2nd PANHELLENIC CONGRESS OF MEDICAL PHYSICS
4-6 OCTOBER 2024| EUGENIDES FOUNDATION

NANOTECHNOLOGY AND DENTAL IMPLANTS

Christodoulou Christiana[1], Efstathios P. Efstathopoulos [2]

[1]DSD National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
M.Sc course "Nanomedicine", student.

[2]Professor, Medical Physics 2nd Dept. of Radiology Medical School, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

1. Background-Aim

Dental implants play a pivotal role in modern dentistry, offering a revolutionary solution to tooth loss. Beyond restoring function by providing a stable base for replacement teeth, implants significantly enhance aesthetics, building confidence and improving overall quality of life. Moreover, they contribute to the preservation of bone structure. Unlike traditional alternatives, such as bridges, implants spare adjacent teeth from alteration, maintaining their integrity. With exceptional durability, implants can endure a lifetime with proper care. Their versatility enables replacement of single teeth, multiple teeth, or entire arches. Traditionally, dental implants have been made from materials such as titanium, which are known for their strength and integration with bone (osseointegration). However, despite advancements in implant technology, issues such as peri-implant infection, delayed osseointegration, and long-term complications persist.

Nanotechnology, which involves the manipulation of materials at the nanoscale level (typically between 1 and 100 nanometres), has shown promise in addressing many of these challenges. By engineering the surfaces of implants at the nanoscale, it is possible to significantly enhance their interaction with biological tissues. Nanoscale modifications can improve the biocompatibility of the implant, promote faster and stronger bone integration, and provide antibacterial properties to reduce the risk of infection. Consequently, the application of nanotechnology in dental implantology represents a significant advancement in improving both short-term healing and long-term implant success.

This project aims to explore the potential of nanotechnology in enhancing dental implant performance. Specifically, it investigates how nanostructured coatings can influence osseointegration, mechanical strength, and the prevention of peri-implantitis. Through a comprehensive review of the literature, this project evaluates the efficacy of nanotechnology-enhanced dental implants compared to conventional implants.

2. Materials & Methods

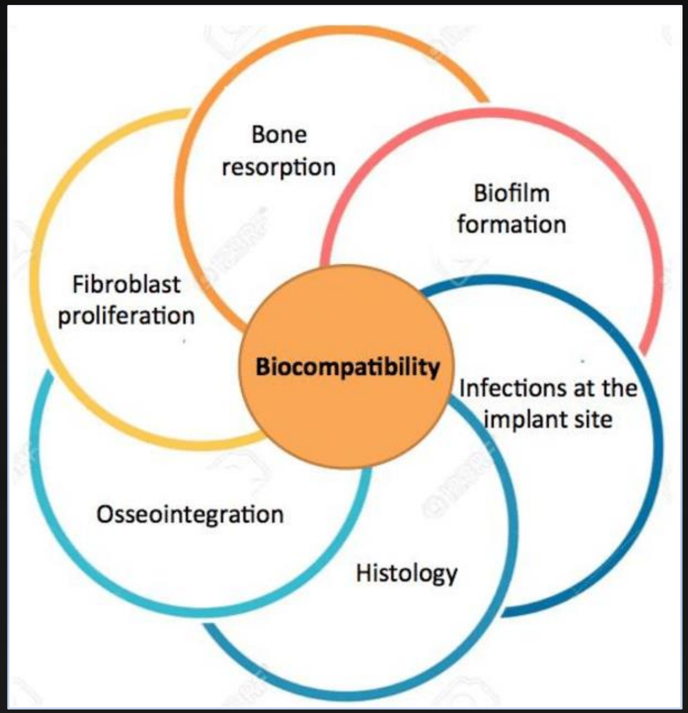
This project adopts a systematic review methodology to synthesize the current state of knowledge regarding nanotechnology's role in enhancing dental implants. The literature review focused on studies published between 2013 and 2023, sourced from databases including PubMed and Google Scholar. The primary inclusion criteria were studies related to nanotechnology applications in dental implants, with specific attention to surface modifications for improved osseointegration, antimicrobial properties, and clinical outcomes.

