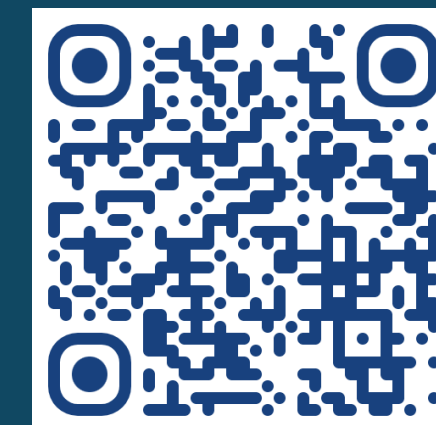


## Natural hydrogel patches with antimicrobial, anti-itch and moisturising properties as an alternative to Wet Wrap Therapy for Atopic Dermatitis

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### Background

**Atopic Dermatitis (AD)**, also known as eczema, is a chronic inflammatory skin condition characterised by **itching, dry skin**, and compromised barrier function.

The pathophysiology of AD involves a combination of genetic factors (such as mutations in the **filaggrin gene**), immune dysregulation, and environmental triggers, leading to immune activation, **disruption of the skin barrier**, and **increased susceptibility to infections**.

Patients experience significant discomfort from the **itch-scratch cycle**, and the constant skin irritation makes healing difficult. Treatments often focus on maintaining moisture, reducing inflammation, and preventing infections.



