

Nanomaterials and exercise interventions: A synergistic approach for atherosclerosis therapy (Review)

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Abstract. Atherosclerosis constitutes the fundamental pathological basis for cardiovascular diseases, with its pathogenesis intricately associated with dysfunctions in vascular endothelial and smooth muscle cells. Nanomaterials have emerged as a promising research focus within the biomedical field, attributed to their distinctive physicochemical properties. The present review explores the potential of nanomaterials, in conjunction with exercise interventions, to synergistically enhance vascular cell function, thereby presenting innovative therapeutic strategies against atherosclerosis. The present review systematically evaluates the various types of nanomaterials, elucidates their mechanisms of action, examines the synergistic effects of exercise interventions and discusses the challenges encountered in clinical translation, along with prospective directions for future research in this dynamic field.

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1. Introduction

Atherosclerosis is a chronic inflammatory disease characterized by endothelial dysfunction, lipid accumulation and plaque formation within arterial walls, notably contributing to cardiovascular morbidity and mortality on a global scale (1). According to the 2024 Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update of American Heart Association, cardiovascular diseases, for which atherosclerosis is the underlying pathology in most cases, remain the leading cause of death globally (2). Traditional therapeutic approaches, such as the use of statins, have proven effective in reducing cholesterol levels and decreasing the incidence of cardiovascular events (3). However, these treatments are frequently associated with adverse effects and may not be suitable for all patients. Consequently, there is an urgent demand for alternative therapeutic strategies that can effectively manage atherosclerosis while minimizing side effects. Recent advancements in nanotechnology have highlighted the potential of nanomaterials to carry out a pivotal role in the treatment and prevention of atherosclerosis (4). Nanomaterials exhibit unique properties, including high surface area, modifiability and targeted delivery capabilities, rendering them particularly advantageous for drug delivery and the modulation of cellular functions. Furthermore, exercise has been shown to improve vascular function through various mechanisms, including enhanced endothelial nitric oxide (NO) production and reduced oxidative stress (5,6). Combining the therapeutic potential of nanomaterials with the beneficial effects of exercise presents a novel approach to enhance vascular health and combat atherosclerosis.

Previous research suggests that nanomaterials can modulate the inflammatory response in vascular cells, thereby mitigating the progression of atherosclerosis (7-9). Certain nanoparticles, for example, have been shown to suppress the expression of pro-inflammatory cytokines and facilitate the resolution of inflammation in endothelial cells (9,10). Nanomaterials can potentially halt or reverse atherosclerosis by targeting inflammatory pathways (11). Combining these with exercise, which releases factors such as NO to improve endothelial function (12), may enhance their therapeutic effects (13). Exercise could also increase the delivery and effectiveness of nanomaterial treatments in the vascular system.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of understanding the interactions between nanomaterials and the vascular microenvironment (14,15). The distinctive properties of nanomaterials considerably affect their behavior within biological systems, encompassing aspects such as biocompatibility, biodistribution and pharmacokinetics (16). Consequently, an in-depth examination of these interactions is imperative for optimizing the design of nanomaterials specifically engineered for vascular applications.

The present review explores how combining nanomaterials with physical exercise can impact atherosclerosis. It examines numerous studies on using nanomaterials to improve endothelial function, reduce inflammation and aid lipid clearance in atherosclerotic lesions. Additionally, it examines how exercise enhances the effectiveness of nanomaterial therapies and the biological mechanisms involved. Ultimately, integrating nanomaterials with physical exercise presents a promising strategy for improved vascular health and reduced cardiovascular disease burden. Future research should focus on understanding these synergistic effects and exploring clinical applications for managing atherosclerosis.

2. The role of nanomaterials in regulating vascular cell function

Protective effects of nanomaterials on vascular ECs. Nanomaterials have emerged as promising agents for the protection of vascular ECs by reducing oxidative stress and inflammation, and enhance the release of NO (17,18). For example, gold nanoparticles have been demonstrated to activate the nuclear factor erythroid 2-related factor 2 signaling pathway (19), which reduces reactive oxygen species (ROS) production. This activation markedly reduces oxidative stress in ECs, preserving their function and integrity (19). Moreover, silica nanoparticles carrying anti-inflammatory drugs effectively inhibit the NF- κ B pathway, reducing endothelial inflammation (20). This is key as chronic inflammation carries out a key role in endothelial dysfunction and the advancement of atherosclerosis (20). Additionally, carbon-based nanomaterials can mimic endothelial nitric oxide synthase (eNOS) activity, promoting the release of NO, which is key for vasodilation (21). This increase in NO improves vascular tone and contributes to the protective effects on ECs, highlighting their potential as treatments for vascular diseases.

Protective effects of nanomaterials on vascular smooth muscle cells (VSMCs). Nanomaterials carry out a key role in influencing VSMC phenotypes by inhibiting pathological proliferation and maintaining a contractile phenotype (22). Polymer-based nanoparticles are used to deliver miR-145, which regulates the transcription factor Krüppel-like factor (KLF) 4, key for VSMC phenotype modulation (23). By modulating the expression of KLF4, these nanoparticles effectively inhibit the pathological VSMCs proliferation, a key characteristic of atherosclerosis (24,25). Furthermore, magnetic nanoparticles activate the RhoA/ROCK pathway, thereby promoting the maintenance of a contractile phenotype in VSMCs. This mechanical activation is essential for preventing the phenotypic transition from a contractile to a synthetic

state, a process frequently associated with vascular remodeling and the development of atherosclerotic plaques (26). Additionally, nanofibrous scaffolds provide mechanical cues that influence the remodeling of the extracellular matrix, consequently affecting collagen secretion and the overall vascular architecture (27).