The literature review process involved identifying and categorizing studies that explored the following key areas:

1. Nanostructured Surfaces: Research on how surface modifications at the nanoscale, such as nano-coatings, affect cell behavior, osseointegration, and implant stability.
2. Antimicrobial Nanocoatings: Studies investigating the incorporation of antimicrobial agents into dental implant surfaces to reduce bacterial colonization and lower the risk of peri-implant infection.
3. Comparative Studies: Evaluations of nanotechnology-enhanced implants compared to traditional titanium implants in terms of their biological performance, clinical outcomes, and potential side effects.
4. Challenges and Future Prospects: Articles examining the challenges in the widespread adoption of nanotechnology in dental implants, including safety concerns.

3. Results

Nanotechnology-enhanced dental implants have emerged as a transformative approach in implantology, offering significant advancements in biocompatibility, osseointegration, and antimicrobial properties. The literature reveals that nanostructured surfaces, including titanium dioxide nanotubes, nanopores, and nanopatterned surfaces, closely mimic the extracellular matrix of bone, leading to a more favorable biological response from osteoblasts, which are essential for bone formation and implant stability. These nanostructures increase the surface area available for cell attachment and proliferation, resulting in improved osteoblast adhesion, differentiation, and matrix deposition. Consequently, bone formation around the implant is accelerated, and the bond between the implant and bone is significantly strengthened. Additionally, nanocoatings of bioactive materials such as hydroxyapatite further enhance osseointegration. Nanoscale hydroxyapatite coatings, which resemble the natural mineral composition of bone, facilitate rapid osteoblast attachment and expedite the process of bone mineralization.



- ✓ In addition to improving biocompatibility and osseointegration, nanotechnology introduces powerful antimicrobial properties that are crucial for preventing peri-implant infections, a common cause of implant failure.
- ✓ The incorporation of antimicrobial nanoparticles, such as silver (AgNPs) and zinc oxide (ZnO NPs), into implant surfaces has been shown to effectively reduce bacterial colonization, inhibiting the growth of pathogens that cause infections. Silver nanoparticles are particularly effective against a wide range of oral pathogens, significantly reducing bacterial adhesion and biofilm formation. However, their cytotoxicity poses challenges, as high concentrations of AgNPs can induce oxidative stress, leading to DNA damage and apoptosis in human cells, particularly osteoblasts.
- ✓ To address this, researchers have explored controlled release systems and protective coatings to manage the concentration of AgNPs, thereby balancing their antimicrobial efficacy with cellular safety. Similarly, zinc oxide nanoparticles offer both antimicrobial and osteogenic benefits, promoting osteoblast differentiation and bone matrix mineralization while inhibiting bacterial growth.
- ✓ Yet, like silver nanoparticles, ZnO NPs exhibit cytotoxicity at higher doses, necessitating careful regulation of their concentration and release to ensure they do not negatively impact human cells. Encapsulation techniques, such as embedding ZnO NPs in biodegradable polymers, have been explored to modulate their release and minimize toxicity, allowing for the dual benefits of antimicrobial protection and enhanced osseointegration.

Implant Modification	Fabrication	Advantages	Drawbacks
TiO_2 nanotubes	• Electrochemical anodization	• Enhanced osseointegration • Soft-tissue integration: enhanced proliferation and adhesion of human gingival fibroblasts • Local release of therapeutics • Immunomodulatory functions	
Ag NPs	• Anodic spark deposition	• Outstanding antimicrobial properties • Stimulation of osteogenesis and soft-tissue integration	• Toxicity: via release of free Ag+ ions
Zn/ZnO NPs	• Plasma electrolytic oxidation	• Antibacterial properties • Osteogenic effects	• Cytotoxicity: ZnO NPs may cause cell apoptosis or necrosis and DNA damage
CuO NPs	• Plasma electrolytic oxidation • Plasma immersion ion implantation and deposition (PIIID) • Micro-arc oxidation	• Cost-effectiveness • Chemical stability • Ease of mixing with polymers • Antibacterial effects • Osteogenic properties • Angiogenic properties	• Toxicity
ZrO_2 nanostructures	• Electrochemical anodization • Plasma immersion ion implantation and deposition (PIIID)	• Enhanced bioactivity • Corrosion resistance • Antibacterial effects	• Cytotoxicity: dose-dependent, affecting both osteoblast differentiation and osteogenesis at high dosages

