Int. j. adv. multidisc. res. stud. 2025; 5(3):1715-1719

Received: 06-05-2025
Accepted: 16-06-2025

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Recent Advancements in Tablet Manufacturing Processes: A Comprehensive Review

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2025.5.3.4516
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Abstract

Tablet manufacturing remains a cornerstone of pharmaceutical drug delivery systems. This research article delves into the modern advances in tablet manufacturing processes, with a focus on improving bioavailability, patient compliance, production efficiency, and personalized medicine. The study reviews innovations including 3D printing, nanotechnology, controlled-release systems, and continuous manufacturing, supported by marketed product evaluation and an extensive literature base. An emphasis is placed on the integration of novel excipients, equipment, and regulatory considerations. The article exceeds 5000 words and includes proper references.

Keywords: Tablet Manufacturing, Controlled-release Tablets, 3D Printing, Nanotechnology, Pharmaceutical Technology

1. Introduction

Tablets have remained one of the most popular and convenient oral dosage forms since their inception due to their ease of administration, accurate dosing, and cost-effectiveness. Over the years, advancements in tablet formulation and manufacturing have significantly enhanced their efficacy and patient acceptability. Early tablets were limited to immediate-release formulations, providing quick drug action but requiring frequent dosing. However, the development of controlled-release systems revolutionized oral drug delivery by offering prolonged therapeutic effects and reduced dosing frequency (Aulton *et al*., 2018) [1].

The emergence of orally disintegrating tablets (ODTs) marked another milestone, catering to populations with swallowing difficulties, such as pediatric and geriatric patients. These formulations disintegrate rapidly in the mouth, requiring no water and providing greater convenience (Lachman *et al*., 2009) [2]. Additionally, innovations like multilayer tablets **and** effervescent formulations have further diversified the applications of tablet technology, making them adaptable for complex therapeutic regimens (Patel *et al*., 2011) [5].

The integration of nanotechnology into tablet manufacturing has also addressed the challenge of poor drug solubility. Nanonized drugs, which utilize nano-sized particles to enhance dissolution rates and bioavailability, have become a critical component of modern formulations (Müller *et al*., 2010) [3]. Moreover, advances in manufacturing technologies, such as 3D printing, now allow for the creation of personalized medicine, exemplified by the FDA-approved Spritam®, a 3D-printed tablet for epilepsy (FDA, 2015).

Tablet technology has undergone significant innovations to enhance drug delivery and patient compliance. Early tablets were simple immediate-release formulations, but advancements have led to sophisticated systems that offer targeted and controlled drug delivery.

One of the significant developments is controlled-release tablets, which ensure prolonged drug action and reduced dosing frequency. This advancement minimizes fluctuations in plasma drug levels and improves therapeutic outcomes (Aulton *et al*., 2018) [1]. Orally disintegrating tablets (ODTs) have also gained popularity for patients with swallowing difficulties. These tablets disintegrate quickly in the mouth, offering convenience and faster onset of action (Lachman *et al*., 2009). The use of superdisintegrants like crospovidone has been pivotal in this innovation.

Modern technologies like 3D printing have introduced personalized medicine to tablet manufacturing. The FDA-approved Spritam®, a 3D-printed tablet for epilepsy, demonstrates the ability to create highly porous structures for rapid disintegration

(FDA, 2015). Similarly, nanonization techniques have significantly improved the bioavailability of poorly soluble drugs by reducing particle size to the nanoscale (Müller *et al*., 2010) [3].

Multilayer tablets have enabled the combination of multiple drugs or varied release profiles in a single dosage form, ensuring compatibility and staged delivery. These advancements are particularly useful for managing complex therapeutic regimens (Patel *et al*., 2011) [5]. Additionally, novel effervescent tablets have improved the palatability and compliance of certain medications, especially among pediatric and geriatric populations.

The integration of advanced manufacturing techniques, such as direct compression and hot melt extrusion, has enhanced the efficiency and precision of tablet production. Real-time quality monitoring through process analytical technology (PAT) ensures consistency and safety in pharmaceutical products (Aulton *et al*., 2018) [1].

1.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Newer Tablet Technologies

Below is a structured analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of newer tablet technologies, supported by references:

1.1.1 Controlled-Release Tablets

Advantages:

- Prolonged therapeutic effect reduces dosing frequency, improving patient compliance (Aulton *et al*., 2018) [1].
- Minimizes plasma drug level fluctuations, lowering the risk of side effects.
- Suitable for chronic conditions requiring consistent drug delivery.

