

## SPILANTHOL GEL IN PERIODONTITIS: BRIDGING TRADITIONAL WISDOM WITH MODERN DENTISTRY

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Article Received on  
23 July 2025,

Revised on 12 August 2025,  
Accepted on 01 Sept. 2025

DOI: 10.20959/wjpr202518-38241



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### ABSTRACT

Periodontitis is a chronic inflammatory disease characterized by destruction of tooth-supporting tissues due to microbial dysbiosis and host immune response, remains challenging to treat effectively with conventional therapies alone. Spilanthol, the bioactive alkylamide extracted from *Spilanthus acmella* and *Acmella oleracea*, (commonly known as the toothache plant), exhibits significant pharmacological properties such as local anesthetic, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antimicrobial, and immunomodulatory effects, making it a promising therapeutic agent in oral healthcare. Spilanthol is primarily extracted from the flower heads of *Spilanthus acmella* using methods like Natural Deep Eutectic Solvents (NADES), Supercritical CO<sub>2</sub> extraction, Ethanol extraction, and Solid-Phase Extraction (SPE). These methods aim to optimize yield and purity while being eco-

friendly. Various studies have developed spilanthol-based gels for different applications. These gels demonstrate robust antimicrobial, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory activities suitable for treating periodontal conditions. Spilanthol offers a unique combination of therapeutic properties beneficial for treating periodontitis. Incorporating spilanthol into gels presents a promising localized treatment strategy that combines sustained release, targeted action, and reduced systemic side effects. Although no standardized commercial spilanthol gel for periodontitis exists yet, the evidence supports its potential for future development.

**KEYWORDS:** Periodontitis, spilanthol, *spilanthus acmella*, periodontal gel.

## INTRODUCTION

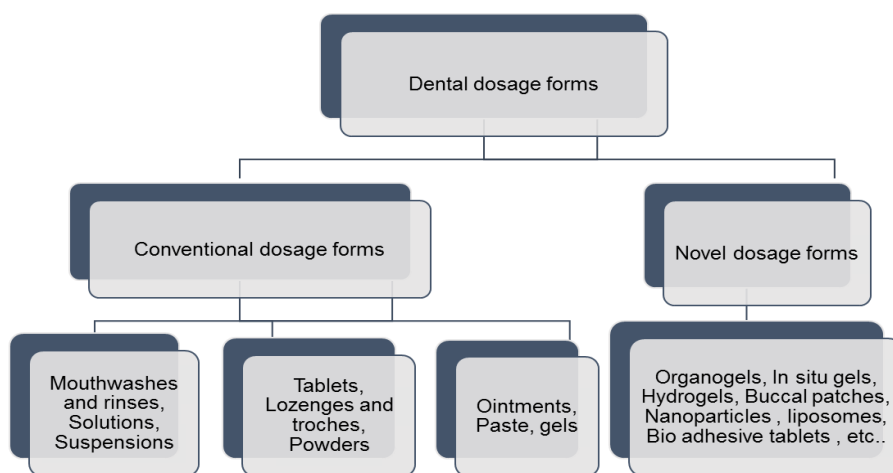
Periodontitis is a prevalent and serious inflammatory condition affecting the tissues surrounding the teeth, leading to the destruction of the periodontium and potentially resulting in tooth loss.<sup>[1]</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that periodontal diseases affect around 19% of adults around the world. It is primarily caused by the accumulation of bacteria in dental plaque, leading to chronic inflammation, tissue damage, and bone resorption.<sup>[1]</sup> The main goal of periodontal therapy is to eliminate or control the microbial biofilm and the restoration of the periodontium's health and function.

Effective management of periodontitis typically involves deep cleaning procedures such as scaling and root planing, anti-inflammatory drugs and antibiotics to control bacterial infection, and sometimes in severe cases, surgical interventions like flap surgery, bone grafts, or tissue grafts may be necessary.<sup>[2]</sup> These treatments can be invasive and uncomfortable, often requiring multiple visits and longer recovery times. Various antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory drugs have been used along with mechanical debridement (professional removal of microbial biofilm) for the treatment of periodontitis.<sup>[3]</sup> Orally administered drugs for periodontal treatment can be less effective due to variable absorption influenced by factors like food and gastric pH, leading to inconsistent drug levels in the bloodstream. Additionally, these drugs undergo first-pass metabolism in the liver, reducing their bioavailability. They can also cause gastrointestinal side effects such as nausea and vomiting, and may not be suitable for patients with swallowing difficulties or those who are unconscious.<sup>[4]</sup>



