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## LUBRICANTS IN PHARMACEUTICAL SOLID DOSAGE FORMS: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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**\*Asmaa Abdelaziz Mohamed**

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College of Pharmacy, Al-Zahraa University for Women, Karbala, Iraq.

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**\*Corresponding Author: Asmaa Abdelaziz Mohamed**

College of Pharmacy, Al-Zahraa University for Women, Karbala, Iraq.

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### ABSTRACT

Lubricants are essential excipients in the manufacture of pharmaceutical solid dosage forms, particularly tablets and capsules. They play a critical role in reducing friction between the powder blend and processing equipment, preventing sticking to punches and dies, and ensuring smooth ejection of tablets during compression. However, inappropriate selection or excessive use of lubricants can adversely affect critical quality attributes such as tablet hardness, disintegration time, dissolution rate, and content uniformity. This review provides a comprehensive overview of lubricants used in solid dosage forms, including their mechanisms of action, classification, commonly used materials, and their impact on formulation and processing parameters. Recent advances, challenges, and future perspectives in lubricant selection and optimization are also discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** Lubricants; Solid dosage forms; Tablets; Magnesium stearate; Pharmaceutical excipients.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Lubricants play a critical role in modern mechanical systems by reducing friction and wear between interacting surfaces in relative motion. Their use is essential for improving energy efficiency, extending equipment lifespan, minimizing maintenance costs, and ensuring operational reliability across a wide range of industrial, automotive, aerospace, and biomedical applications. As mechanical systems become more complex and operate under increasingly severe conditions—such as high loads, extreme temperatures, and aggressive environments—the demand for advanced lubrication technologies continues to grow.

Fundamentally, lubrication functions by introducing a substance between contacting surfaces to separate them partially or completely, thereby reducing direct surface-to-surface contact. Depending on operating conditions, lubrication may occur in different regimes, including boundary, mixed, hydrodynamic, and elastohydrodynamic lubrication. Each regime is governed by distinct physical mechanisms involving surface roughness, lubricant viscosity, pressure, and sliding speed, as described by classical tribological theory and the Stribeck curve [1,2].

Lubricants are commonly classified into liquid lubricants (such as mineral oils, synthetic oils, and bio-based oils), semi-solid lubricants (greases), solid lubricants (graphite, molybdenum disulfide, and polytetrafluoroethylene), and gaseous lubricants. Liquid lubricants remain the most widely used due to their ability to provide effective cooling, debris removal, and corrosion protection in addition to friction reduction. The performance of a lubricant is largely determined by its base oil properties and the chemical additives blended into it, including anti-wear agents, antioxidants, viscosity index improvers, and corrosion inhibitors [3,4].

In recent years, environmental and sustainability concerns have significantly influenced lubricant development. Conventional petroleum-based lubricants pose environmental risks due to toxicity, low biodegradability, and disposal challenges. As a result, there has been increasing interest in environmentally acceptable lubricants (EALs), such as bio-lubricants derived from vegetable oils and synthetic esters. These alternatives offer advantages in biodegradability and renewability, although challenges related to oxidative stability and low-temperature performance remain active areas of research [5].

Advancements in material science and surface engineering have further expanded the role of lubricants beyond traditional friction control. Modern lubrication research increasingly focuses on nano-lubricants, smart additives, and surface-lubricant interactions at the micro- and nano-scale. The incorporation of nanoparticles such as graphene, titanium dioxide, and copper oxide has demonstrated significant potential in enhancing load-carrying capacity, reducing wear, and improving thermal stability. These developments highlight the evolving importance of lubricants as integral components of tribological system design rather than passive consumables. [6].

Overall, lubricants remain indispensable to technological progress, and continued innovation in lubricant formulation, testing, and application is essential to meet the performance, efficiency, and sustainability demands of future engineering systems.

## 2. Role and Mechanism of Lubricants

Lubricants function primarily by reducing friction and adhesion at the interface between the formulation and processing equipment. Their mechanisms include:

- **Boundary lubrication:** Formation of a thin film between metal surfaces and particles, reducing direct contact.
  - **Reduction of die-wall friction:** Facilitates smooth tablet ejection and prevents damage to tablet edges.
  - **Prevention of sticking and picking:** Minimizes adherence of powder to punches and dies.
- Most pharmaceutical lubricants are hydrophobic in nature and act by coating the surface of particles, which explains both their effectiveness and their potential negative effects on tablet performance. 7