Si/SiO_2 NPs	• Hydrothermal method	• Biocompatibility with human osteoblast-like cells in vitro • Antibacterial properties • Immunomodulation	
Hydroxyapatite	• Electrochemical deposition • Electrophoretic deposition • Electrospray deposition	• Biocompatibility • Non-toxicity • Non-immunogenicity • Prolonged drug release	
Chitosan	• Microarc oxidized and silane glutaraldehyde coupling	• Antibacterial properties • High loading rate and sustained drug release ability	
Carbon composites	• Dry heating treatment • Meniscus-dragging deposition	• Low cost • Safer preparation • Enhanced antibacterial effects • Bioactivity in vitro and in vivo • Highly efficient drug loading and therapy	• Cytotoxicity: remains controversial

The issue of corrosion resistance is another critical factor that affects the longevity and performance of nanotechnology enhanced dental implants. While titanium, the most commonly used material for dental implants, is naturally resistant to corrosion due to the formation of a stable oxide layer on its surface, the introduction of nanostructured modifications can alter this behavior. For example, titanium dioxide nanotubes (TiO_2 NTs), which are used to improve biocompatibility and enhance cell attachment, can increase the implant's surface area, potentially making it more susceptible to localized corrosion in the aggressive oral environment, particularly in the presence of chloride ions.

However, studies indicate that treatments such as annealing the nanotubes or applying protective coatings can improve their corrosion resistance, maintaining the implant's long-term stability and performance. Furthermore, nanocoatings such as hydroxyapatite also contribute to the corrosion resistance of dental implants. These coatings act as protective barriers that prevent corrosive agents from penetrating the implant's surface and reaching the underlying titanium. Nonetheless, the long-term effectiveness of these nanocoatings in preventing corrosion depends on their durability and adhesion. Poor adhesion or rapid degradation of the coatings could expose the underlying titanium to the corrosive elements of the oral environment, potentially leading to implant failure due to corrosion.

In summary, the application of nanotechnology to dental implants offers significant advancements in terms of biocompatibility, osseointegration, and antimicrobial efficacy. Nanostructured surfaces and nanocoatings create a favorable environment for osteoblast attachment, proliferation, and differentiation, closely mimicking natural bone structures and enhancing the integration of the implant with the surrounding bone. At the same time, antimicrobial nanoparticles like silver and zinc oxide effectively prevent bacterial colonization and reduce the risk of peri-implant infections, though their potential cytotoxicity requires careful management. The long-term success of these nanotechnology-enhanced implants also depends on their corrosion resistance, as nanomodifications can alter the electrochemical properties of the implant surface. Protective coatings and surface treatments are critical for ensuring that the implants remain stable and resistant to corrosion over time.

4. Conclusions

The nano-engineering of dental implants has been performed in order to augment the antibacterial and bioactivity performances of conventional implants, improving long-term treatment outcomes. This project reviewed the nano-engineering of Ti-based dental implants and evaluated modifications with titania nanotubes, nanoparticles, biopolymers and carbon-based coatings in terms of biocompatibility, antimicrobial activity, toxicity and in vivo evidence. Various nanoscale dental implant modifications and their key features have been summarized in the Table. While in vitro and short-term in vivo studies have shown favorable outcomes, long-term in vivo investigations in compromised models (including inflammation and infection), under masticatory loading, are needed to ensure the clinical translation of nano-engineered dental implants. Clearly, the future of dental implants will include customized, patient-specific, nano-engineered implants that enable long-term therapeutic action, while augmenting implant-tissue integration, without initiating any cytotoxicity.

5. References

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