**Figure i: Healthy v/s periodontal teeth.**

To circumvent these issues, clinicians prefer localized drug delivery to inflamed periodontal sites. Delivering drugs locally into the pocket region provides the best efficiency in terms of drug concentration at the site while eliminating systemic side effects in patients. The different local drug delivery systems include films, gels, microspheres, nanoparticles etc, which can release drugs over an extended period.<sup>[5]</sup> Among the various types of local drug delivery systems, gels have received considerable attention for periodontal applications. Gels are semi-solid systems that consist of a liquid phase entrapped within a three-dimensional network of cross-linked polymers or solid particles. Gels represent a versatile and patient-friendly local drug delivery system for periodontal treatment, capable of delivering antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory drugs directly to periodontal pockets with controlled release profiles.<sup>[6]</sup> Hydrogels, oleogels, and bigels each provide complementary benefits, and ongoing research is enhancing their clinical applicability and overcoming existing limitations. Their superiority in biocompatibility, ease of use, and sustained drug delivery is why gels have gained considerable attention in the management of periodontitis.<sup>[7]</sup>



**Figure ii: various types of dental dosage forms.**

Spilanthalol is a potent alkylamide found as a primary bioactive compound in *Spilanthes acmella* (a.k.a. toothache plant).<sup>[8]</sup> *Spilanthes acmella* has been a staple in traditional medicine for treating oral diseases.<sup>[9]</sup> Spilanthalol possesses multiple biological activities like analgesic,<sup>[10]</sup> anti-inflammatory,<sup>[11]</sup> anesthetic<sup>[12]</sup> and antimicrobial activity<sup>[13]</sup> that make it effective for treating periodontal conditions. Spilanthalol works by interacting with sensory nerve endings, especially those responsible for pain and temperature perception. It modulates ion channels on nerve cells, leading to a tingling and numbing sensation and

temporary desensitization to pain stimuli.<sup>[14]</sup> Antimicrobial activity against periodontal pathogens, and modulation of immune responses, collectively reducing periodontal tissue inflammation, bacterial load and pain.<sup>[15]</sup>

### EXTRACTION OF SPILANTHOL

Spilanthol concentration is highest in flower heads compared to leaves and stems of *Spilanthes acmella*. Extraction yield and purity can be optimized by controlling temperature, solvent composition, and extraction duration. Purified spilanthol can be quantified by HPLC-DAD or NMR methods. Green extraction methods (NADES, SFE) offer eco-friendly and efficient routes with minimal toxicity and environmental impact.



**Figure iii: *Acmella* flower extract powder.**

#### **i. Natural Deep Eutectic Solvents (NADES) Extraction**

Choline chloride-based NADES mixed with various hydrogen bond donors (especially 1,2-propanediol at 1:2 molar ratio with 20% water) can efficiently extract spilanthol from *Spilanthes acmella* flower heads at 50–80 °C for 1 hour with a 1:10 (plant material to solvent) ratio. NADES are non-toxic, green solvents, and offer an eco-friendly alternative to organic solvents.<sup>[16]</sup>

#### **ii. Supercritical CO<sub>2</sub> Extraction**

Extracted from flowers with CO<sub>2</sub> at supercritical conditions (~35–40 MPa, 40–50 °C). Uses ethanol/water as cosolvents to increase spilanthol yield and Collects solvent-free extract containing enriched spilanthol.<sup>[17]</sup>

#### **iii. Extraction with Ethanol**

Plant material is macerated with 96% ethanol at room temperature for 24 hours with stirring, then filtered and evaporated to yield a dry resinous extract.<sup>[18]</sup>

#### iv. Solid-Phase Extraction (SPE)

SPE on C18 phases with isocratic elution (e.g., 52% ethanol) is an efficient, scalable, and simple purification step compatible with both NADES and ethanolic extracts, achieving up to ~94% purity post-fractionation<sup>(19)</sup>.

### THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITY OF SPILANTHOL

#### i. Anti-Inflammatory and Neuroprotective Activity

Spilanthol significantly inhibits pro-inflammatory cytokines Interleukin-8 (IL-8) and Tumor Necrosis Factor- $\alpha$  (TNF- $\alpha$ ) release from lipopolysaccharide-activated human neutrophils, demonstrating potent anti-inflammatory properties. In macrophage models (RAW 264.7 cells), spilanthol reduces iNOS expression and nitric oxide production, contributing to anti-inflammatory effects at cellular signaling levels.<sup>[20]</sup>

Spilanthol attenuates neuroinflammation, a pathological hallmark in several neurodegenerative diseases (NDDs) such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. It suppresses proinflammatory cytokines (e.g., TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-6, IL-1 $\beta$ ), nitric oxide (NO) production, and key enzymes inducible nitric oxide synthase (iNOS) and cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2). Mechanistically, spilanthol modulates toll-like receptor 4 (TLR4) and nuclear factor  $\kappa$ B (NF- $\kappa$ B) pathways, inhibiting downstream signaling and expression of neuroinflammatory mediators. Studies combining in silico ADMET (absorption, distribution, metabolism, excretion, toxicity) and network pharmacology reveal spilanthol's favorable blood-brain barrier permeability and molecular docking affinity with TLR4-related targets.<sup>[21]</sup>

#### ii. Analgesic and Local Anesthetic activity

Traditional use for toothache and oral mucosa analgesia is attributed to spilanthol's ability to inhibit nerve conduction and stimulate gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) release in the cerebral cortex. It produces localized tingling, numbing, and mouth-watering sensations. Spilanthol-containing preparations are used in dental care products for pain relief and in topical anesthetic gels.<sup>[22,23]</sup>

#### iii. Antimicrobial and Antibacterial activity

Exhibits broad-spectrum antibacterial activity against pathogens responsible for dental caries and periodontal disease, including *Streptococcus mutans*<sup>[24]</sup> *Staphylococcus aureus*,<sup>[25]</sup> *Porphyromonas gingivalis*, and *Aggregatibacter actinomycetemcomitans*.<sup>[26]</sup> Demonstrated antifungal activity against *Aspergillus* and *Fusarium* species.<sup>[27]</sup>

**iv. Antioxidant activity**

Contains significant phenolic and flavonoid contents, contributing to strong antioxidant effects. Protects cells from oxidative stress by scavenging free radicals and enhancing activity of endogenous antioxidant enzymes.<sup>[25]</sup>

**v. Immunomodulatory activity**

Enhances both humoral and cellular immune responses and modulates oxidative stress and inflammatory cytokines in models of chronic fatigue syndrome. Flavonoids and polyphenols in spilanthol-containing extracts contribute to immune modulation.<sup>[28]</sup>

**vi. Antimalarial and Larvicidal activity**

Spilanthol is active against mosquito vectors and parasitic eggs/pupae; lethal to insect vectors but safe for vertebrates. Extracts containing spilanthol are effective against malaria parasites (*Plasmodium* species) and various mosquito vectors (*Anopheles*, *Culex*, *Aedes*), which are responsible for transmitting malaria, filariasis, and dengue fever.<sup>[29]</sup>

**vii. Vasorelaxant and Diuretic activity**

Spilanthol shown to induce vasodilation and increase urine output in animal studies. *Spilanthes acmella* extracts exhibited dose-dependent vasorelaxant effects mediated by endothelial nitric oxide and prostacyclin.<sup>[30]</sup>

**viii. Anti-cancer and Aphrodisiac activity**

Preliminary evidence suggests anticancer activity<sup>(31)</sup> and stimulation of sexual function<sup>(32)</sup>.

**PERIODONTAL GELS**

Periodontal gels have emerged as promising local drug delivery systems for the treatment of periodontitis. These gels upon administration in the periodontal pocket, allowing for sustained and controlled release of therapeutic agents directly at the infection site.

