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Commentary

# Pharmacokinetics in Pediatric and Geriatric Populations: A Commentary

**Moshe Yael***

*Department of Pharmacology, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia*

## INTRODUCTION

Pharmacokinetics-the study of how the body absorbs, distributes, metabolizes, and eliminates drugs-differs significantly across age groups. Pediatric and geriatric populations are particularly sensitive to these changes due to the distinct physiological characteristics of children and older adults. This commentary highlights the key differences in pharmacokinetics between these groups and emphasizes the need for age-specific drug therapy to ensure both safety and efficacy.

## DESCRIPTION

### Pediatrics: Developing organ systems and their impact

In neonates and infants, organ systems such as the liver, kidneys, and gastrointestinal tract are still maturing, which significantly affects how drugs are processed. Absorption in children can be slower and less predictable due to factors like higher gastric pH and slower gastric emptying. Distribution is influenced by the higher body water content and lower fat stores in newborns. This results in a larger volume of distribution for water-soluble drugs and potentially lower plasma concentrations for fat-soluble ones.

Metabolism is slower in neonates due to immature liver enzymes, particularly cytochrome P450 enzymes, leading to prolonged drug half-lives and increased risk of toxicity. As children grow, liver enzyme activity improves, but it remains lower than adults until later childhood. Excretion is also affected, with immature kidneys resulting in slower clearance of drugs that are eliminated through the kidneys, increasing the risk of drug accumulation.

Dosing for pediatric patients must account for age, weight, and developmental stage. Neonates and infants often require lower doses or longer dosing intervals compared to older children and adults. Adjustments should be made as children grow and their pharmacokinetic profiles change.

### Geriatrics: Age-related declines and their impact

In older adults, aging leads to a decline in organ function, particularly the liver and kidneys, which significantly alters pharmacokinetics. Absorption in the elderly can be slightly altered due to changes in gastric pH and slower gastric emptying, though these effects are typically not as significant as in pediatrics. Distribution changes with aging, as increased body fat and decreased muscle mass lead to altered volumes of distribution. Lipophilic (fat-soluble) drugs accumulate more in fat stores, while hydrophilic (water-soluble) drugs may have higher plasma concentrations due to reduced body water.

Metabolism in the elderly is slowed, particularly phase I reactions in the liver, due to reduced hepatic function. This results in prolonged drug half-lives and an increased risk of toxicity. Excretion is also impaired, with a decreased Glomerular Filtration Rate (GFR) and reduced renal clearance, leading to the accumulation of drugs that are primarily eliminated by the kidneys.

Given these changes, geriatric patients often require lower doses, longer intervals between doses, and careful monitoring for adverse effects. Polypharmacy is common in older adults, which increases the risk of drug-drug interactions and complicates pharmacokinetic management.

### Customized drug therapy for pediatric and geriatric patients

Both pediatric and geriatric populations require individualized drug therapy to account for their unique pharmacokinetic profiles. In children, dosages should be adjusted based on developmental stages and organ maturity. For older adults, drug therapy must be tailored to declining organ function and changes in body composition. Regular monitoring and dose adjustments are crucial for both groups to ensure drug safety and effectiveness.

Pharmacokinetics in pediatric and geriatric populations presents unique challenges. Age-related physiological changes in these groups require tailored drug dosing and careful monitoring. Understanding these differences helps ensure safe and effective

**Correspondence to:** Moshe Yael, Department of Pharmacology, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; E-mail: Mosheael@gmail.com

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medication use, optimizing therapeutic outcomes and minimizing the risk of adverse effects. Through personalized drug therapy, clinicians can better manage the health of these vulnerable populations.

In pediatrics, the rapidly developing and maturing body requires frequent adjustments to dosing and therapy to accommodate the variations in absorption, distribution, metabolism, and excretion during different developmental stages. Inadequate consideration of these factors can lead to underdosing or overdosing, both of which can result in suboptimal therapeutic outcomes or increased risk of toxicity. Moreover, the fact that children are often unable to communicate side effects makes it even more critical to tailor drug regimens and carefully monitor their responses.

For the elderly, the natural decline in organ function and the presence of multiple chronic conditions can alter how drugs are processed in the body. This makes it essential for clinicians to adjust medications to account for slower metabolism and renal function, and to monitor for drug-drug interactions, especially given the frequent use of multiple medications in this population. Failure to adjust drug dosages or consider the complex interplay of age-related changes may lead to adverse drug reactions, hospitalizations, or even mortality.

## CONCLUSION

Both age groups also highlight the importance of individualized care and the need for clinicians to stay informed about pharmacokinetic principles and age-specific drug responses. By incorporating pharmacokinetic knowledge into clinical practice, healthcare providers can minimize the risks associated with pharmacotherapy, enhance treatment efficacy, and improve overall health outcomes for pediatric and geriatric patients. Ultimately, adopting a personalized approach to pharmacokinetics ensures that these vulnerable populations receive the safest and most effective care possible, preventing medication errors and enhancing the quality of life.