural is not automatically safe for an open wound[11]

## OBJECTIVES

1. To study the development of smart herbal hydrogel for diabetic wound management.
2. To select suitable herbal extracts possessing antimicrobial, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.
3. To formulate a hydrogel using natural polymers such as chitosan, aloe vera and alginate.
4. To study the physicochemical properties of the prepared herbal hydrogel.
5. To evaluate the pH and swelling capacity of the hydrogel formulation.
6. To evaluate the antimicrobial activity of the herbal hydrogel against selected wound-associated microorganisms.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The proposed smart herbal hydrogel formulation consists of natural polymers, herbal bioactive ingredients and suitable pharmaceutical excipients. Chitosan and sodium alginate are considered as the primary polymeric materials because of their biocompatibility, water-retaining capacity and hydrogel-forming properties. Aloe vera extract and curcumin are selected as potential herbal bioactive ingredients because of their reported antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and wound-healing properties. Glycerin may be used as a humectant and plasticizer, while purified water serves as the formulation medium. A suitable crosslinking agent may be selected to provide structural stability to the hydrogel network. The materials will be selected based on their compatibility, quality, safety and stability.

The proposed study begins with the selection of suitable herbal ingredients and natural polymers for the development of smart herbal hydrogel. Aloe vera and curcumin are considered as herbal bioactive ingredients due to their reported antioxidant, antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties. The selected herbal materials will be processed using suitable extraction methods, followed by filtration and concentration. The extracts will be standardized to ensure consistency in their chemical composition and biological activity.

## RESULTS

The development of a smart herbal hydrogel is expected to provide a suitable moisture-retaining environment for diabetic wound management. The proposed formulation combines natural polymers, such as chitosan and alginate, with selected herbal bioactive compounds to support wound protection and tissue regeneration. (figure no 2.).

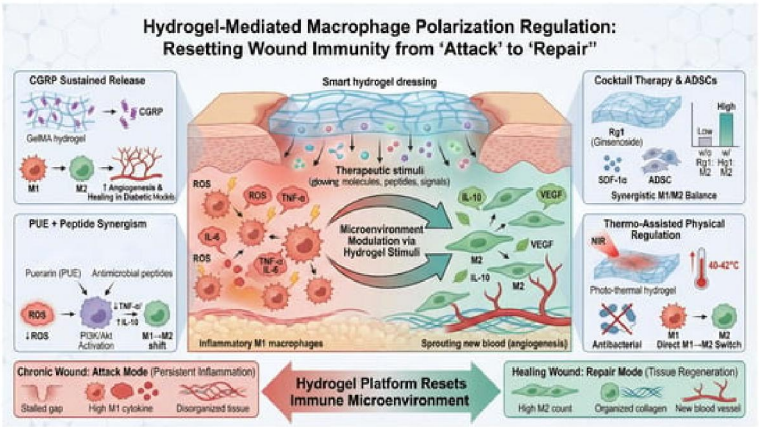


**Figure no 2.** Hydrogel-Mediated Macrophage Polarization Regulation: Resetting Wound Immunity From 'Attack' To 'Repair'.

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Based on previously published experimental research, the following results have been reported:

1. **Hydrogel formation:** Herbal extract-loaded chitosan nanoparticles were successfully incorporated into calcium alginate hydrogel, producing a porous hydrogel structure.
2. **Swelling capacity:** The prepared hydrogel formulations demonstrated good water absorption, with water uptake capacities ranging from 334.19% to 372.53%.
3. **Controlled drug release:** The hydrogel showed sustained release of herbal bioactive compounds. After 48 hours, cumulative release reached 61.58% and 70.24% in two formulations.
4. **Biocompatibility:** Cell viability studies indicated that the prepared hydrogel formulations did not show significant cytotoxicity against L929 cells under the tested conditions.
5. **Antioxidant activity:** The herbal extract-containing hydrogel demonstrated cytoprotective effects against oxidative stress in laboratory studies.
6. **Anti-inflammatory activity:** The herbal hydrogel reduced IL-6 levels in an in-vitro experimental model, indicating potential anti-inflammatory activity.
7. **Cell migration:** The formulation promoted skin-cell migration, suggesting potential support for wound closure.
8. **Collagen formation:** Increased collagen deposition was observed in diabetic wound tissues treated with the herbal hydrogel.
9. **Tissue regeneration:** Histological examination showed improved re-epithelialization and granulation tissue formation in treated animal wounds.
10. **Growth factor expression:** Increased expression of wound-healing-associated genes, including VEGF, b-FGF and TGF-β, was reported.
11. **Wound closure:** In the diabetic rat model, the 20% herbal extract-loaded formulation demonstrated 93.06 ± 3.52% wound size reduction after 14 days.
12. **Overall performance:** The experimental findings suggested that herbal extract-loaded chitosan nanoparticles incorporated into calcium alginate hydrogel have potential for diabetic wound management.

