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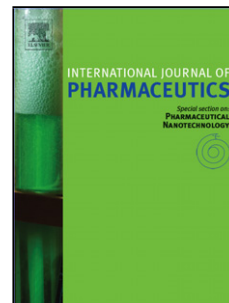
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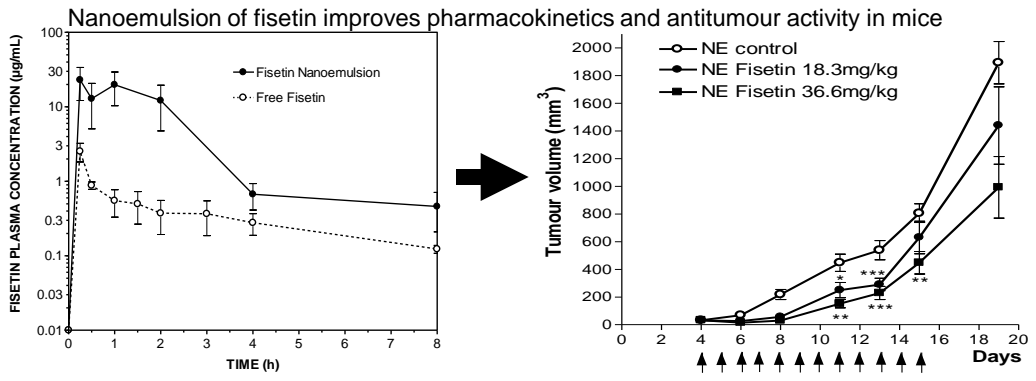
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# Nanoemulsion formulation of fisetin improves bioavailability and antitumour activity in mice

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**Abbreviations:** Fisetin, 3,3',4',7-tetrahydroxyflavone; EAhy 926, immortalized human  
20 umbilical vein endothelial cells; HLB, hydrophilic-lipophilic balance; HPLC, high  
performance liquid chromatography; PDI, polydispersity index.

## Abstract

25 The natural flavonoid fisetin (3,3',4',7-tetrahydroxyflavone) has shown antitumour activity  
but its administration is complicated by its low water solubility. Our aim was to incorporate  
fisetin into a nanoemulsion to improve its pharmacokinetics and therapeutic efficacy.  
Solubility and emulsification tests allowed to develop an optimal nanoemulsion composed of  
Miglyol<sup>®</sup> 812 N / Labrasol<sup>®</sup> / Tween<sup>®</sup> 80 / Lipoid E80<sup>®</sup> / water  
30 (10%/10%/2.5%/1.2%/76.3%). The nanoemulsion had an oil droplet diameter of  $153 \pm 2$  nm,  
a negative zeta potential ( $-28.4 \pm 0.6$  mV) and a polydispersity index of 0.129. The  
nanoemulsion was stable at 4°C for 30 days, but phase separation occurred at 20°C.  
Pharmacokinetic studies in mice revealed that the fisetin nanoemulsion injected intravenously  
(13 mg/kg) showed no significant difference in systemic exposure compared to free fisetin.  
35 However, when the fisetin nanoemulsion was administered intraperitoneally, a 24-fold  
increase in fisetin relative bioavailability was noted, compared to free fisetin. Additionally,  
the antitumour activity of the fisetin nanoemulsion in Lewis lung carcinoma bearing mice  
occurred at lower doses (36.6 mg/kg) compared to free fisetin (223 mg/kg). In conclusion, we  
have developed a stable nanoemulsion of fisetin and have shown that it could improve its  
40 relative bioavailability and antitumour activity.

**Keywords:** Nanoemulsion, flavonoids, fisetin, pharmacokinetics, bioavailability, antitumor  
activity

45

## 1. Introduction

Among the plant-derived compounds that have been linked to the chemoprevention and treatment of cancer, the flavonoids occupy a special place due to their abundance in human food and their relative non toxicity (Havsteen, 2002; Lopez-Lazaro, 2002; Middleton, Jr. et al., 2000; Surh, 2003).

In a program aimed at finding new antiangiogenic agents in the flavonoid family, we have recently identified the natural flavonoid fisetin (3,3',4',7-tetrahydroxyflavone) as an interesting lead that can stabilize endothelial cells *in vitro* at non cytotoxic concentrations (Touil et al., 2009). Fisetin is found in several fruits, vegetables, nuts and wine (Arai et al., 2000; Kimira et al., 1998) and displays a variety of biological effects including antioxidant, anti-inflammatory (Park et al., 2007; Woodman and Chan, 2004), anti-carcinogenic and *in vitro* anti-angiogenesis (Fotsis et al., 1997). Fisetin has been shown to inhibit several molecular targets, including cyclin-dependent kinases (Lu et al., 2005a; Lu et al., 2005b; Sung et al., 2007), DNA topoisomerases I and II (Constantinou et al., 1995; Olaharski et al., 2005), urokinase (Jankun et al., 2006), actin polymerization (Böhl et al., 2007), and androgen receptor signalling (Khan et al., 2008).

*In vivo*, fisetin has recently been shown to possess interesting anticancer activity in mice bearing lung carcinoma (Touil et al., 2011), prostate tumours (Khan et al., 2008), and human embryonal carcinoma (Tripathi et al., 2011). Its *in vivo* mechanism of action appears rather complex and includes antiangiogenic, antiandrogenic and anti-metastatic activities (Chien et al., 2010; Khan et al., 2008; Touil et al., 2011; Tripathi et al., 2011).