**Common Types of Periodontal Gels****1. Antibiotic-loaded gels**

Metronidazole, satranidazole, doxycycline, and minocycline gels have demonstrated effective antimicrobial action against anaerobic pathogens such as *Porphyromonas gingivalis* and *Tannerella forsythia* and *Satranidazole* may provide superior clinical effects compared to metronidazole in chronic periodontitis with less side effects.<sup>[33-36]</sup>



## 2. Herbal and natural product gels

Curcumin in situ gels show anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial properties enhancing wound healing and reducing inflammation locally.<sup>[37]</sup> Clove oil gels, often formulated with carbopol 934 as gelling agent, exert broad-spectrum antibacterial and analgesic effects beneficial in periodontal therapy.<sup>[38]</sup>

## 3. Novel oxygen-releasing and other adjunct gels

Formulations like Blue M gel (oxygen releasing) aid healing by elevating oxygen levels in pockets and reduce infection risk.<sup>[39]</sup>

## PREPERATION OF SPILANTHOL-CONTAINING GEL

Afzal et. al (2022) developed and evaluated an herbal emulgel formulation based on *Spilanthes acmella* extract for treatment of bacterial skin infections, addressing antibiotic resistance issues. Methanolic extract of *S. acmella* incorporated into emulgel bases with natural oils and polymers to enhance gel consistency, bioadhesive strength, spreadability, and skin permeation.<sup>[40]</sup> The *Spilanthes acmella*-based emulgel shows robust antimicrobial, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory activities suitable for topical treatment of bacterial and fungal skin infections including eczema, cellulitis, and dermatitis caused by common bacterial pathogens. Emulgel formulation improves drug delivery via dual emulsion-gel properties, provides sustained release, better skin adherence, and enhanced penetration while maintaining a non-greasy, cosmetically acceptable texture.<sup>[41]</sup>

Kielbratowski et. al, demonstrated that a mouthwash containing cannabidiol and spilanthol significantly improves oral health indicators in patients with gingivitis compared to a tea tree oil rinse. This suggests the potential for these natural ingredients to be effective in maintaining oral microbiota balance and reducing inflammation.<sup>[42]</sup> Kashyap P et. al, focused on the development of an herbal tooth gel aimed at managing gingival bleeding and toothache. The gel incorporated *Spilanthes acmella*, Green Tea, and clove oil as its primary ingredients. The combination of *Spilanthes acmella* and Green Tea extracts provided synergistic benefits for managing toothaches and gingival bleeding. Clove oil and menthol oil served as effective natural preservatives, enhancing the shelf life of the gel. The study concludes that this herbal tooth gel has significant potential for treating gingival issues.<sup>[43]</sup>

Verma K et. al, evaluated the efficacy of locally delivered *Acmella oleracea* and *Acacia catechu* gels in managing generalized chronic periodontitis, focusing on clinical parameters

and subgingival microflora and shown an improvement in periodontal healing compared to scaling and root planning.<sup>[44]</sup> Daundkar S, developed a herbal tooth gel utilizing spilanthol and evaluated against marketed preparations and found formulation's effectiveness and its potential application in maintaining oral hygiene and managing mouth ulcers.<sup>[45]</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Spilanthol-containing gels represent a promising advancement in the management of periodontitis. By leveraging the bioactive properties of spilanthol extracted from *Spilanthes acmella* and *Acmella oleracea* these gels deliver targeted anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial effects directly within periodontal pockets. This localized drug delivery approach enhances treatment efficacy while minimizing systemic side effects, addressing limitations associated with conventional oral or systemic therapies. Spilanthol exhibits unique combination of analgesic, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and immunomodulatory properties makes it highly beneficial for treating periodontitis. Its incorporation into gels provides a promising localized treatment strategy for periodontitis, combining sustained release and targeted action. The use of spilanthol gel bridges traditional herbal wisdom with modern dental practices, offering a novel therapeutic option for the effective control of periodontal disease.

However, further research particularly large-scale clinical trials and comprehensive safety assessments is necessary to fully establish the clinical effectiveness and optimize the use of spilanthol-containing gels in routine periodontal therapy.

## FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Spilanthol-containing gel formulations are suitable and have been studied for oral applications such as reducing inflammation and microbial infection in periodontal tissues. While no widely commercialized specific "spilanthol gel" for periodontitis is standardized yet and research supports the potential of spilanthol-based gels for periodontitis management due to its anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antimicrobial, and local anesthetic properties.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who helped me during the completion of this work. My deepest appreciation goes to my husband for his unwavering support, patience, and motivation that were crucial in overcoming difficult moments. I am profoundly thankful to my family for their love and encouragement throughout my life. I



extend my heartfelt thanks to my teachers for their expert guidance and valuable insights, which enriched my learning experience. I also appreciate my friends for their constant support and understanding. Without all of you, this accomplishment would not have been possible.

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