## 3. Classification of Lubricants

Lubricants used in solid dosage forms can be broadly classified as:

### 3.1 Hydrophobic Lubricants

These are the most commonly used lubricants and include:

- Magnesium stearate
- Calcium stearate
- Stearic acid
- Talc

Hydrophobic lubricants are highly efficient at low concentrations but may retard wetting, disintegration, and dissolution. 8

### 3.2 Hydrophilic Lubricants

Examples include:

- Sodium stearyl fumarate
- Polyethylene glycol (PEG)
- Sodium lauryl sulfate (occasionally used as a lubricant/glidant)

Hydrophilic lubricants generally have less adverse impact on dissolution but may be less effective in reducing friction compared to hydrophobic lubricants. 9

## **4. Commonly Used Lubricants**

### **4.1 Magnesium Stearate**

Magnesium stearate is the most widely used lubricant in tablet formulations due to its excellent lubricating efficiency at low concentrations (0.25–2%). However, it is highly hydrophobic and sensitive to mixing time and concentration. Over-lubrication can lead to decreased tablet hardness, prolonged disintegration time, and reduced dissolution rate.<sup>10</sup>

### **4.1 Calcium Stearate**

Calcium stearate is one of the most commonly used **hydrophobic lubricants** in pharmaceutical solid dosage forms, particularly in tablet and capsule formulations. It is the calcium salt of stearic acid and appears as a fine, white, odorless powder with good flow and anti-adherent properties. Calcium stearate is widely employed to reduce friction between the tablet formulation and the die wall during compression, thereby improving tablet manufacturability and preventing sticking to punches and dies [11,12].

### **4.2 Stearic Acid**

Stearic acid is a fatty acid used as a lubricant and sometimes as a binder. It is less hydrophobic than magnesium stearate but may require higher concentrations to achieve comparable lubrication.

### **4.3 Sodium Stearyl Fumarate**

Sodium stearyl fumarate is a hydrophilic lubricant that provides effective lubrication with minimal impact on tablet dissolution. It is often preferred in formulations where rapid drug release is critical.

### **4.4 Talc**

Talc acts as both a lubricant and glidant. It is less effective than stearates but can be useful in combination with other lubricants.

## **5. Effect of Lubricants on Tablet Properties**

### **5.1 Powder Flow and Compressibility**

Lubricants reduce interparticle friction and die-wall friction, thereby improving powder flow and facilitating uniform die filling. Hydrophobic lubricants such as magnesium stearate are highly effective at low concentrations; however, excessive surface coating of particles can reduce interparticle bonding during compression, leading to decreased tablet tensile strength

and increased friability. The extent of this effect depends on lubricant concentration, mixing time, and the nature of the formulation components [13-15].

## 5.2 Tablet Hardness and Friability

Several studies have demonstrated that increasing lubricant concentration or prolonged blending, particularly with magnesium stearate, results in reduced tablet hardness due to inhibition of solid–solid bonding. Hydrophilic lubricants such as sodium stearyl fumarate generally exhibit a lower negative impact on mechanical strength [13, 16].

## 5.3 Disintegration and Dissolution

Hydrophobic lubricants may delay tablet disintegration and drug dissolution by forming a water-repellent layer around particles, which reduces wettability. This effect is more pronounced in poorly soluble drugs (BCS class II and IV). In contrast, hydrophilic lubricants are associated with faster disintegration and more consistent dissolution profiles [14, 17].

## 5.4 Drug Release and Bioavailability

Changes in dissolution behavior induced by lubricants can directly affect drug bioavailability. Careful optimization of lubricant type and level is therefore critical, particularly for immediate-release formulations and drugs with dissolution-limited absorption [17].

## 6. Comparative Evaluation of Common Lubricants

**Table 1. Comparison of commonly used lubricants in solid dosage forms.**

Lubricant	Type	Typical Concentration	Advantages	Limitations	References
Magnesium stearate	Hydrophobic	0.25–2.0%	Highly efficient lubrication; widely available	Reduced tablet hardness; delayed dissolution; sensitive to mixing time	[13-17]
Calcium stearate	Hydrophobic	0.5–2.0%	Effective lubricant; less sensitive than Mg stearate	Hydrophobic; may still affect dissolution	[13, 14]
Stearic acid	Hydrophobic	1–5%	Lower impact on dissolution than Mg stearate	Requires higher concentration	[13, 15]
Sodium stearyl fumarate	Hydrophilic	0.5–2.0%	Minimal effect on dissolution; good alternative to Mg stearate	Less lubricating efficiency	[14-17]

Lubricant	Type	Typical Concentration	Advantages	Limitations	References
Talc	Inorganic	1–5%	Dual function (glidant/lubricant)	Less effective alone; may require combination	[13, 15]

## 7. Mechanism of Lubrication in Tablet Manufacturing

Lubrication in tablet manufacturing primarily occurs via boundary lubrication, where a thin layer of lubricant particles coats the surfaces of formulation components and metal tooling. This layer reduces metal–particle and particle–particle friction, facilitating powder flow, compression, and tablet ejection. However, excessive coating can interfere with interparticle bonding, resulting in weakened tablets and altered drug release profiles [13].