Optimization strategies for nanomaterial targeted delivery systems. Optimization of nanomaterial-based targeted delivery systems is essential for improving their therapeutic efficacy in vascular applications. Surface modification techniques, such as polyethylene glycol-ylation, have been utilized to extend the circulation time of nanoparticles within the bloodstream (28), thereby enhancing their bioavailability and reducing premature clearance by the immune system. Moreover, the incorporation of targeting ligands, such as RGD peptides, can substantially increase the specificity of these nanomaterials for diseased vascular sites, facilitating more effective treatment of conditions such as atherosclerosis (29). Stimuli-responsive systems such as pH-sensitive nanocarriers allow localized drug release in the acidic environments of atherosclerotic plaques, increasing drug efficacy and reducing side effects (30). Combining therapies, such as photothermal treatment with drug delivery, enables precise control over treatment timing and location, optimizing outcomes in vascular diseases (31). These strategies enhance the role of nanomaterials in vascular health therapy.

3. Mechanisms of exercise interventions in improving vascular function

The mechanical and biological effects of shear stress on vascular cells. Exercise applies mechanical forces to the vascular endothelium, mainly through blood flow-induced shear stress, which activates signaling pathways key for endothelial function (32). This includes the activation of eNOS, leading to increased NO production, essential for vascular relaxation and homeostasis (33). Shear stress also boosts KLF2 expression, protecting ECs by regulating inflammation and vascular tone (34). Additionally, exercise-induced blood flow influences the cell cycle of vascular wall cells, promoting their proliferation and migration, key for vascular remodeling and repair (35). Shear stress activates mechanotransduction pathways, such as the integrin-FAK-Akt signaling cascade, which are important for ECs to adapt to mechanical stimuli and preserve vascular integrity (36,37).

Exercise-mediated metabolic reprogramming. Physical exercise triggers metabolic changes in various tissues, including the vascular system, by activating AMPK and Peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor γ coactivator 1- α (PGC-1 α), which increase mitochondrial function and biogenesis (38,39). This enhances energy production and oxidative capacity in ECs, improving vascular function. Exercise also facilitates lipid metabolism by delivering liver X receptor agonists through nanocarriers, regulating cholesterol and inflammation in vascular tissues (40,41). Increased autophagic flux, supported by exercise and mTOR-inhibiting nanomedicines (42), helps degrade damaged organelles and proteins (43,44), enhancing cellular health and vascular healing.

Systemic regulation of the vascular microenvironment by exercise. Physical exercise triggers changes in the vascular microenvironment, affecting circulating factors that improve vascular function (45). A key element is irisin, a myokine released during exercise, which increases vascular permeability and aids drug delivery, especially in nanomedicine. Moreover, exercise also redistributes immune cells, notably stabilizing atherosclerotic plaques through the activation of Ly6C^{low} monocytes (46). This alteration in immune cell dynamics carries out a key role in promoting vascular health and stability. Additionally, exercise-regulated sympathetic nervous system activity can enhance the distribution and effectiveness of therapeutic agents, including nanomedicines, in targeted vascular tissues (47). These adaptations underscore the role of exercise in improving vascular health and function.

4. Nanomaterials and exercise synergistically combat atherosclerosis: Experimental evidence

Synergistic effects in preclinical research models. Preclinical studies using animal models, especially the alipoprotein E^{-/-} (apoE^{-/-}) mouse model relevant to atherosclerosis, have shown that combining exercise with nanomaterials such as poly-lactide-co-glycolic acid (PLGA) nanoparticles markedly reduces plaque area by ~42% compared with using either alone (48,49). This suggests that nanocarriers can enhance the benefits of exercise by improving drug delivery in vascular tissues. Additionally, research with porcine coronary artery models indicates that injectable hydrogels combined with exercise improve vascular remodeling, showing that exercise can increase the effectiveness of nanomaterials (13). Additionally, research employing 3D vascular chips has provided valuable insights into the dynamic responses of nanofibers under conditions that simulate exercise, highlighting the key role of mechanical forces in influencing the interaction between nanomaterials and vascular cells (50). These findings collectively indicate that the integration of exercise with nanomaterial therapies can lead to enhanced vascular health and reduced atherosclerotic burden. However, despite the promising nature of the preclinical evidence discussed, the clinical translational potential of the combined nanomaterial and exercise therapies remains unverified. Currently, there is a notable lack of relevant clinical studies involving humans. Advancing this field necessitates the execution of rigorously designed clinical trials to clarify the biodistribution, safety and potential synergistic effects of nanomaterials in conjunction with exercise within patient populations.

Molecular mechanisms of synergistic action. Exercise and nanomaterials work together at the molecular level to combat atherosclerosis through several mechanisms (51). A key mechanism is epigenetic regulation, where exercise boosts the demethylation effects of histone deacetylase inhibitors delivered by nanocarriers, enhancing their therapeutic impact on vascular health (52,53). Additionally, exercise-induced exosomes and exosome-like nanoparticles interact to strengthen cellular signaling pathways vital for cardiovascular disease prevention and treatment (54). Furthermore, the timing of exercise can affect the efficacy of pH-sensitive nanomedicines, indicating that exercise-related biological rhythms

can influence nanomaterial therapy outcomes (55). These molecular insights underscore the complex interplay between exercise and nanotechnology in the treatment of atherosclerosis, emphasizing the need for a tailored approach that considers both physical activity and nanomaterial properties.