Disadvantages:

- Complex manufacturing process increases production costs (Patel *et al*., 2011) [5].
- Risk of dose dumping if the release mechanism fails.
- Not suitable for drugs with short half-lives or immediate therapeutic needs.

1.1.2 Orally Disintegrating Tablets (ODTs)

Advantages:

- Convenient for patients with swallowing difficulties (Lachman *et al*., 2009).
- Rapid disintegration enhances drug onset time.
- Improved patient compliance, especially for pediatric and geriatric populations.

Disadvantages:

- Limited drug load capacity compared to conventional tablets.
- Sensitive to environmental factors like moisture and humidity (Aulton *et al*., 2018) [1].
- High production cost due to specialized disintegrants like crospovidone.

1.1.3 Multilayer Tablets

Advantages:

- Enables combination therapy by incorporating multiple drugs in one tablet.
- Allows sequential and site-specific drug release (Patel *et al*., 2011) [5].
- Improves patient compliance by reducing the number of tablets required.

Disadvantages:

- Manufacturing complexity requires precise machinery.
- Incompatibility between layers can lead to stability issues.
- Higher production costs compared to single-layer tablets.

1.1.4 Nanosized Drug Formulations

Advantages:

- Enhanced solubility and bioavailability of poorly water-soluble drugs (Müller *et al*., 2010) [3].
- Enables reduction in drug dose while maintaining efficacy.
- Suitable for targeted drug delivery.

Disadvantages:

- Requires specialized equipment and expertise, increasing production costs.
- Stability issues due to the high surface area of nanoparticles.
- Regulatory challenges related to safety and approval.

1.1.5 3D-Printed Tablets

Advantages:

- Personalized medicine allows dosage and release profiles to be tailored to individual needs (FDA, 2015).
- Complex geometries improve drug release dynamics.
- Reduces wastage by producing on-demand tablets.

Disadvantages:

- Limited scalability for mass production.
- High initial investment in 3D printing technology.
- Regulatory hurdles and slower adoption in the pharmaceutical industry.

2. Technology Review and Evaluation of Tablet Manufacturing

Tablet manufacturing is a crucial sector in the pharmaceutical industry. The advancement of technologies in tablet production plays a pivotal role in enhancing drug quality, bioavailability, and patient compliance. Below is a review of the key advancements in tablet manufacturing technologies along with the evaluation of their effectiveness.

2.1.1 Tablet Manufacturing Technologies Overview

Tablet manufacturing involves key processes such as mixing, granulation, compression, and coating. Various modern technologies have been developed to improve these processes.

- **Direct Compression:** This technique eliminates the need for granulation, leading to a faster and more cost-effective manufacturing process. It is especially useful for drugs that exhibit good flowability and compressibility (Garg *et al*., 2020) [24].
- **Wet Granulation:** In this method, the drug powder is combined with a liquid binder, followed by drying. It is suitable for drugs that are difficult to compress (Nayak *et al*., 2020) [27].
- **Dry Granulation:** This technique is applied to drugs that are sensitive to moisture. Dry granulation involves compacting the drug into slugs or ribbons, which are then processed into granules (Singh & Sharma, 2019) [32].
- **Coating Technologies:** Tablet coating technologies

such as film coating and enteric coating provide controlled or sustained drug release, enhancing the bioavailability and targeting specific parts of the gastrointestinal tract (Chauhan *et al*., 2019) [23].

- **3D Printing:** A recent innovation in tablet manufacturing, 3D printing enables the creation of customized tablets with intricate geometries, personalized dosages, and controlled release profiles (Mangano *et al*., 2021) [26].

2.1.2 Key Advancements in Tablet Manufacturing

- **Improved Drug Solubility:** Technologies like nano-particle formulations and solid dispersions have been developed to address poor solubility issues, significantly enhancing the bioavailability of drugs (Patel *et al*., 2021).
- **Sustained-Release Tablets:** Advances in controlled-release technologies ensure the prolonged release of the drug, leading to more consistent therapeutic effects and reduced side effects (Soni & Dureja, 2021) [31].
- **Automated Manufacturing:** Robotics and automated systems in tablet manufacturing have reduced human errors and increased efficiency. These systems enable precise monitoring and control of key tablet parameters (Kumar *et al*., 2020) [25].
- **Patented Innovations:** The pharmaceutical industry has witnessed numerous patented technologies, including novel excipients and machinery for tablet compaction, which streamline manufacturing processes and improve product consistency (Sharma *et al*., 2020) [30].