Despite its highly interesting properties for cancer therapy, fisetin administration *in vivo* remains problematic partly due to its poor water solubility (Guzzo et al., 2006; Mignet et al., 2012). Fisetin bioavailability must therefore be significantly improved in order to optimize its delivery to tumours after *in vivo* administration. Although the design of suitable

molecular carriers for flavonoids is an area of intense research, solutions are still far from being developed for therapy, and suitable molecular carriers for flavonoids have yet to be designed and tested (Leonarduzzi et al., 2010). To do so, we therefore chose to formulate fisetin into nanoemulsion in order to hopefully achieve a better bioavailability.

75 Nanoemulsions represent good vehicles to formulate hydrophobic active molecules (Sarker, 2005). For example, nanoemulsions are widely used for parenteral administration of lipids, and have also been employed for intravenous administration of anticancer drugs like paclitaxel (Kan et al., 1999) and chlorambucil (Ganta et al., 2008). Also noteworthy, nanoemulsion has also been recently reported to contribute to the *in vivo* increase in efficacy  
80 of anticancer drugs, e.g., dacarbazine (Tagne et al., 2008) and camptothecin (Han et al., 2009).

The aim of the present study was therefore to design and characterize a nanoemulsion of fisetin that could be suitable for parenteral administration. We also evaluated the fisetin nanoemulsion pharmacokinetics after intravenous (i.v.) or intraperitoneal (i.p.) administration  
85 in mice, and determined its relative i.p. bioavailability compared to the i.p. administration of the free fisetin. Finally, the antitumour activity of the fisetin nanoemulsion was compared to the administration of free fisetin in Lewis lung carcinoma bearing mice.

## 2. Materials and methods

90

### 2.1. Materials

Fisetin (98% purity) was purchased from Shanghai FWD Chemicals Limited (Shanghai, China). The various purified oil phases were provided by the following  
95 companies: soybean oil (Société Industrielle des Oléagineux, Saint Laurent Blangy, France); carthame oil, ethyl oleate and n-capric acid (Sigma-Aldrich, Saint Quentin Fallavier, France); Miglyol<sup>®</sup> 812 N and Imwitor<sup>®</sup> 742 (Sasol Witten, Germany); Captex<sup>®</sup> 355 and Capmul<sup>®</sup> PG-8 (Abitec, Janesville, WI, USA); Labrafac lipophile WL 1349<sup>®</sup> (Gattefossé, Saint Priest, France); triacetin (VWR Fontenay-sous-Bois, France).

100 The surfactants were purchased from the following companies: egg lecithin containing 82.3% phosphatidylcholine (Lipoid E80<sup>®</sup>, Lipoid GmbH Ludwigshafen, Germany); polysorbate 80 (Tween<sup>®</sup> 80), sorbitan trioleate (Span 85<sup>®</sup>), polyoxyethylene glycol 2000 monostearate (Myrj<sup>®</sup> 52) (Uniquema, Everberg, Belgium); polyoxyethylenated ricin oil (Cremophor EL<sup>®</sup>, BASF, Ludwigshafen, Germany) ; vitamin E TPGS (Eastman Chemical  
105 B.V., Paris, France); a mixture of glycerides and esters of PEG-8 (Labrasol<sup>®</sup>), a mixture of glycerides and esters of PEG 300 (Labrafil M 1944 CS<sup>®</sup>) (Gattefossé Saint Priest, France); glycerol monocaprylocaprate (Capmul MCM<sup>®</sup>, Abitec, Janesville, WI, USA). Glycerol was purchased from Labosi (Paris, France). Sterile water for injection was from Fresenius-Kabi (Sèvres, France). Sodium hydroxide 0.1 N was from Carlo Erba Reactif SDS (Peypin,  
110 France).

The other chemicals used for drug dissolution, plasma preparation and HPLC analysis were the following: methanol, acetonitrile, perchloric acid (Carlo Erba Reactif SDS, Peypin, France); DMSO, PEG 200, morin, phosphate buffer (pH 7.4) and mouse serum (Sigma-



Aldrich, Saint Quentin Fallavier, France). All other chemicals were of pharmaceutical grade  
115 or of the highest analytical purity available.

## 2.2. Fisetin solubility studies

Fisetin solubility was assessed according to the approached solubility method (Mulak  
120 and Cotty, 1975). Fisetin solubility was first separately assessed in different oil phases and  
surfactants, and thereafter in various mixtures of oil/surfactant (Tables 1-3). Increasing fisetin  
concentrations were introduced in the various phases under agitation and heating at  $60 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$   
until a precipitate was observed. The solubility was determined after cooling at room  
temperature.