Validation of synergistic effects using advanced imaging techniques. Advanced imaging technologies, such as cutting-edge imaging technologies, have markedly validated the combined effects of exercise and nanomaterials. PET/MRI has been key in tracking nanoparticle distribution during exercise, offering insights into treatment dynamics by visualizing their accumulation in atherosclerotic lesions (56). Furthermore, super-resolution microscopy has precisely observed nanomedicine deposition on plaque fibrous caps after exercise, suggesting enhanced targeted delivery (57). Additionally, Raman spectroscopy effectively monitors biochemical changes in plaques post-exercise and nanomaterial treatment (58,59). Collectively, these advanced imaging techniques not only validate the synergistic effects observed in preclinical models but also pave the way for future clinical applications, highlighting the potential of integrating exercise with nanomedicine to mitigate atherosclerosis.

5. Nanomedicine: Innovation in drug delivery strategies

Numerous therapeutic drugs can slow atherosclerosis by enhancing SMC function. Several therapeutic agents include short hairpin RNA, small interfering (si)RNAs, natural extracts and chemicals (60-63). However, the application of these therapeutic agents for the treatment of metabolic disorders is unfortunately limited by pharmacological issues, including drug instability, rapid degradation and poor specificity (64).

Nanomedicine has attracted widespread attention due to its advantage in drug delivery (65). As theragnostic agents with high molecular specificity, nanoparticles have been shown to serve as drug delivery carriers to facilitate the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. Due to their dimensions <100 nm (ASTM International, 2006), the advantages of nanoparticles include i) efficient delivery of drug insoluble or poorly soluble in water, ii) targeted drug delivery in a tissue/cell type -specific pattern, iii) controlled absorption and sustained drug release, iv) delivery of drugs to intracellular sites of action or to the soma, v) high binding ability and capture efficiency due to a relatively high surface to volume ratio, vi) delivery of two or more drugs for combination therapy due to the nano-sizes, vii) visualization of drug sites by combining therapeutic agents with imaging modalities; viii) protect the therapeutic agents and increase their stability, ix) immune-evading and tumor-targeting capabilities and x) great biocompatibility and high drug loading efficiency *in vivo* drug efficacy (66-70). Nanomedicine has incomparable advantages over ordinary drugs. It has high solubility, can greatly enhance the absorption and bioavailability of oral drugs, can make the drug pass through the blood-brain barrier to act on the central nervous system, can penetrate the epidermis to enhance the absorption of the preparation and can also enhance the drug targeting. Therefore, nanoparticles have a wide application in the field of biomedicine due to their aforementioned medical characteristics.

Despite its advantages, nanomedicine has several drawbacks, such as toxicity, genotoxicity and carcinogenicity. Given their small size, nanoparticles can circulate in the body and accumulate in tissues, posing health risks. Metal nanoparticles such as titanium dioxide, gold, silver and platinum can harm human health. For example, 21 nm titanium dioxide nanoparticles can cause neuroinflammation, brain and spleen injury, heart damage, and lung toxicity (71,72). Gold nanoparticles have been found in urine and blood 3 months after exposure (73), and platinum nanoparticles accumulate in the liver and spleen, causing liver and kidney toxicity (74). To date, the advantages of using nanoparticles over traditional medical strategies seem to outweigh their disadvantages. Nanoparticles in medicine must be designed carefully and validated through a series of experiments to ensure their safety.

6. Application of nanomedicine for therapeutics of atherosclerosis

Nanomedicine, using nanomaterials such as nanoparticles, is rapidly advancing in treating atherosclerosis (Fig. 1). Nanotechnology markedly impacts healthcare, including targeted nanotherapeutics (75), medical imaging (76), diagnostics (77), vaccines (78) and regenerative medicine. Previous studies show nanoparticles can slow vascular disease by targeting vascular cells (79-110) (Table I). Due to its importance, several reviews cover the role of nanomedicine in treating diseases such as cancer, atherosclerosis and diabetes (77,111,112). Therefore, it is important to increase awareness of the benefits of pharmaceutical nanotechnology and existing treatments for atherosclerosis (Fig. 1).

Nanomedicine improved atherosclerosis by targeting SMCs. Imbalanced SMC proliferation can cause pathological angiogenesis, leading to plaque growth and rupture in coronary arteries, potentially resulting in cardiovascular mortality. Accurate ultrasound detection of nanoparticles on atherosclerotic plaque neovascularization can aid in early diagnosis of unstable plaques. Super-paramagnetic iron oxide particles (SPIONs) conjugated with annexin A5 are more effective than non-targeted SPIONs in identifying atherosclerotic lesions in rabbits (113). Additionally, synthetic high density lipoprotein nanoparticles with Apo A1 (APOA1) and triphenyl phosphonium cations can detect mitochondrial membrane potential collapse and apoptotic cells (114). The mTOR pathway is involved in VSMC and pulmonary arterial SMCs (PASMCs) proliferation in pulmonary arterial hypertension (115,116), and administration of mTOR siRNA nanomedicines can markedly inhibit PASMC proliferation after hypoxia (115). Nanoparticles notably attenuate oxidized low-density lipoprotein-induced SMC proliferation and thrombosis through downregulating the expression of scavenger receptor and key proinflammatory markers, implying the promise of nanomedicine for next-generation cardiovascular therapeutics (117). Therefore, nanomedicines carrying drugs may be promising therapeutics for diseases associated with the proliferation of SMCs (Fig. 2).

