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Mini Review

Biocompatibility, biodegradation and excretion of polylactic acid (PLA) in medical implants and theranostic systems

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Abstract. Polylactic acid (PLA) is the most commonly used biodegradable polymer in clinical applications today. Examples range from drug delivery systems, tissue engineering, temporary and long-term implantable devices; constantly expanding to new fields. This is owed greatly to the polymer's favorable biocompatibility and to its safe degradation products. Once coming in contact with biological media, the polymer begins breaking down, usually by hydrolysis, into lactic acid (LA) or to carbon dioxide and water. These products are metabolized intracellularly or excreted in the urine and breath. Bacterial infection and foreign-body inflammation enhance the breakdown of PLA, through the secretion of enzymes that degrade the polymeric matrix. The biodegradation occurs both on the surface of the polymeric device and inside the polymer body, by diffusion of water between the polymer chains.

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