125

## 2.3. Nanoemulsion preparation

Fisetin was dissolved in several fractions in a mixture of Labrasol<sup>®</sup>/Tween<sup>®</sup> 80 heated  
at  $60 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$  under sonication (Sonifier<sup>®</sup> 450, Branson, Danbury, CT, U.S.A.). This mixture  
130 was added to the oil phase (Miglyol<sup>®</sup> 812) in which lecithin (Lipoid E80<sup>®</sup>) has previously  
been dispersed by heating. Aqueous and oil phases have been heated at  $70 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$  thereafter.  
Emulsification was accomplished by phase inversion (Becher, 1965), i.e., the aqueous phase  
was added to the oil phase. The mixture was then submitted to a high shear mixer  
(Ultraturrax<sup>®</sup> T25, Ika, Staufen, Germany) for 10 min at 21,500 rpm (set at 5) that allowed  
135 the formation of a crude emulsion. An additional 15 min sonication in the cold of the previous  
emulsion using a Sonifier<sup>®</sup> 450 set at 90% and output 3 allowed to obtain a submicron  
emulsion. For intravenous (i.v.) and intraperitoneal (i.p.) administration, sodium hydroxide  
0.1 N was used to adjust pH to 7.0 and glycerol 2.25% was added to adjust tonicity. Two

methods of sterilization were investigated: steam sterilization using 120°C, 15 minutes cycle  
140 and filtration through a 0.22 µm filter.

#### 2.4. Nanoemulsion characterization and stability studies

Nanoemulsions were visually inspected for eventual creaming, coalescence, phase  
145 separation and/or precipitation. After dilution (1/1000) in water, the mean droplet size, size  
distribution, the zeta potential ( $\zeta$ ), and the polydispersity index (PDI) were determined using a  
Zetasizer Nano ZS (Malvern Instruments, Orsay, France). The PDI reflects the polydispersity  
of the emulsion ranging from 0 to 1, with lower values indicating a more monodispersed  
suspension. pH was determined using a pH meter 210 (MeterLab, Copenhagen, Denmark). A  
150 short term stability of the optimized formulations over a period of 30 days was accomplished  
at room temperature ( $+20 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$ ) and at  $+4^\circ\text{C}$  by evaluating the above mentioned parameters.  
Measurements were performed in triplicate.

For the determination of the fisetin concentration, nanoemulsions were diluted  
(1/2000) in methanol, vortexed, and 100 µL were injected onto a reversed-phase HPLC  
155 system (Shimadzu CLASS-VP<sup>®</sup>, version 5.3), equipped with an octadecylsilane column  
(Beckman Ultrasphere ODS, 5 µm; 4.6 × 250 mm) thermostated at 20°C, and a UV detector  
set at 360 nm. The mobile phase was composed of 25% acetonitrile and 75% acidified water  
(2% v/v glacial acetic acid), at a flow rate of 1 mL/min. In these conditions the retention time  
of fisetin was 8 min. The area of the fisetin peak was reported to a calibration curve to  
160 determine the concentration of fisetin. Calibration curves were linear with correlation  
coefficients near unity.

#### 2.5. Effect of fisetin nanoemulsion on endothelial cells

165           Immortalized human endothelial cells (EAhy 926) (Edgell et al., 1983) were grown in  
DMEM containing 2 mM L-glutamine, 10% foetal bovine serum, 100 U/mL penicillin and  
100 µg/mL streptomycin (37°C, 5% CO<sub>2</sub>). Cells were plated onto 96-well plates at 5000 cells  
per well in 100 µL of culture medium. The fisetin-free nanoemulsion or the fisetin  
170 nanoemulsion were added to the cells for a 2 h exposure time, and the cell morphology was  
assessed under microscopy at a magnification of X100 (Nikon Diaphot, Nikon Corp. Japan).

## 2.6. Fisetin pharmacokinetics in mice

### 2.6.1. Mice and treatments

175           Female 8 weeks old C57BL/6J mice (body weight 18-22 g), were purchased from  
Janvier (Le Genest-St-Isle, France). After an overnight fasting period, mice were administered  
the various treatments as described hereafter. For the intravenous (i.v.) administration into the  
tail vein, 21 mice received the free fisetin formulated in 20% DMSO, 20% PEG 200 and 60%  
saline at a final concentration of 1.3 mg/mL (hereafter referred as “free fisetin”). The total  
180 volume injected i.v. was 200 µL for a 20 g mouse, which corresponds to a volume of DMSO  
of 40 µL. It should be noted that an undiluted DMSO volume of 50 µL can be administered  
safely i.v. to mice without toxicity (Willson et al., 1965), and that in our studies, the final  
DMSO dose per mouse corresponds to 40 µL (for a 20 g mouse), which was further diluted in  
saline and injected slowly over 1 minute. We did not encounter any acute mortality using this  
185 formulation in our studies.

A second group of 21 mice received the fisetin nanoemulsion in a final volume of 50  
µL, previously sterilized by filtration through 0.22 µm filters. The fisetin dose was 13 mg/kg  
for the free fisetin or its nanoemulsion. Mice were sacrificed at 5, 10, 15, 30 min, 1, 2, 4 h, the

blood was obtained by cardiac puncture onto heparinized syringes, centrifuged ( $10,000 \times g$ ,  
190 10 min), and the harvested plasma was kept frozen at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  until HPLC analysis. For the  
intraperitoneal (i.p.) administration, the free fisetin (prepared as described above for the i.v.  
route) was injected at the maximum tolerated dose by this route (223 mg/kg). The fisetin  
nanoemulsion dose was 112.5 mg/kg corresponding to an injected volume of 450  $\mu\text{L}$  i.p.  
Three mice per time point were sacrificed at 0, 0.25, 0.5, 1, 2, 4, 8, 15 and 24 h to harvest the  
195 blood by cardiac puncture (heparinized syringe). Plasma was obtained by centrifugation  
( $10,000 \times g$ , 10 min), and frozen at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  until HPLC analysis. All animal experiments have  
been carried out in accordance with institutional and French regulations concerning the  
protection of animals, and with the European Commission regulations.