Nanomedicine offers an effective approach to treating atherosclerosis by improving SMC dysfunction and inhibiting cell proliferation (118). In early atherosclerosis, SMCs increase adhesion molecules and pro-inflammatory

cytokines. A nano-delivery system, including 17- β E loaded nano-emulsions, notably reduced the expression of these molecules (119), highlighting its therapeutic potential. Additionally, miR-146a-5p nanomedicines, which target inflammation via the NF- κ B pathway, reduced neointimal hyperplasia in rat arteries post-revascularization (120). Thus, nanomedicines can effectively deliver drugs to injury sites, showing promise against neointimal hyperplasia.

Nanomedicine improved atherosclerosis by targeting ECs. Atherosclerosis is a chronic disease marked by lipid deposition and inflammation in arterial walls (121), leading to plaque growth and potential rupture, which can cause myocardial infarction (MI). The severity of the disease is influenced by plaque size and composition, affecting stability. Unstable plaques may rupture under altered blood flow, blocking capillaries and causing cardiovascular events such as MI, stroke and peripheral artery disease (122). Endothelial injury exacerbates atherosclerosis by promoting platelet aggregation, coagulation and SMC proliferation (123), making the endothelium vital in plaque development, stability and rupture.

Previous studies indicate that nanoparticles can deliver drugs to ECs for diagnosing or treating atherosclerotic diseases (79-110,124,125) (Table I; Fig. 2). Ultrasound imaging of plaque neovascularization can improve early detection of unstable plaques. VEGFR-2 targeting antibody nano-microbubbles are more effective than blank ones in detecting plaques in rats (126). IL-10, an inflammation regulator, suppresses pro-inflammatory responses in atherosclerosis by inhibiting NF- κ B activation (127). Branched poly (β -amino ester) nanoparticles with IL-10 plasmid DNA can slow atherosclerosis progression (128). The nanoparticle-VHPKQHRGGSGC peptide drug delivery system targets ECs, enhancing the anti-inflammatory effects of IL-10 on atherosclerotic plaques (128). Triptolide could inhibit inflammatory responses and angiogenesis in ECs (129), which might improve the symptoms and delay the progression of atherosclerosis. APRPG (Ala-Pro-Arg-Pro-Gly) peptide-modified nanoliposomes, a novel sustained-release drug delivery system targeting ECs, enhances inhibitory effects of triptolide on laser-induced neovascularization (130). Nanomedicine not only inhibits angiogenesis but also enhances endothelial function to treat atherosclerosis. In primary ECs, amorphous selenium quantum dots improved endothelium-dependent relaxation and accelerated wound healing, reducing atherosclerotic plaque in aortic arteries (131). Encapsulating cherry extract from *Prunus avium L.* in nanoparticles protected HUVECs from oxidative stress and decreased ROS production (132). Molybdenum disulfide nanoparticles (MoS₂ NPs) show promise as a multifunctional therapeutic, reversing hydrogen peroxide-induced endothelial senescence by enhancing autophagy (133). Additionally, mRNA-p5RHH nanoparticles can be assembled into nuclease-resistant nanoparticles (134). Cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor p27^{Kip1} nanoparticles target endothelial denudation areas, promoting vessel reendothelialization and reducing neointima formation after injury (135). Mesoporous silica nanoparticles with CD9 antibodies deliver rosuvastatin to senescent ECs and macrophages, slowing atherosclerosis progression in apoE^{-/-} mice (136). These EC-targeted nanotherapies are promising for atherosclerosis