**Summary of published experimental results**

| Evaluation parameter | Reported result |
|---|---|
| Water uptake capacity | 372.53 ± 33.96% |
| Drug release at 48 hours | 70.24 ± 4.43% |
| Porosity | 80.23 ± 4.50% |
| Wound size reduction at day 14 | 93.06 ± 3.52% |
| Collagen deposition | 65.48 ± 8.62% |

Values shown are from the 20% Fumaria officinalis extract-loaded chitosan nanoparticle/calcium alginate hydrogel formulation in the published study.[12]

## DISCUSSION

Diabetic wound healing is a complex process because persistent hyperglycaemia, poor blood circulation, oxidative stress, prolonged inflammation and increased susceptibility to microbial infections can delay normal tissue repair. Conventional wound dressings mainly provide physical protection and moisture management, whereas smart herbal hydrogels are being investigated as advanced wound-dressing systems that may offer additional therapeutic benefits.

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1. **Importance of diabetic wound management:** Diabetic wounds are difficult to heal because of poor blood circulation, high blood glucose levels, oxidative stress and prolonged inflammation. Therefore, advanced wound-dressing systems are being investigated to improve wound management.
2. **Role of natural polymers:** Natural polymers such as chitosan, aloe vera and alginate are potential materials for hydrogel preparation because of their water-retaining properties, biocompatibility and suitability for wound-dressing research.
3. **Moisture-retaining property:** The hydrogel maintains a moist environment around the wound, which may support cell migration and tissue regeneration.
4. **Antimicrobial activity:** Chitosan and selected herbal extracts may provide antimicrobial effects that could help control microbial growth at the wound site.
5. **Anti-inflammatory activity:** Herbal ingredients such as curcumin and aloe vera contain bioactive compounds that have been investigated for their potential to reduce inflammatory responses.
6. **Antioxidant activity:** Herbal extracts containing antioxidant compounds may help reduce oxidative stress, which is one of the factors associated with delayed diabetic wound healing.
7. **Controlled drug release:** The hydrogel polymer network may provide sustained and localized release of herbal bioactive compounds, potentially reducing the need for frequent dressing applications.
8. **Smart response mechanism:** Stimuli-responsive hydrogels can be designed to respond to wound-related changes such as pH, temperature and enzyme activity. These properties may help regulate drug release according to the wound environment.
9. **Swelling capacity:** The swelling property of hydrogel helps absorb wound fluid and maintain moisture balance. It is important to optimize swelling according to the amount of wound exudate.
10. **Collagen formation:** Certain herbal bioactive compounds may support collagen synthesis, which plays an important role in tissue repair and wound regeneration.
11. **Tissue regeneration:** The proposed hydrogel may support fibroblast activity, cell migration, granulation tissue formation and re-epithelialization, which are important processes in wound healing.
12. **Biocompatibility:** The prepared formulation should be evaluated for cytotoxicity, skin irritation and compatibility with biological tissues to ensure its suitability for further development.
13. **Stability studies:** Stability testing is necessary to determine whether the hydrogel maintains its physical appearance, pH, bioactive content and drug-release properties during storage.
14. **Advantages over conventional dressings:** Smart herbal hydrogels may offer better moisture management, flexibility, controlled release and additional biological activities compared with simple protective dressings.
15. **Future scope:** Further research is required to optimize the formulation, establish its safety, evaluate its wound-healing activity and conduct clinical studies to determine its effectiveness in diabetic wound management.

**Overall Discussion**

The smart herbal hydrogel is a promising research approach that combines natural polymers, herbal bioactive compounds and advanced hydrogel technology. Its moisture-retaining, antimicrobial, antioxidant and controlled-release properties may provide advantages in diabetic wound-care research. However, experimental and clinical studies are necessary to confirm its safety and therapeutic effectiveness.

## II. CONCLUSION

The smart herbal hydrogel for diabetic wound healing represents a promising and innovative approach in the field of pharmaceutical and biomedical research. It combines the beneficial properties of natural polymers such as chitosan, aloe vera and alginate with herbal bioactive compounds possessing potential antimicrobial, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activities.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the preparation of the academic project entitled **"Smart Herbal Hydrogel for Diabetic Wound Healing."**

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