## 8. Factors Affecting Lubricant Performance

Several factors influence the effectiveness and impact of lubricants, including:

- Type and concentration of lubricant
- Mixing time and order of addition
- Particle size and surface area of the lubricant
- Nature of the API and excipients
- Compression force and manufacturing method (direct compression vs wet granulation)

## 9. Recent Advances and Alternative Approaches

Recent research has focused on minimizing the negative effects of traditional lubricants through:

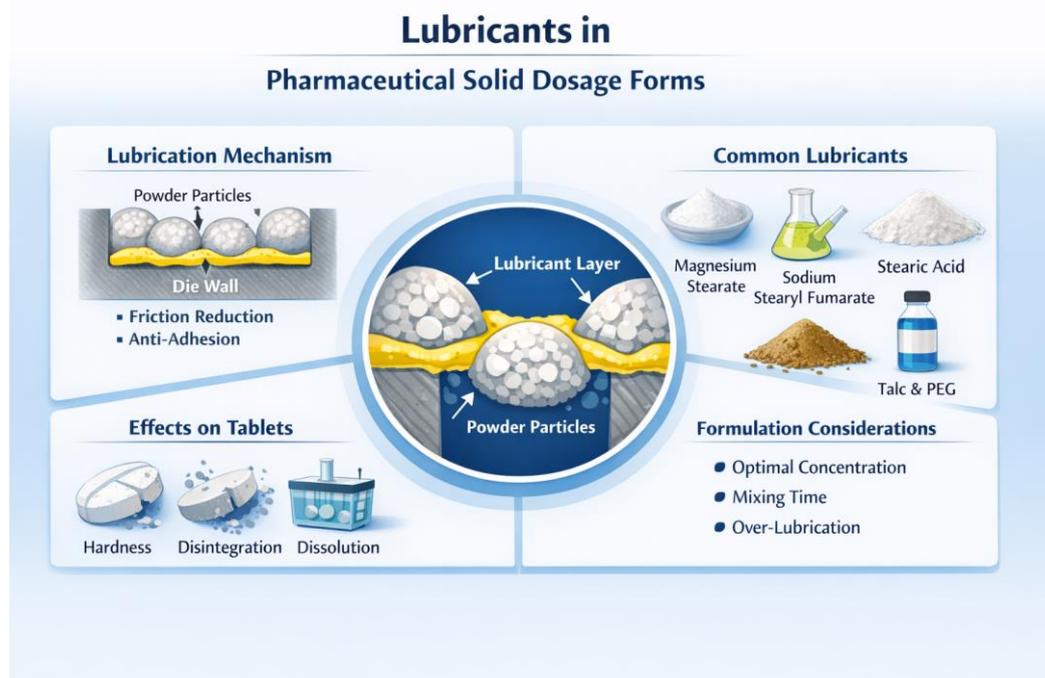
- Use of hydrophilic or multifunctional lubricants
- Development of co-processed excipients
- Application of quality-by-design (QbD) principles
- Use of lubricant nanoparticles and surface-modified lubricants

These approaches aim to achieve optimal lubrication while maintaining desired tablet performance.

## 8. Challenges and Future Perspectives

The main challenge in lubricant selection lies in balancing manufacturability with product quality. Future research is expected to focus on predictive tools for lubricant optimization,

deeper understanding of lubricant–API interactions, and the development of novel excipients with minimal adverse effects.



**Figure 1: Mechanism of action, effects of lubricants.**

## 9. CONCLUSION

Lubricants are indispensable excipients in the manufacture of solid dosage forms. While they play a crucial role in ensuring smooth processing, their impact on tablet properties must be carefully controlled. Rational selection of lubricant type, concentration, and processing conditions is essential to achieve high-quality pharmaceutical products. Continued research and innovation in this field will further enhance formulation robustness and performance.

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