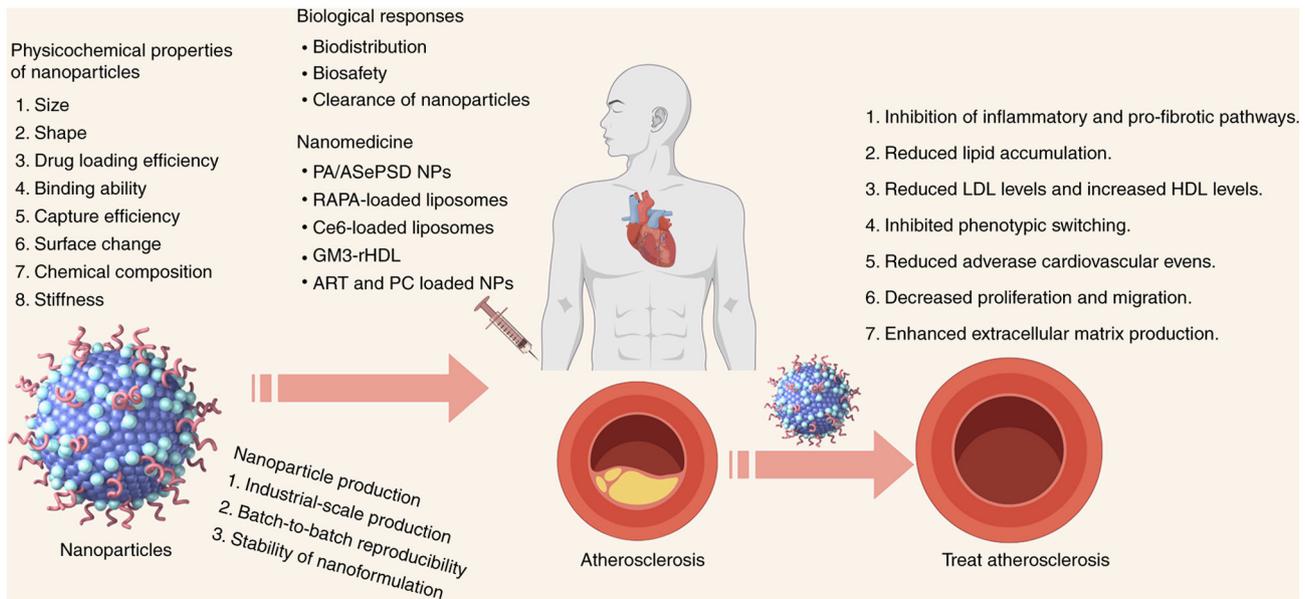


Figure 1. Application of nanomedicine for therapeutics of atherosclerosis. Schematic representation of nanoparticles functionalized with specific physicochemical properties, including size, surface charge, functional groups, shape, stiffness and chemical composition, is provided. The biological responses to these nanoparticles encompass biodistribution, biosafety and clearance. In the field of nanomedicine, examples include RAPA-loaded liposomes, Ce6-loaded liposomes, PA/ASePSD nanoparticles, GM3-rHDL and nanoparticles loaded with ART and PC. These nanomedicines are produced through industrial-scale production processes, ensuring batch-to-batch reproducibility and stability of the nanoformulations. When nanomaterials are administered intravenously, they can exert various beneficial effects, such as the inhibition of inflammatory and pro-fibrotic pathways, reduction of lipid accumulation, decrease in LDL levels, increase in HDL levels, reduction of drug toxicity, mitigation of adverse cardiovascular events and improvement of endothelial cell and smooth muscle cell function. The efficacy of targeted delivery of dual or multiple therapeutics across different anti-atherogenic pathways is key for synergistic anti-atherosclerosis therapies. ART, artemisinin; Ce6, Chlorin e6; GM3-rHDL, GM3-functionalized reconstituted high-density lipoprotein; HDL, high-density lipoprotein; LDL, low-density lipoprotein; PA/ASePSD NPs, polylactide/alpha-lactalbumin selective pH-sensitive delivery nanoparticles; PC, procyanidins. RAPA, rapamycin.

and other cardiovascular diseases. For instance, silica-coated magnetic iron oxide nanoparticles can label endothelial progenitor cells (EPCs) from male rats, forming magnetized EPCs (137). Transplanting these EPCs improves cardiac function, reduces infarction size and decreases myocardial cell apoptosis, enhancing myocardial infarction treatment (138).

Invasive therapy technology, such as NO-producing vascular stents, offers a novel therapeutic strategy for treating arterial stenosis. A study by Yang *et al* (139) demonstrated that stents functionalized with 3,3-diselenodipropionic acid and S-nitrosothiols implanted into vessels via nanomaterials can produce NO, promote EC growth, reduce platelet activation and VSMC activity (Fig. 2). This nanocoating technique creates an endothelium-like environment, presenting a novel treatment strategy for cardiovascular diseases.

Nanomedicine improved atherosclerosis by targeting macrophages. Atherosclerosis is an inflammatory disease of the artery walls involving immune cells such as macrophages, which are key in its progression (77,140). Targeting macrophage-related processes offers potential for diagnostics and therapies. Early in atherogenesis, arterial ECs recruit macrophages via chemokine-receptor interactions and adhesion molecules such as intercellular adhesion molecule 1 and vascular cell adhesion molecule 1 (141). This recruitment system is redundant, allowing for the inhibition of plaque formation by targeting multiple adhesion molecules (141). Additionally, vascular macrophages contribute to atherosclerosis through the expression of the olfactory receptor Olfr2 and related signaling molecules (142). Aberrant activation

and polarization of arterial macrophages affect apoptosis and efferocytosis, associate with lipid accumulation and the inflammatory response in macrophages to the development of atherosclerotic lesions (143). Indeed, suppression of macrophages reduced atherosclerosis in mice (144), emphasizing the importance of detecting subclinical disease in humans for monocyte-directed treatment.

Nanotechnology could enhance atherosclerosis treatment by developing new diagnostic and therapeutic methods to lower cardiovascular disease risk. Gao *et al* (145) introduced a biomimetic drug delivery system using ROS-responsive nanoparticles coated with macrophage membranes, which block proinflammatory cytokines to reduce inflammation. This approach, along with pharmacotherapy, increases atherosclerosis treatment efficacy, indicating that macrophage membrane-coated systems are well-suited for inflammatory diseases (145). Rapamycin-loaded nanoparticles using activated macrophage membrane proteins have shown promise by inhibiting macrophage proliferation and reducing inflammation and plaque changes (146). Long-term use of PLGA nanoparticles enhances lysosomal degradation, reduces macrophage apoptosis, necrotic core formation and cytotoxic protein aggregates, while increasing fibrous cap formation (147), suggesting they can alleviate macrophage lysosomal dysfunction in atherosclerosis. RNA interference (RNAi) with nanoparticles effectively inhibited key adhesion molecules, reducing macrophage recruitment to atherosclerotic lesions (141). Thus, nanomedicine can improve atherosclerosis by targeting macrophages (Fig. 2). However, nanoparticles can also worsen vascular disease; for example, inhaled

Table I. Examples of nanotherapies for the targeted therapy CVDs.