2% **Levomenthol (Lm):**  
Anti-itch; Cooling

1.5% **Kappa carrageenan (KC):**  
Porous; Swelling

2% **Chitosan:**  
Structure;  
Biocompatibility

89% **Distilled water**

0.1% **Curcumin (CUR):**  
Antimicrobial;  
Anti-inflammatory

2% **Cellulose:**  
Mechanical strength

2% **Aloe vera gel:**  
Moisturising;  
Repairs barrier

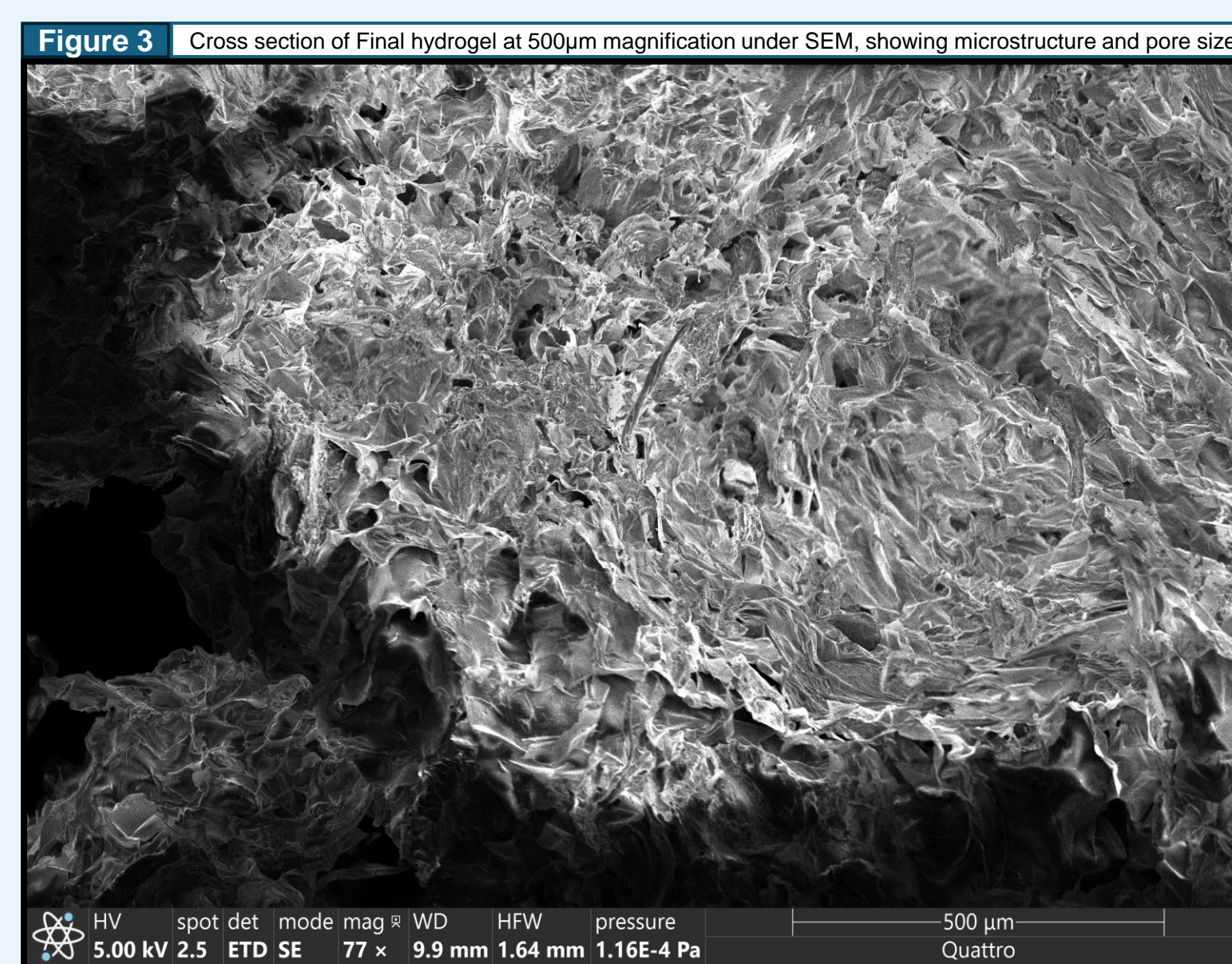
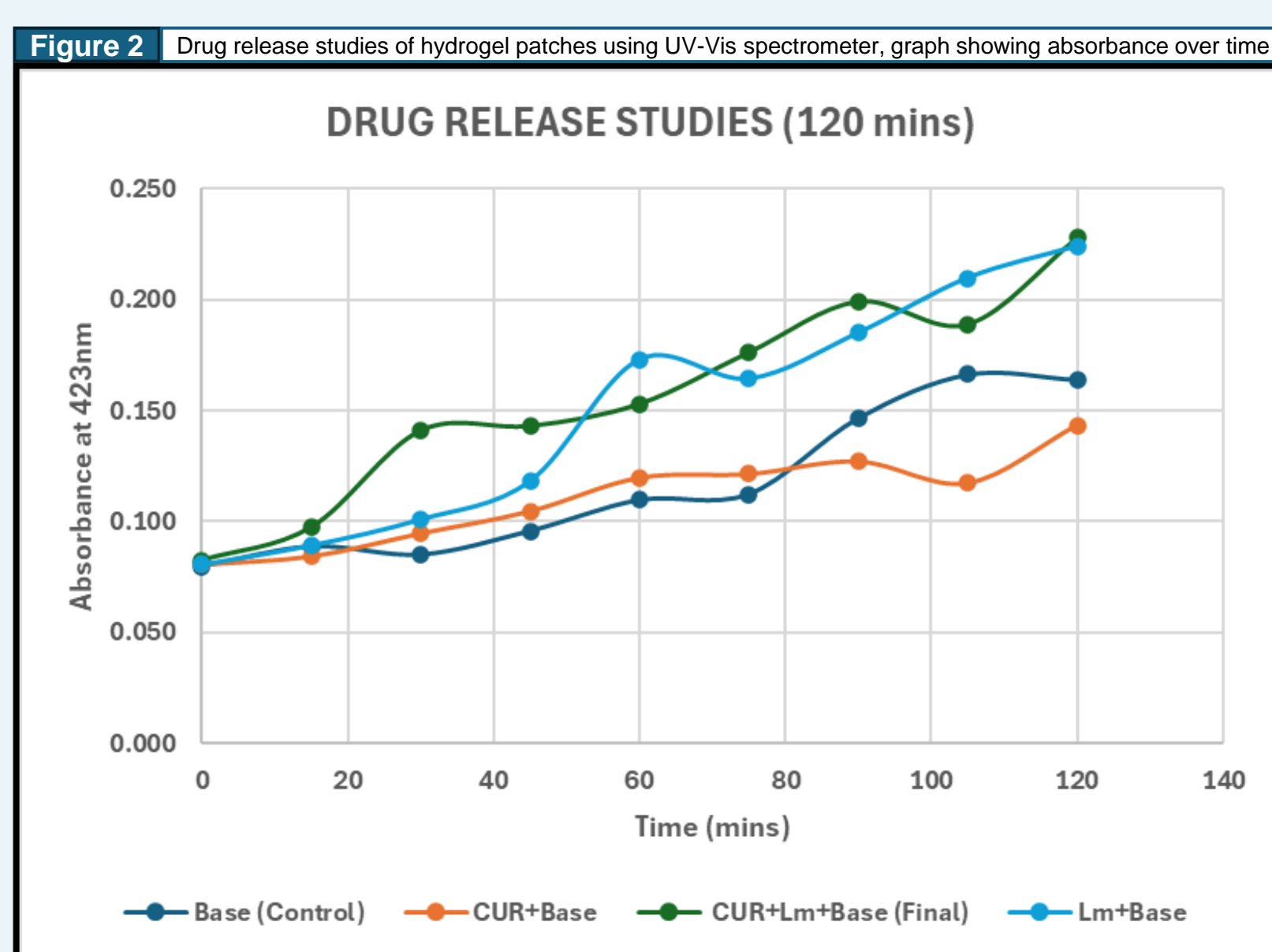
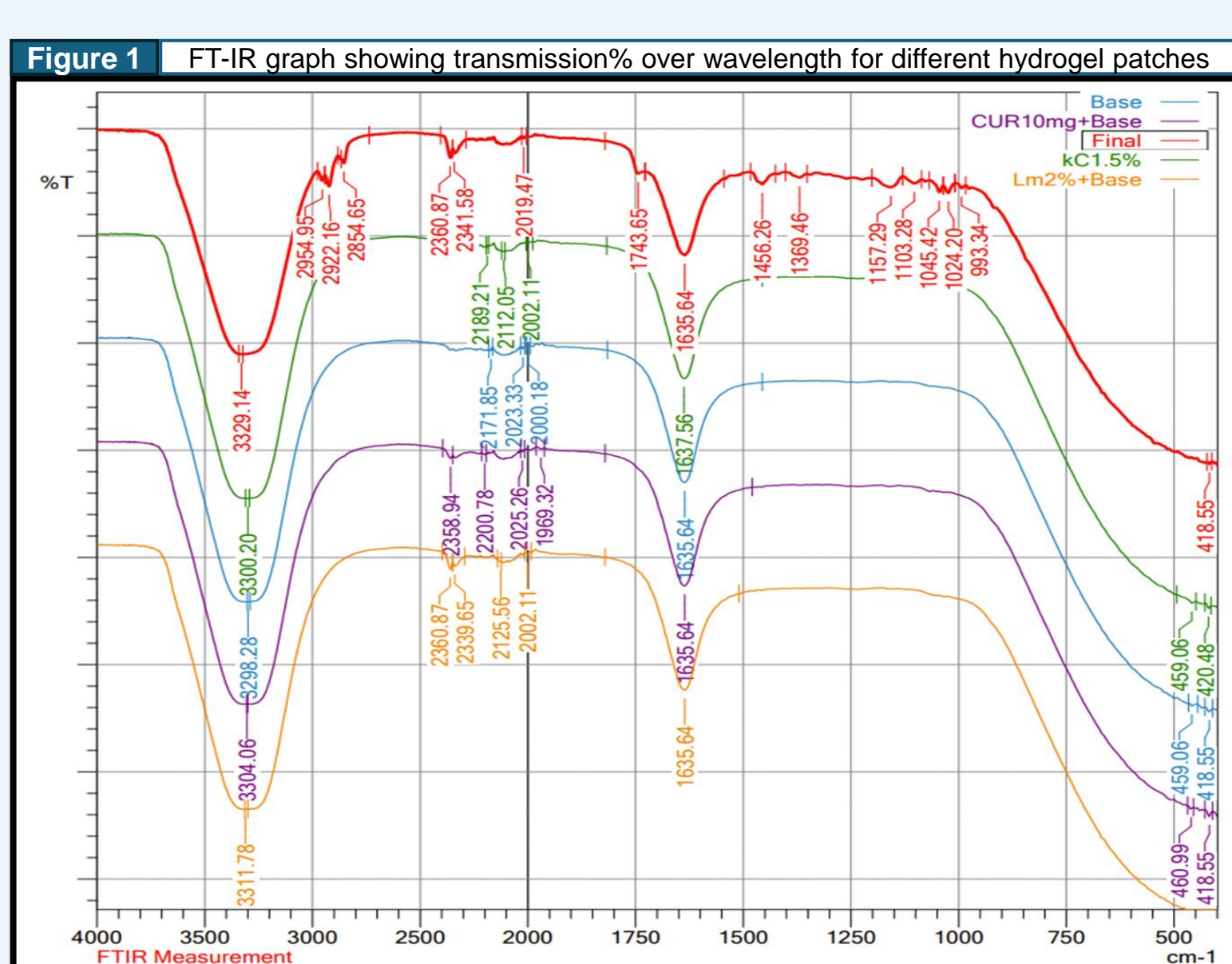
1% **Coconut oil:**  
Moisture retention

