e-ISSN: 2320-4230, p-ISSN: 2961-6085

# Journal of Drug Discovery and Therapeutics

Available Online at www.jddt.in

CODEN: - JDDTBP (Source: - American Chemical Society)

Volume 13, Issue 5; 2025, 22-25

## Potential Applications of Dendrimers

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**Received: 05-08-2025 / Revised: 28-08-2025 / Accepted: 17-09-2025**
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**Conflict of interest: No conflict of interest.**

**Abstract:**

This review gives concise information about the application of dendrimers in the field of drug delivery. Due to their unique architecture these have improved physical and chemical properties. Due to their terminal groups these show high solubility, miscibility and reactivity. Dendrimers have well defined size, shape, molecular weight and monodispersity. These properties make the dendrimers a suitable carrier in drug delivery application. Dendrimers are unimolecular miceller in nature and due to this enhances the solubility of poorly soluble drugs. Their compatibility with DNA, heparin and polyanions make them more versatile. Dendrimers, also referred as modern day polymers, they offer much more good properties than the conventional polymers. Due to their multivalent and mono disperse character dendrimers have stimulated wide interest in the field of chemistry biology, especially in applications like drug delivery, gene therapy and chemotherapy. Self-assembly produces a faster means of generating nanoscopic functional and structural systems. But their actual utility in drug delivery can be assessed only after deep understanding of factors affecting their properties and their behavior in vivo.

**Keywords:** Dendrimers, Drug targeting, nanoscale carriers.

## Introduction

Dendrimers (from Greek dendron = tree) are synthetic, radially symmetric macromolecules characterized by repeated branching from a central core to multiple generations, producing a globular architecture with internal cavities and many peripheral functional groups. Their monodispersity, tunable size (typically 1–10 nm depending on generation), and controllable surface chemistry distinguish them from traditional linear polymers and hyperbranched polymers, making them attractive scaffolds for nanoscale engineering and biomedical applications. The most-studied families include poly(amidoamine) (PAMAM), polypropylene imine (PPI), polyester-based dendrimers, and many tailor-made hybrid structures.

**Synthetic strategies:** Two classical synthetic routes are used:

**Divergent synthesis:** Introduced by Tomalia, the divergent approach grows dendrimer branches outward from a multifunctional core in iterative reaction–

deprotection steps. Divergent synthesis allows quick generation expansion but can suffer from incomplete reactions at high generations and purification challenges.

**Convergent synthesis**

Developed by Hawker and Fréchet, convergent synthesis builds dendrons (branched wedges) first, then couples them to a core. This yields high structural fidelity and easier purification of end-groups but can be limited by steric hindrance when attaching many dendrons to a core. Modern variants combine both methods or use accelerated chemistries (click reactions, orthogonal protections) to improve yield and scalability.

**Advanced and green approaches**

Recent advances include microwave-assisted synthesis, enzyme-catalyzed steps, and modular "one-pot" methods to speed assembly and improve scalability. Biodegradable polyester dendrimers and post-synthetic modifications (PEGylation, zwitterionization) are used to improve biocompatibility.

**Major Dendrimer classes and architectures**

**PAMAM (polyamidoamine):** Most widely studied for biomedical uses due to ease of synthesis and tunable amine termini. PAMAM's polyvalent surface allows covalent conjugation of drugs, ligands, and imaging moieties.

**PPI (polypropylene imine):** Early dendrimers used for gene delivery; primary amines make them effective for complexing nucleic acids but also potentially cytotoxic unless modified.

**Polyester and other biodegradable dendrimers:** Offer improved biodegradability and lower long-term toxicity risk.

**Dendronized polymers, hyperbranched polymers and Janus dendrimers:** Useful for self-assembly and multifunctional surface presentation.

**Characterization techniques**

Essential characterization confirms generation, molar mass, and surface composition:

**NMR spectroscopy** (structure, end-group analysis), MALDI-TOF/ESI-MS (mass distribution), and SEC/GPC (size/polydispersity).

DLS and TEM/AFM for hydrodynamic size and morphology; zeta potential for surface charge.

**XPS/FTIR** and elemental analysis for surface functionalization. Combined orthogonal analyses ensure monodispersity and batch consistency—critical for biomedical translation.