Nanoparticles loaded drug	CVDs	Mechanism of action	Administration route	Model of use/animal	(Refs.)
HA conjugated ATV NPs	Atherosclerosis	Inhibition of inflammation	Intravenous injection	Macrophages, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(81)
RAPA-loaded liposomes	Atherosclerosis	Attenuation of arteriosclerosis	Intravenous injection	Endothelial cells, LDLR ^{-/-} mice or apoE ^{-/-} mice	(82,110)
NPs loaded with LFP	Atherosclerosis	Anti-atherosclerosis	Intravenous injection	<i>In vitro</i> , apoE ^{-/-} mice	(83)
Gliclazide-loaded nanoghosis	Atherosclerosis	Attenuation of arteriosclerosis	Intravenous injection	Monocytes, rabbits	(84)
Pioglitazone loaded Polymer-NPs	Atherosclerosis	Inhibition of inflammation	-	THP-1 cells	(85)
Ce6 loaded liposome	Atherosclerosis	Inhibition of migration and cholesterol efflux in foam cells	Intravenous injection	HCAEC, MOVAS, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(86)
MM@MTX NPs	Atherosclerosis	Attenuation of arteriosclerosis	Tail vein injection	apoE ^{-/-} mice	(87)
Rapa@UiO-66-NH-FAM-IL-1Ra	Atherosclerosis	Anti-atherosclerosis treatment	Tail vein injection	Macrophage, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(88)
Hyaluronic acid-guided cerasome NPs	Atherosclerosis	Treatment of atherosclerosis	Intravenous injection	CD44-positive cells, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(89)
PA/ASePSD NPs	Atherosclerosis	Anti-inflammation and regulation of lipid metabolism	Intravenous injection	RAW 264.7, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(90)
PPAR δ -agonist-loaded NPs	Atherosclerosis	Attenuation of arteriosclerosis	Intravenous injection	VSMC, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(91)
ZIF-8 NPs loaded with LP	Atherosclerosis	Therapy of atherosclerosis	Intravenous injection	apoE ^{-/-} mice	(92)
Necrosulfonamide-loaded porous NPs	Atherosclerosis	Suppress inflammatory responses	-	Macrophages	(93)
ART and PC loaded NPs	Atherosclerosis	Attenuation of arteriosclerosis	Intravenous injection	Macrophage, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(94)
Cyclodextrin-loaded NPs	Atherosclerosis	Treatment of atherosclerosis	Tail vein injection	Macrophage, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(95)
pH-sensitive hyaluronic acid NPs	Atherosclerosis	Therapy of atherosclerosis	Tail vein injection	Macrophages, SMCs, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(96)
HA-functionalized mesoporous silica NPs loading simvastatin	Atherosclerosis	Therapy of atherosclerosis	Tail vein injection	Macrophages, HUVECs	(97)

Table I. Continued.

Nanoparticles loaded drug	CVDs	Mechanism of action	Administration route	Model of use/animal	(Refs.)
Self-oxygenation mesoporous MnO ₂ NPs	Atherosclerosis	Therapy of atherosclerosis	Intravenous injection	Macrophage, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(98)
Bevacizumab encapsulation into PLGA NPs	Atherosclerosis	Therapy of atherosclerosis	-	Endothelial cells, macrophages	(99)
Nano-enabled biotinylated anti-LDL	CVDs	Reduction in LDL levels, and an increase in HDL levels	Jugular vein	Large White pigs	(100)
Everolimus-Loaded rHDL	Atherosclerosis	Therapy of atherosclerosis	Inject flow (Vinj) of 0.2 ml/min	Macrophages, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(101)
GM3-rHDL	Atherosclerosis	Inhibition of foam cell formation	Single administration	Macrophages, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(102)
Administration of rHDL to deliver miRNA	Atherosclerosis	Increasing cholesterol efflux	Sequential administration	Triple-cell 2D-atheroma model	(103)
Netrin-1 antibody-functionalized NPs loaded metformin	AAAs	Reduced the aneurysm diameter	Tail vein injection	VSMCs, THP-1, apoE ^{-/-} mice	(104)
Galactose-modified nanoparticles for delivery of microRNAs	AAAs	Reduced the production of related proinflammatory cytokines	Tail vein injection	BMDMs, apoE ^{-/-} mice, patients with AAA	(105)
PGG-NPs	AAAs	Suppressed inflammatory cytokines and increased anti-inflammatory cytokines	Intravenous injections	Pathogen-free C57BL/6 male mice	(106)
Statin-loaded NPs	AAAs	Prevented AAAs expansion	Intravenous injections	Rat models	(107)
ROS-responsive NPs	AAAs	Inhibited calcification and attenuated ROS stress and apoptosis	Intravenous injections	AAA rats	(108)
EDTA- and PGG-loaded NPs	AAAs	Reduction of MMP activity, elastin degradation and calcification	Tail vein injection	Calcium chloride-injury rats	(109)

ATV, Atorvastatin; HA, Hyaluronan; NPs, Nanoparticle; RAPA, Rapamycin; LFP, lipid-specific AIEgen; Ce6, Chlorin e6; HCAEC, human coronary artery endothelial cells; MOVAS, mouse aortic vascular smooth muscle cells; MM@MTX NPs, MTX nanoparticles (MTX NPs) camouflaged with macrophage membranes; ZIF-8, zeolitic imidazolate framework-8; LP, losartan potassium; ART, Artemisinin; PC, Procyanidins; HA, hyaluronic acid; rHDL, reconstituted high-density lipoprotein; GM3-rHDL, Ganglioside GM3-functionalized reconstituted high-density lipoprotein; AAAs, Abdominal aortic aneurysms; BMDMs, bone marrow-derived macrophages; PGG-NPs, pentagalloyl glucose-loaded nanoparticles; PGG, pentagalloyl glucose; MMP, matrix metalloproteinase.