#### Advantages of our hydrogels:

- ✓ Hydration and moisture retention.
- ✓ Addition of antimicrobial components limiting infection risk.
- ✓ Adheres to the skin with a sticky border (similar to a plaster/dressing).
- ✓ Repairing the skin barrier and protection from further damage.
- ✓ Could be potentially kept on the skin for up to 48 hours.
- ✓ Minimal loss of topical agents like moisturiser and NSAIDs.
- ✓ Maintain consistent hydration and controlled release of bioactive compounds curcumin and levomenthol.

#### Disadvantages of Wet Wrap Therapy:

- Works by using a damp gauze (which dries quickly) followed by a dry layer to retain moisture temporarily.
- Bandages must be changed every 1-2 hours.
- The warm, damp environment caused by wet wrap makes the user prone to infections (commonly *Staphylococcus aureus* infections).
- Can cause further breakdown of the skin barrier once bandages are removed and the skin dries again.
- Often requires higher doses of NSAIDs or corticosteroids due to potential loss through touch or wrap changes.



### Results and Discussion

#### Final Hydrogel molecular stability and potential:

The **FT-IR spectra** of the final hydrogel show enhanced absorption in the C=O (~1745 cm<sup>-1</sup>) and O-H (~3329 cm<sup>-1</sup>), indicating stronger carbonyl and ether linkages. This is likely due to crosslinking or interaction with added curcumin, which influences the hydrogel's swelling behaviour, drug release profile, biocompatibility, and mechanical strength (Fig. 1).

#### Active ingredient loading and release capacity:

**SEM imaging** (Fig. 3) validated the porous structure of hydrogel. The large pore size indicates a greater holding capacity of water and active ingredients. A porous network also ensures adequate oxygen exchange, critical for wound healing and maintaining skin integrity.

**Swelling studies** proved hydrogel's high absorption and retention ability in acidic and neutral pH solutions, by swelling up to 150% in 45 minutes. **Drug release profiles** (Fig. 2) show slow, sustained release which is beneficial for prolonged therapeutic effects in treating AD.

#### Antimicrobial and anti-itch properties:

The preliminary studies using the final composition (containing curcumin) showed promising results in inhibiting the growth of *Staphylococcus aureus*, compared to the base (control) hydrogel (Fig. 4).

**Future tests** would involve in vitro tests on cell lines and eventually, in vivo testing of hydrogel patches on animal models to study wound healing and infection control.

### Conclusion

Hydrogel patches composed of natural polymers; loaded with **anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial and anti-pruritic agents** such as curcumin and levomenthol represent a superior alternative to wet wrap therapy. Stronger molecular interaction of active ingredients within hydrogel displayed greater stability. Their ability to maintain consistent moisture, control drug release, and provide additional therapeutic benefits, makes them a more efficient, convenient, and safer option for the long-term management of severe AD.

### References

- The central animated images were created using Adobe Express image generator.
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### Acknowledgements

Special thanks to:  
UURIP team and NIHR for funding, Amrutha Sunny, Sergey Zlatogorsky, Sarah Dennison, Analytical Suite technicians and Lipid Nanostructures team.