**Physicochemical and biological properties**

Dendrimers display size- and generation-dependent properties: internal cavities allow drug encapsulation (non-covalent), while peripheral groups permit covalent drug conjugation or ligand attachment. Surface charge strongly influences cellular uptake, cytotoxicity, and biodistribution: cationic dendrimers often show efficient cell internalization but higher cytotoxicity; neutral or anionic surface modifications (PEGylation, acetylation, glycosylation) reduce toxicity and improve circulation times.

**Biomedical applications**

**Drug delivery**

Dendrimers serve as carriers for small molecules, peptides, proteins, and nucleic acids. They enable:

- Improved solubility and stability of hydrophobic drugs via encapsulation.

- Controlled or stimuli-responsive release (pH-sensitive linkers, redox-cleavable bonds).
- Active targeting through conjugation of ligands (antibodies, peptides).

Recent reviews and experimental studies show dendrimer formulations improving pharmacokinetics and therapeutic indices for oncology, CNS, and infectious disease models.

**Gene delivery and nucleic acid therapeutics**

Cationic dendrimers complex nucleic acids to form nanoscale polyplexes for transfection. Generation, surface density of amines, and shielding strategies (PEG, zwitterions) modulate transfection efficiency and toxicity. Recent engineering efforts focus on charge-reversal and biodegradable linkers to achieve high transfection with low cytotoxicity.

**Imaging and theranostics**

Dendrimers are versatile scaffolds for multimodal imaging (MRI contrast agents, radiolabels, fluorescent tags) and combined therapy–diagnosis platforms (theranostics). Conjugation of multiple imaging moieties on a single dendrimer enhances signal while allowing co-delivery of therapeutics.

**Nanogels and hybrid systems**

Dendrimer-based nanogels combine crosslinked dendrimer networks with hydrogels to provide sustained release, stimuli-responsive behavior, or improved mechanical properties for topical or injectable formulations. These hybrid systems have shown promise in cancer therapy and controlled local release.

**Non-biomedical applications**

Dendrimers are employed in catalysis (as soluble, recoverable catalysts), sensors (optical and electrochemical), materials modification (as compatibilizers or building blocks in nanocomposites), and agriculture (smart pesticide carriers). Their dense functionalizable surface is useful for immobilizing catalysts or creating templated nanomaterials.

**Toxicity, immunogenicity, and safety considerations**

Safety remains a central concern for clinical translation. Factors influencing toxicity include generation number, surface charge, dose, route of administration, and biodistribution. Strategies to mitigate toxicity include surface neutralization (acetylation, PEGylation), incorporation of biodegradable linkers, and use of lower-generation dendrimers or dendronized constructs.

Preclinical studies indicate that properly modified dendrimers can achieve acceptable safety profiles, but rigorous, standardized long-term toxicology and pharmacokinetic studies are still needed.

**Challenges and translational hurdles**

Major barriers to wider adoption include:

- **Scalability and cost:** multi-step syntheses and purification at GMP scale are nontrivial.
- **Batch reproducibility:** small deviations accumulate across generations.
- **Regulatory pathways:** nanoparticle classification and complex structure–activity correlation complicate regulatory evaluation.
- **Long-term safety and clearance:** persistence, organ accumulation, and degradation behavior require detailed study.

Addressing these will require standardization of synthetic/analytical workflows, scalable chemistries, and collaborative public–private efforts for preclinical pipelines.

## Future perspectives and opportunities

Key directions likely to accelerate translation:

**1. Biodegradable dendrimers and cleavable linkers** to ensure safe clearance.

**2. Stimuli-responsive dendrimers** for on-demand release (pH, enzyme, redox, temperature).

**3. Multivalent, targeted theranostics** combining imaging and therapy.

**4. Combination with advanced manufacturing** (flow chemistry, automated synthesis) to improve scale and reproducibility.

**5. Regulatory-focused studies**—standardized toxicology, immunogenicity, and ADME (absorption, distribution, metabolism, excretion) characterization. Recent literature emphasizes these avenues and reports encouraging preclinical findings for PAMAM-based and dendrimer-nanogel platforms.

## Conclusions

Dendrimers present a uniquely tunable nanoscale platform with broad utility across medicine, catalysis, and materials science. Advances in synthetic chemistry, surface engineering, and hybridization with gels or other nanomaterials have addressed many early limitations. However, to fully realize clinical and industrial impact, researchers must overcome scalability, regulatory, and long-term safety challenges.

With coordinated interdisciplinary efforts, dendrimers have realistic potential to deliver next-generation targeted therapeutics and multifunctional nanomaterials.

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