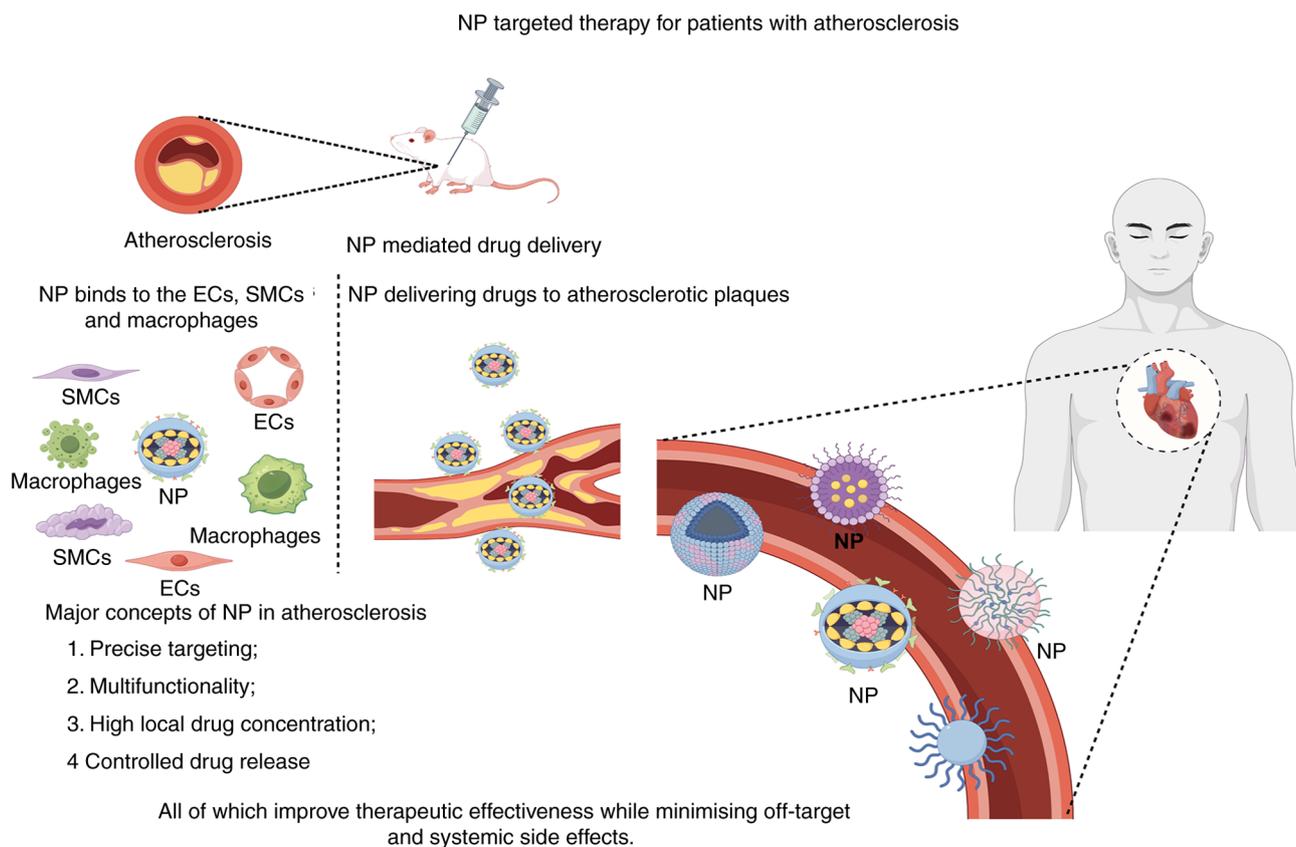


Figure 2. NP targeting atherosclerotic plaques in mouse and human models. NP have the capability to bind to ECs, SMCs and macrophages, facilitating NP-mediated drug delivery to atherosclerotic plaques within blood vessels in both murine and human models. Key concepts of NP application in atherosclerosis include precise targeting, multifunctionality, high local drug concentration and controlled drug release. These attributes collectively enhance therapeutic efficacy while minimizing off-target and systemic side effects. ECs, endothelial cells; NP, nanoparticles; SMCs, smooth muscle cells.

silica nanoparticles can exacerbate lesions and increase pro-inflammatory M1 macrophages (148).

7. Conclusions and future perspectives

Exercise-induced acute and adaptive physiological changes may notably improve the *in vivo* microenvironment for nano-drugs, thereby enhancing their efficacy (149). This synergistic effect can be attributed to several mechanistic pathways: i) Hemodynamics and vascular permeability: Exercise increases cardiac output and tissue blood flow, potentially facilitating the delivery and accumulation of nanoparticles in target tissues such as the heart or skeletal muscle, ii) metabolic and immune reprogramming: Exercise-induced metabolic alterations, such as reduced insulin resistance and immunomodulation, including an increase in anti-inflammatory M2 macrophages, may enhance the susceptibility of target cells to therapeutic agents such as nucleic acids and small molecules, while also mitigating inflammatory responses that could degrade nanoparticles, iii) cellular uptake: The upregulation of specific cell surface receptors, such as certain integrins, during exercise, when aligned with the targeting ligands on nanoparticles, could markedly enhance cellular internalization. Consequently, exercise should not be viewed merely as an adjuvant therapy but rather as a 'bio-enhancer' that actively modulates the host environment to optimize pharmacokinetics.