#### 200 2.6.2. *Determination of fisetin concentration in plasma*

Fisetin concentration in plasma was determined by HPLC as followed: to 100  $\mu\text{L}$  of  
plasma was added 60  $\mu\text{L}$  of a morin methanolic solution at 0.5 mg/mL (internal standard), and  
200  $\mu\text{L}$  of cold acidified methanol (methanol:perchloric acid 70%, 200:1, v:v) to precipitate  
proteins. After vortexing for 5 min the samples were kept on ice for 15 min, and centrifuged  
205 at  $10,000 \times g$  at  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The supernatant (100  $\mu\text{L}$ ) was injected onto a reversed-phase HPLC  
system as described above with the UV detector set at 360 nm. The ratio of the area of the  
fisetin peak divided by the internal standard peak area was reported to a calibration curve to  
determine the concentration of fisetin. Calibration curves were linear with correlation  
coefficients near unity. The quantification limit of the system was 0.1  $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ .

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#### 2.6.3. *Pharmacokinetic parameters determination*

The following non compartmental pharmacokinetic parameters were calculated using  
standard methods (Gibaldi and Perrier, 1982): maximum concentration ( $C_{\text{max}}$ ) extrapolated to

time zero for the i.v. route; area under the plasma concentration versus time curve from time  
215 zero to the time of the last measurable concentration ( $AUC_{0-t}$ ) calculated by the trapezoidal  
method; terminal half-life =  $\ln 2/K_{el}$ , where  $K_{el}$  is the terminal elimination rate constant. The  
mean residence time (MRT) was calculated as the  $AUMC/AUC$ , where AUMC is the area  
under the first moment curve. Clearance was calculated as the dose/AUC, and the volume of  
distribution  $V_{ss}$  as the  $CL \times MRT$ . The mean absorption time (MAT) after i.p. administration  
220 was calculated as the  $MRT_{i.p.}$  minus  $MRT_{i.v.}$  (Gibaldi and Perrier, 1982). Relative  
bioavailability ( $F_{REL}$ ) comparing the free fisetin and its nanoemulsion for the same route of  
administration was determined by the following formula:  $F_{REL} = (AUC_{NE} \times dose_{FREE}) / (AUC_{FREE} \times dose_{NE})$ .

## 225 2.7. Evaluation of antitumour activity in mice

Female 8 weeks old C57BL/6J mice (body weight 18-22 g) (Janvier, Le Genest-St-  
Isle, France) were used for antitumour evaluation. Lewis lung tumour fragments (about 2 mm  
diameter) were implanted subcutaneously (s.c.) bilaterally into mouse flanks using a 12 gauge  
trocar. Four days after tumour implantation, the mice were submitted to the following i.p.  
230 treatments (4 mice per group) for 12 consecutive days (day 4 to 15): 4 control mice received a  
fisetin-free nanoemulsion; 4 mice received the fisetin nanoemulsion corresponding to 18.3  
mg/kg of fisetin; and, 4 mice were injected the fisetin nanoemulsion at 36.6 mg/kg. Tumour  
growth was assessed using caliper bi-dimensional measurements (in mm) and the tumour  
volume ( $mm^3$ ) was calculated according to the following formula:  $(width^2 \times length/2)$ .

235

## 2.8. Statistical analysis

Data are presented as the mean  $\pm$  SEM. Comparison between tumour volumes was  
assessed by the Student *t* test.

## 240 **3. Results**

### *3.1. Fisetin solubility in various solvents*

Table 1 presents the solubility of fisetin in various solvents. Fisetin was not soluble in water (<1 mg/g) and was weakly soluble in ethanol (<14 mg/g). Fisetin was also found  
245 weakly soluble for all the oil phases tested, with a maximum solubility value < 6 mg/g for triacetin and < 5 mg/g for propylene glycol monocaprylate.

Table 2 shows fisetin solubility in frequently used surfactants. In lipophilic surfactants (low HLB value), fisetin solubility was low, whereas its solubility was markedly increased in hydrophilic surfactants with high HLB values. The best surfactant was found to be Labrasol®  
250 which could solubilize up to 54 mg/g of fisetin.

Finally, the solubility values of fisetin using several combinations of oils and surfactants in various proportions are presented in Table 3. It was found that the mixture composed of Tween® 80 and Labrasol® (20/80) could solubilize fisetin most efficiently up to a maximal concentration of 45 mg/g.  
255

### *3.2. Development of a fisetin nanoemulsion*

#### *3.2.1. Emulsification capacity*

Several nanoemulsion formulations were thereafter tested for their emulsification  
260 capacity and 3 cases could be observed, as follows (Table 4): a) no emulsification was obtained for certain formulations lacking Lipoid® E80 (e.g., formulations 3 to 7) or containing soybean oil and Capmul® MCM, as in formulation 2; b) formation of a

nanoemulsion was observed for formulations 1, 8 and 9; c) and, formulation 10 allowed the formation of a clear solution.