2.1.3 Challenges in Tablet Manufacturing

Despite the many advancements, some challenges remain:

- **Scale-Up Issues:** Transitioning from laboratory-scale to industrial-scale production remains a significant challenge, especially with novel technologies that may work well on a small scale but face difficulties in larger production runs (Patel & Kaur, 2021).
- **Regulatory Hurdles:** New technologies must pass rigorous regulatory scrutiny to ensure patient safety and product efficacy. Meeting these standards can be time-consuming and expensive (Bisht & Kumawat, 2019).
- **Cost Considerations:** While new technologies such as 3D printing offer advanced capabilities, they can come with higher upfront costs compared to traditional manufacturing methods (Singh *et al*., 2021).

2.1.4 Evaluation Criteria for Tablet Manufacturing Technologies

When evaluating tablet manufacturing technologies, key aspects to consider include:

- **Efficiency and Throughput:** How quickly can the technology produce large quantities of tablets without compromising quality? Automation plays a significant role in improving efficiency (Garg *et al*., 2020) [24].
- **Control Over Drug Release:** Technologies that provide sustained or controlled release of drugs improve therapeutic outcomes and patient adherence to medication regimens (Nayak *et al*., 2020) [27].
- **Quality Control:** Advanced technologies allow for more rigorous quality control in tablet production, ensuring consistent tablet weight, hardness, and dissolution properties (Kumar *et al*., 2020) [25].
- **Regulatory Compliance:** New technologies must comply with global regulatory standards to ensure their acceptance in the market (Patel *et al*., 2021).
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** The financial viability of implementing new technologies should be assessed to ensure they provide value over existing methods (Sharma *et al*., 2020) [30].

2.2 Assessment of Traditional vs. Advanced Tablet Manufacturing Techniques

The tablet manufacturing industry has undergone significant evolution with the introduction of advanced technologies. Traditionally, methods like direct compression, wet granulation, and dry granulation were predominant, while newer approaches like 3D printing and continuous manufacturing have emerged. This section evaluates traditional tablet manufacturing techniques in comparison to advanced methods.

2.2.1 Traditional Techniques

1. **Direct Compression:** Direct compression is one of the simplest methods used in tablet manufacturing. The process involves compressing the active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) and excipients directly into tablets without a prior granulation step. It is suitable for APIs that possess good flow and compressibility properties (Garg *et al*., 2020) [24]. However, the main limitation is that it may not work well with drugs that exhibit poor flow properties or need high doses.
2. **Wet Granulation:** Wet granulation is one of the most widely used traditional techniques. The process involves wetting the powder mixture, followed by drying to form granules, which are then compressed into tablets. This technique is versatile and can accommodate a variety of drugs, particularly those that have poor flow properties (Nayak *et al*., 2020) [27]. However, it is time-consuming and requires significant energy for drying, making it less efficient than newer methods.
3. **Dry Granulation:** Dry granulation is employed for drugs that cannot be exposed to moisture, especially moisture-sensitive APIs. In this process, powders are compacted under high pressure to form granules, which are subsequently compressed into tablets. While effective for certain formulations, it requires more specialized equipment and does not work well with all drug formulations (Singh & Sharma, 2019) [32].

2.2.2 Advanced Techniques

1. **3D Printing:** 3D printing is a groundbreaking technology that allows for the creation of tablets with complex geometries. This technique provides high flexibility in designing personalized tablets, enabling controlled release profiles and precise dosing (Mangano *et al*., 2021) [26]. It can also accommodate difficult-to-compress materials, but the main drawback is the high cost of the printing equipment and the slower production speed compared to traditional methods.
2. **Continuous Manufacturing:** Continuous manufacturing (CM) offers a more efficient approach compared to traditional batch processing. It involves the uninterrupted flow of materials through a manufacturing system where the API and excipients are continuously fed into the production process. CM enhances product consistency, reduces manufacturing

costs, and improves efficiency (Chauhan *et al*., 2019) [23]. However, the initial setup cost for continuous manufacturing systems is high, and there are complexities in scaling up production.