Despite promising advancements in preclinical research and the application of nanomaterials, challenges remain that could hinder progress. A primary challenge lies in the ethical implications associated with ongoing clinical trials, especially with fast-evolving science and issues such as COVID-19 (150). Ensuring the relevance and value of clinical trials as new information emerges is key for maintaining public trust and scientific integrity. Furthermore, the integration of nanomaterials into clinical practice presents notable obstacles, including concerns regarding toxicity, immunogenicity and regulatory approval processes (151). However, these challenges also present opportunities for innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration. By fostering partnerships among researchers, clinicians and regulatory bodies, the field can develop robust frameworks that address these issues while advancing scientific knowledge and improving patient outcomes. Future research should focus on overcoming these barriers to fully harness the potential of emerging technologies in personalized medicine and preclinical research.

Nanoparticles have several advantages over traditional therapeutic agents, including the ability to target specific tissues or cells, controlled drug release and reduced toxicity. Nonetheless, there are important limitations and challenges in cardiovascular nanomedicine that should be noted (79-110,152,153) (Table I). Future advancements in nanoparticle-based therapies for the diagnosis and treatment of arteriosclerosis are anticipated, with ongoing development and refinement in this

field (4,7,77). These nanoparticles have the potential to inhibit pro-atherogenic processes in macrophages, VSMCs and ECs, thereby enhancing the resolution of inflammation and stabilizing plaques. Furthermore, this work addresses the enduring challenge of translating nanomaterials into clinical applications by summarizing current obstacles and suggesting avenues for innovation and enhancement in nanomaterial design. This may involve the creation of novel and more efficacious therapeutic agents, the development of improved targeting strategies to ensure precise delivery of nanoparticles to plaque sites, and the integration of nanoparticle-based therapies with other treatment modalities, such as surgical interventions or stenting.

The utilization of nanoparticles coated with natural membranes derived from cells or extracellular vesicles for targeted drug delivery to the skin has been explored (154). Recent advancements in imaging techniques have enabled scientists to observe and comprehend the interactions of nanoparticles with biological systems at an ultrastructural level (155). Techniques such as cryo-electron microscopy, super-resolution microscopy and advanced spectroscopy are pivotal for elucidating the safety, biodistribution, and fundamental mechanisms of action of nanomedicines. Interfacial self-assembly nanoarrays pertain to spontaneously organized nanostructures at interfaces, which depend on the intrinsic properties of the materials involved, including surface energy, molecular structure and interactions (156). Moreover, plasmonic alloys have been shown to enhance metabolic fingerprints, facilitating the rapid diagnosis and classification of MI (157). This advancement holds the potential to reduce the duration of emergency department visits and improve MI treatment outcomes. Thus, nanomedicine is transforming from a simple 'drug deliveryman' to a 'comprehensive medical platform' that can intelligently interact with life systems, analyze diseases at the molecular level, and achieve precise diagnosis and efficient treatment integration.

It is imperative to critically evaluate the heterogeneous findings on nanomaterials. Some studies highlight their benefits, while other studies raise concerns about their biocompatibility and long-term implications (158,159). A balanced approach is needed to weigh positive results against potential risks, guiding the development of standardized clinical protocols. Future research should prioritize elucidating the mechanisms that govern the interactions between nanomaterials and cardiovascular cells, alongside optimizing nanomaterial design for improved efficacy and safety. There is an urgent need for rigorously designed clinical trials to evaluate the long-term impacts of nanomaterials in the treatment of atherosclerosis. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaborations among materials scientists, biologists and clinicians will be key to advancing this field.

The present review highlights the considerable potential of the nano-platform for applications such as tumor-targeted therapy; however, there are considerable challenges associated with its clinical translation, particularly in relation to long-term *in vivo* safety and biodistribution. Due to their material composition and size, the nanoparticles are likely to undergo sequestration and clearance predominantly in the liver and spleen. The potential risks of long-term toxicity, immunogenicity and off-target accumulation necessitate comprehensive evaluation in future studies, particularly through systematic long-term animal experiments. Addressing these safety

concerns is essential for the advancement of this platform toward clinical application and will constitute a primary focus of forthcoming research.

The present review posits a key perspective: Nanomaterials and exercise should not be viewed as independent interventions but rather as synergistic agents that converge on common molecular pathways, thereby offering a transformative approach to cardiovascular therapy. This integration propels the field forward in two notable ways. Firstly, on a mechanistic level, it introduces a novel concept of 'bidirectional regulation', for example, in the context of inflammatory pathways, exercise promotes an anti-inflammatory state by modulating myokines such as IL-6, which increases IL-10 and decreases TNF- α levels (160). Concurrently, nanomaterials can be engineered to deliver anti-inflammatory agents (161), such as siRNA targeting TNF- α , directly to gut microbiota for ulcerative colitis therapy (162). This dual approach effectively remodels the inflammatory microenvironment through both 'systemic modulation' and 'localized precision strike' strategies. Secondly, at a translational level, it introduces an innovative paradigm of 'preconditioning combined with therapy'. Exercise acts as a safe and cost-effective systemic 'preconditioning' strategy that optimizes the overall physiological environment by enhancing vascular function and reducing oxidative stress (163). This creates a less favorable environment for the subsequent administration of nanotherapeutics. This integrated approach not only has the potential to enhance the efficacy of monotherapies but also addresses the multi-pathway dysregulation characteristic of complex diseases, representing a key direction for the future integration of precision medicine and lifestyle interventions.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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