265

### 3.2.2. Fisetin incorporation into nanoemulsion formulations

We have next evaluated the maximum quantity of fisetin that could be incorporated into each nanoemulsion (formulations 1, 8, 9), or solution (formulation 10). Table 4 shows that formulation 1 could incorporate only 1 mg/g of fisetin, whereas formulations 8 and 9  
270 allowed the incorporation of 5 mg/g of the flavonoid. These formulations were found visually stable on day 1. Although formulation 10 allowed to solubilize up to 16 mg/g of fisetin due to its higher content in Labrasol<sup>®</sup> and Tween<sup>®</sup> 80, it was unfortunately found to precipitate on day 1 for concentrations of 8 and 16 mg/g, but was found stable for a fisetin concentration of 4 mg/g.

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### 3.2.3. Choice of final fisetin nanoemulsion formulation

Considering the above results, formulations 8 and 9 were therefore considered a good compromise between fisetin content and nanoemulsion stability. These formulations were further tested for their particle diameter and polydispersity index (PDI) and it was observed  
280 that preparation 8 containing soybean oil yielded a nanoparticle diameter of  $323 \pm 2$  nm with a PDI of 0.153, whereas preparation 9 containing Miglyol<sup>®</sup> 812 N showed a nanoparticles diameter of  $146 \pm 3$  nm and a PDI of 0.015. Formulation 9 was therefore chosen for further *in vitro* and *in vivo* testing because of its good fisetin content, its nanoparticle size and low PDI value. The final composition of nanoemulsion 9 containing 5 mg/ml of fisetin was therefore  
285 as follows: Miglyol<sup>®</sup> 812 N (10%), Labrasol<sup>®</sup> (10%), Tween<sup>®</sup> 80 (2.5%), Lipoid E80<sup>®</sup> (1.2%), glycerol (2.25%), NaOH (0.1N) to adjust to pH 7, water to 100%.

### 3.3. Stability of the fisetin nanoemulsion

290 We next performed short term stability studies of the fisetin nanoemulsion  
(preparation 9) over a period of 30 days at room temperature (20°C) and at 4°C (Table 5) by  
evaluating particle diameter, pH, zeta potential and the PDI.

Droplet size of nanoemulsion 9 stored at 20°C increased markedly as a function of  
time until phase separation occurred on day 30, whereas for the 4°C storage condition,  
295 particle diameter remained relatively stable for the 30 day examination period. A slight  
decrease in pH was noted at both storage temperatures. For the zeta potential, negative values  
were observed and remained stable over 30 days for the 4°C storage condition. The PDI  
presented an important increase over time at 20°C, whereas it was found stable and relatively  
low at 4°C. In order to be administered via parenteral routes, we also checked if the  
300 nanoemulsion could sustain standard steam sterilization conditions (121°C for 15 min) but  
this resulted in phase separation. However, sterilization of nanoemulsion 9 has been  
successfully carried out using a 0.22 µm filter with preservation of homogeneity and size  
characteristics.

### 305 3.4. Effect of fisetin nanoemulsion on endothelial cells

Free fisetin has been reported to exert a distinct morphological effect on endothelial  
cells that is characterized by the rapid development of pseudopods at non cytotoxic  
concentrations (Touil et al., 2009). We therefore tested if the fisetin nanoemulsion  
310 (preparation 9) could exert the same morphological effects on Eahy 926 endothelial cells to  
verify if the active principle is indeed released from the pharmaceutical preparation. Figure 1-  
A depicts control endothelial cells exposed to 1% DMSO which show typical cobblestone



appearance, whereas exposure to free fisetin led to the expected pseudopods formation (Figure 1-B). Endothelial cells exposed to control nanoemulsion without fisetin resemble normal control endothelial cells (Figure 1-C), whereas the pseudopods are indeed observed in the cells exposed to the fisetin nanoemulsion (Figure 1-D). This observation indicates that fisetin is indeed released from the nanoemulsion and can exert similar morphological effects as the free fisetin on endothelial cells.

### 3.5. Fisetin nanoemulsion pharmacokinetics in mice

The developed fisetin nanoemulsion (preparation 9) was next administered *in vivo* to evaluate its pharmacokinetics in mice. We first examined the intravenous route (i.v.) by injecting the free fisetin formulation or its nanoemulsion at a dose of 13 mg/kg. We noted a very similar pharmacokinetic profile between the two formulations with plasma concentrations versus time curves almost superimposable (Figure 2). Indeed, similar pharmacokinetic parameters in terms of C<sub>max</sub>, AUC and terminal half-life were observed for both formulations (Table 6). The i.v. route administration of the fisetin nanoemulsion was however found relatively toxic, because we noted a mortality rate of 3/21 mice (14%), apparently due to the rapid administration.

In order to avoid the acute toxicity of the i.v. administration, we next explored the intraperitoneal (i.p.) route. For the fisetin nanoemulsion, a comparison of its pharmacokinetics after i.p. administration with the free fisetin injected by the same route is presented in Figure 3. Compared to the i.p. administration of the free fisetin, it can be seen that the injection of the fisetin nanoemulsion led to a significant increase in fisetin plasma concentrations, even at a fisetin nanoemulsion dose (112.5 mg/kg) half that of the free fisetin dose (223 mg/kg). The pharmacokinetic parameters presented in Table 6 indicate that not only the maximum plasma

concentrations reached were higher for the nanoemulsion, but the relative bioavailability was 24-fold higher compared to the free fisetin. This increase in bioavailability with the nanoemulsion appears to be due to a faster absorption with this drug formulation as shown by a shorter mean absorption time (MAT) of 1.97 h compared to 5.98 h for the free fisetin. It is also noteworthy that following the i.p. administration of the fisetin nanoemulsion, no mortality was observed.