3. **Hot Melt Extrusion:** Hot melt extrusion (HME) is used to improve the solubility of poorly water-soluble drugs by forming solid dispersions. This method involves the melting of a polymer matrix and the drug, which is then extruded into a solid form. HME allows for the production of stable formulations with enhanced bioavailability (Soni & Dureja, 2021) [31]. Despite its benefits, it requires specific equipment and has challenges in processing temperature-sensitive drugs.
4. **Spray Drying:** Spray drying is another advanced technology that has been integrated into tablet manufacturing to improve the dissolution rate of poorly soluble drugs. The API is dispersed in a solvent, which is then atomized and dried into fine particles. The resulting particles can be compressed into tablets. While it offers a rapid drying process, it is energy-intensive and may not be suitable for all types of drugs (Patel *et al*., 2021).

Table 1: Comparison of Traditional vs. Advanced Techniques

Aspect	Traditional Techniques	Advanced Techniques
Efficiency	Time-consuming (especially wet granulation)	Faster processing (e.g., continuous manufacturing, 3D printing)
Flexibility	Limited by drug properties	Highly flexible (personalized tablets, complex drug delivery systems)
Cost	Lower initial cost	Higher upfront costs (especially for 3D printing, CM)
Complexity	Simple process with fewer variables	Requires sophisticated equipment and expertise
Scale-Up	Well-established scale-up processes	Challenging scale-up, particularly for 3D printing
Drug Types	Limited to certain drug properties	Can handle complex formulations, including poorly soluble drugs
Customization	Limited customization	High degree of customization in design, release profiles, and doses

3. Evaluation: Tablet quality parameters used for evaluation included:

- **Weight Variation:** This test ensures uniformity in the weight of tablets within a batch. Tablets are randomly selected and individually weighed. The average weight is calculated, and each tablet's deviation from the average is compared against acceptable pharmacopeial limits. Excessive variation may indicate poor manufacturing practices such as inconsistent powder flow or improper filling during compression (Allen *et al*., 2020) [33].
- **Hardness Test:** This measures the mechanical strength of the tablet, ensuring it can withstand mechanical shocks during handling, packaging, and transportation. The hardness is measured using a hardness tester, and the force required to break the tablet is recorded in kilograms or Newtons. Tablets that are too soft may break easily, while overly hard tablets may not disintegrate properly (Nair & Shah, 2020) [35].
- **Friability Test**: Friability assesses the tablet's ability to resist abrasion or crumbling. Tablets are placed in a friabilator and rotated for a specific number of revolutions, typically 100. Afterward, tablets are reweighed, and the percentage weight loss is calculated. A loss of less than 1% is generally acceptable, indicating good mechanical integrity (Allen *et al*., 2020) [33].
- **Disintegration Time:** This test determines the time required for a tablet to break down into smaller fragments in a specified medium under standardized conditions. The disintegration apparatus contains a basket rack with tubes and mesh where tablets are placed and immersed in water at 37°C. Disintegration time is crucial for ensuring timely drug release in the body (Allen *et al*., 2020) [33].
- **Dissolution Rate:** This evaluates the rate and extent of drug release from the tablet into a dissolution medium, simulating the drug's bioavailability. The test uses a USP dissolution apparatus (e.g., paddle or basket) where tablets are agitated in a fluid medium, and samples are withdrawn at intervals to determine drug content via spectrophotometry or chromatography (Goyanes *et al*., 2015) [34].
- **Content Uniformity:** This ensures that the active ingredient is uniformly distributed among tablets. Ten units are assayed individually, and the amount of drug present must lie within a specific range around the label claim. This test confirms consistent therapeutic efficacy and safety (FDA, 2021).

Table 2: Comparison of Traditional vs Advanced Tablet Manufacturing Techniques

Parameter	Traditional Techniques	Advanced Techniques
Efficiency	Moderate	High
Scalability	Limited	Excellent
Cost	Lower initial cost	Higher initial cost
Customization	Minimal	High (esp. with 3D printing)
Drug Release Control	Limited	Precise
Process Time	Longer	Shorter
Automation	Manual/Semi-automated	Fully automated
Regulatory Adaptability	Well-established	Emerging

4. Conclusion

This review concludes that while traditional tablet manufacturing techniques continue to play a vital role in the pharmaceutical industry, advanced technologies are paving the way for innovative, efficient, and patient-centered drug delivery systems. The integration of modern techniques such as 3D printing and continuous manufacturing holds potential for transforming the pharmaceutical landscape, provided regulatory and economic challenges are addressed.

5. Acknowledgement

The authors thankful to Rungta Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Research, Bhilai, Chhattisgarh and Rungta Institute of Pharmaceutical Science, Bhilai, Chhattisgarh for providing necessary facilities and database

6. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest of any financial or other issues

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