### 3.6. *Fisetin nanoemulsion antitumour activity in mice*

We were next interested to evaluate the antitumour activity of the developed fisetin nanoemulsion (preparation 9) in Lewis lung carcinoma bearing mice. A group of 4 control mice received the empty nanoemulsion and 2 other groups of 4 mice received the fisetin nanoemulsion at an equivalent dose of fisetin of 18.3 and 36.6 mg/kg administered i.p. for 12 days starting on day 4 post tumour implantation. Results depicted in Figure 4 show that the fisetin nanoemulsion can significantly inhibit tumour growth in a dose-dependent manner, even at these relatively low dose levels of fisetin.

355 **4. Discussion**

The main objectives of this study was to develop a nanoemulsion of the hydrophobic flavonoid fisetin, determine its pharmacokinetics in mice, and evaluate its anticancer activity in vivo. The first problems encountered were the low fisetin solubility in the classical oil phases usually employed in formulation, e.g., soybean oil or medium chain triglycerides (Date and Nagarsenker, 2008). The best solubility was observed with triacetin, a short chain triglyceride composed of triester of glycerol and acetic acid. However, triacetin does not exhibit remarkable emulsifying properties (Poullain-Termeau et al., 2008). Fisetin was also found weakly soluble in lipophilic surfactants, but was more soluble in hydrophilic surfactants. As a matter of fact, the maximum solubility was observed with Labrasol<sup>®</sup>, a mixture of triglycerides and polyethylene glycol esters possessing a hydrophilic-lipophilic balance of 14. We did not observe any synergistic effect between the oil phase and surfactant, be it hydrophilic or lipophilic. Hence, the fisetin low solubility in lipid phases leads to a weak association of the active principle in this phase and therefore requires more solubilising surfactant, as previously reported for a nanoemulsion of carbamazepine (Kelman et al., 2007). We finally found that the best mixture was the one composed of Labrasol<sup>®</sup>/Tween<sup>®</sup> 80 which allowed to achieve an acceptable fisetin concentration of 5 mg/ml.

Although Labrasol<sup>®</sup> has already been employed in injectable preparations (Nornoo et al., 2008), no standard preparation has been developed so far, to our knowledge, with this proprietary formulation. Labrasol<sup>®</sup> is mostly used in auto-emulsifying systems for oral administration (Kommuru et al., 2001) and it has been shown to increase oral absorption of hydrophilic drugs, e.g., gentamicin (Hu et al., 2001). Available toxicity data on Labrasol<sup>®</sup> show that it is relatively non toxic when given orally to rats with a LD50 of 22 g/kg (Gad et al., 2006). However, acute toxicity data are not available for the intravenous or intraperitoneal

380 routes. In our experiments, a mortality rate of 14% was noted for the i.v. route, whereas no  
mortality was observed for the i.p. route. The other components of the nanoemulsion are not  
likely to contribute to acute toxicity because medium chain triglycerides (e.g., Miglyol® 812  
N) and lecithins are already widely used in injectable preparations. Tween® 80 can also be  
ruled out in this toxicity because it is frequently used at high concentrations, e.g., 25% in  
385 docetaxel preparation without apparent toxicity (Strickley, 2004). Therefore, a compromise  
will have to be found between the toxicity of the excipient and the final concentration in  
fisetin.

With regard to the physico-chemical properties of the fisetin nanoemulsion, it was  
found that the preparation containing Miglyol® 812 N (No. 9) showed acceptable fisetin  
390 content, nanoparticle size and PDI. This fisetin nanoemulsion was found to be unstable at  
room temperature with increasing diameter and PDI values over time, with phase separation  
occurring on day 30. This relatively slow process could be explained by the Ostwald ripening  
in which larger particles grow at the expense of smaller ones due to the higher solubility of  
the smaller particles and to molecular diffusion through the continuous phase (Capek, 2004).  
395 This phenomenon finally ends up in the coalescence of the emulsion (Tadros et al., 2004).  
Because this phenomenon is temperature sensitive, it was noted that nanoemulsions kept at  
4°C were remarkably stable with almost unchanged particle diameter and PDI over the 30 day  
examination period. PDI smaller than 0.250 are considered acceptable for parenteral  
preparations (Müller et al., 2004). However, it was also noted, as expected, that the  
400 nanoemulsion was particularly unstable in steam sterilization conditions (121°C, 15 min)  
probably due to the non-ionic surface active agents which are not stable at high temperatures  
(Nornoo et al., 2008). To overcome this problem, sterilization by filtration could therefore be  
employed for nanoemulsions (Floyd, 1999). The formulated fisetin nanoemulsion presented a

negative zeta potential which is probably due to the anionic fractions of the employed lecithin  
405 (Wang et al., 2006).

We have observed that fisetin nanoemulsion could exert its distinct morphological  
effects on endothelial cells similar to the free fisetin (Touil et al., 2009) indicating that fisetin  
could be released from its nanoemulsion formulation. These morphological changes on  
endothelial cells are attributed to a stabilization of the cytoskeleton as previously shown by  
410 increased acetylated alpha tubulin (Touil et al., 2009).

Concerning the i.v. administration of the free fisetin and its nanoemulsion, we did not  
observe any pharmacokinetic difference, as expected for a classical emulsion, contrary to  
what is observed for a pegylated formulation which can increase the residence time (Reddy  
and Venkateswarlu, 2005). As a matter of fact, upon injection of a classical emulsion, the  
415 particles interact with the apolipoproteins and are captured by the reticulo-endothelial system  
leading to their rapid elimination from the blood compartment (Kawakami et al., 2000). One  
possibility to increase the residence time using the i.v. administration would be to pegylate the  
emulsion that could increase the surface hydrophilic properties by forming a steric barrier that  
could result in a longer retention time in plasma (Tamilvanan, 2004).

420 We demonstrated that the i.p. administration of the fisetin nanoemulsion led to a  
significant improvement in bioavailability compared to the i.p. administration of the free  
fisetin, with a 24-fold increase in relative bioavailability compared to the free fisetin  
administered via the same route. This could be due to a faster absorption phase from the  
peritoneal cavity with the nanoemulsion compared to free fisetin. As a matter of fact, the  
425 mean absorption time was shorter with the nanoemulsion (2 h) compared to the free fisetin (6  
h). Similar results were reported for the hydrophobic taxoid paclitaxel where i.p.  
administration was leading to a significant improvement in bioavailability compared to the  
i.v. administration (Soma et al., 2009). In addition, this enhanced bioavailability of the fisetin

nanoemulsion is also probably resulting from the unique lymphatic distribution after i.p.  
430 administration which is a favourable property, especially with anticancer drugs that must  
access lymph nodes which are frequently harbouring metastases (Nishioka and Yoshino,  
2001).

We also demonstrated that the fisetin nanoemulsion could elicit a significant  
antitumour activity *in vivo* in Lewis lung tumour bearing mice. It is noteworthy that a  
435 relatively low dose of the fisetin nanoemulsion corresponding to 36.6 mg/kg of fisetin was  
able to reduce by 53% the tumour volume, whereas a 6-fold higher dose (223 mg/kg) was  
required to obtain a similar tumour growth inhibition with the free fisetin, as recently reported  
by Touil et al. (Touil et al., 2011). This indicates that the nanoemulsion of fisetin is  
favourable to its anticancer action *in vivo* probably by increasing its bioavailability, as shown  
440 in this study.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have developed a nanoemulsion of fisetin that allowed to solubilize  
445 a relatively high concentration of fisetin (5 mg/mL), thanks to the use of two surface active  
agents, i.e., Tween<sup>®</sup> 80 and Labrasol<sup>®</sup>. However the latter agent appeared to be relatively  
toxic when using the i.v. route, but was not found toxic by the i.p. route. The developed  
fisetin nanoemulsion could also markedly increase the bioavailability of fisetin after i.p.  
administration and was also found to significantly improve its antitumoral activity in tumour  
450 bearing mice compared to the free fisetin. The developed nanoemulsion of fisetin could  
therefore advantageously be employed to improve the antiangiogenic and anticancer activities  
of this flavonoid, as well as other flavonoids sharing the same problems of *in vivo*  
administration.

455

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605

**Table 1. Fisetin solubility in various solvents.**

<b>Solvents</b>	<b>Solubility mg/g</b>
Water	< 1
Ethanol	< 14
<b><i>Long chain triglycerides</i></b>	
Soybean oil	< 1
Carthame oil	< 1
<b><i>Medium chain mono- di- or triglycerides</i></b>	
Miglyol <sup>®</sup> 812 N (capric and caprylic acid triglycerides)	< 1
Captex <sup>®</sup> 355 (capric and caprylic acid triglycerides)	< 1
Labrafac Lipophile WL 1349 <sup>®</sup> (capric and caprylic acid triglycerides)	< 1
Inwitor <sup>®</sup> 742 (capric and caprylic mono- di- and triglycerides)	< 4
<b><i>Short chain triglycerides:</i></b> Triacetin (triesther of glycerol and acetic acid)	< 6
<b><i>Fatty acid esters:</i></b> Ethyl oleate	< 1
Capmul <sup>®</sup> PG8 (propylene glycol monocaprylate)	< 5
Capric acid	< 1



**Table 2. Fisetin solubility in various surfactants.**

<b>Surfactants</b>	<b>HLB<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Solubility mg/g</b>
Span <sup>®</sup> 85 (sorbitan trioleate)	1.8	< 2
Labrafil M 1944 CS <sup>®</sup> (glycerides and PEG 300 ester mixture)	4	< 3
Capmul <sup>®</sup> MCM (mono diglyceride of capric and caprylic acids)	5	< 7
Vitamin E TPGS ( $\alpha$ tocopheryl acid succinate ester/PEG 1000)	13	< 10
Cremophor EL <sup>®</sup> (polyethoxylated ricin oil)	13	< 26
Myrj <sup>®</sup> 52 (polyoxyethylene glycol 2000 monostearate)	16.9	< 30
Tween <sup>®</sup> 80 (polysorbate 80)	15	< 30
Labrasol <sup>®</sup> (caprylocaproyl polyoxyl-8 glycerides)	14	< 54

610

<sup>a</sup> HLB, hydrophilic-lipophilic balance (a value <10 indicates a majority of lipophilic fractions and a value >10 indicates a majority of hydrophilic fractions).

**Table 3. Fisetin solubility in various mixtures.**

<b>Mixtures (in percent)</b>	<b>Solubility mg/g</b>
Ethanol / Tween <sup>®</sup> 80 (2%)	< 21
Miglyol <sup>®</sup> 812 N/ Tween <sup>®</sup> 80 ( 2%)	< 1
Soybean oil / Tween <sup>®</sup> 80 (15%)	< 3
Soybean oil / Span 85 <sup>®</sup> (10%)	< 1
Miglyol <sup>®</sup> 812 N/ Span 85 <sup>®</sup> (7.5%)	< 3
Soybean oil / Labrasol <sup>®</sup> (50/50)	ND <sup>a</sup>
Miglyol <sup>®</sup> 812 N/ Labrasol <sup>®</sup> (50/50)	ND <sup>a</sup>
Capmul MCM <sup>®</sup> / Labrasol <sup>®</sup> (50/50)	< 21
Tween <sup>®</sup> 80/ Labrasol <sup>®</sup> (20/80)	< 45
Tween <sup>®</sup> 80/ Labrasol <sup>®</sup> / soybean oil (12/44/44)	ND <sup>a</sup>
Tween <sup>®</sup> 80/ Labrasol <sup>®</sup> / Miglyol <sup>®</sup> 812 N (12/44/44)	< 30
Mirj 52 <sup>®</sup> /Solutol HS 15 <sup>®</sup> / Capmul MCM <sup>®</sup> (57/29/14)	< 24
Tween <sup>®</sup> 80/ Labrasol <sup>®</sup> / Capmul MCM <sup>®</sup> (17/69/14)	< 40

615

<sup>a</sup> ND, not determined because the phases were not miscible in these proportions.

**Table 4. Composition of the various emulsions.**

<i>Component</i>	<i>Formulation number</i>									
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>
Soybean oil	10	10	20	-	-	-	-	10	-	-
Miglyol <sup>®</sup> 812 N	-	-	-	10	10	15	20	-	10	-
Triacetin	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capmul MCM <sup>®</sup>	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Labrasol <sup>®</sup>	-	-	20	10	9.6	14.4	19.2	10	10	27
Tween <sup>®</sup> 80	2.5	2.5	-	2.5	0.4	0.6	0.8	2.5	2.5	7
Lipoid E80 <sup>®</sup>	1.2	1.2	-	-	-	-	-	1.2	1.2	-
Water	76.3	76.3	60	77.5	80	70	60	76.3	76.3	60
<i>Observations</i>	<i>NE<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Lack of emulsification</i>						<i>NE<sup>a</sup></i>		<i>Sol.<sup>b</sup></i>
Fisetin incorporation on day 1 (mg/g)	1							5	5	4

620 <sup>a</sup> NE, nanoemulsion; <sup>b</sup> Sol., clear solution

**Table 5. Fisetin nanoemulsion (preparation 9) stability parameters.**

Parameter	Day					
	0	1	4	7	15	30
Diameter (nm) 20°C	153 ± 2 <sup>a</sup>	189 ± 1	331 ± 7	749 ± 54	2882 ± 87	Phase separation
Diameter (nm) 4°C	138 ± 5	138 ± 0	152 ± 4	144 ± 2	147 ± 2	154 ± 2
pH at 20°C	7.11 ± 0.01	6.80 ± 0.02	6.61 ± 0.02	6.51 ± 0.02	6.42 ± 0.01	-
pH at 4°C	7.09 ± 0.01	6.79 ± 0.02	6.81 ± 0.02	6.65 ± 0.03	N.D.	6.53 ± 0.01
Zeta potential (ζ) 20°C	-28.4 ± 0.6	-30.8 ± 0.9	-34.8 ± 1.4	-40.3 ± 0.4	-39.9 ± 0.5	-
Zeta potential (ζ) 4°C	-32.7 ± 1.1	-26.7 ± 1.0	-33.5 ± 0.5	-34.7 ± 1.6	-32.5 ± 2.9	-34.1 ± 2.5
PDI <sup>b</sup> 20°C	0.129	0.090	0.201	0.371	1.000	-
PDI <sup>b</sup> 4°C	0.151	0.157	0.136	0.128	0.147	0.115

<sup>a</sup> Mean ± SEM of 3 determinations; <sup>b</sup> PDI, polydispersity index.

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**Table 6. Fisetin pharmacokinetic parameters after intravenous or intraperitoneal administration of free fisetin and fisetin nanoemulsion in mice (preparation 9).**

Parameter	Intravenous		Intraperitoneal	
	Free fisetin	Fisetin Nano-emulsion	Free fisetin	Fisetin Nano-emulsion
Dose (mg/kg)	13	13	223	112.5
C <sub>max</sub> (µg/mL)	6.0	5.3	2.53	22.96
Elimination constant (K <sub>el</sub> ) (h <sup>-1</sup> )	1.136	1.072	0.165	0.226
Terminal half-life (h)	0.61	0.65	4.19	3.07
AUC <sub>0→t</sub> (µg.h/mL)	1.12	1.13	4.07	48.53
AUMC (µg.h <sup>2</sup> /mL)	1.09	1.12	28.26	143.56
Mean residence time (MRT) (h)	0.97	0.99	6.95	2.96
Mean absorption time (MAT) (h)	-	-	5.98	1.97
Clearance (CL) (L/kg/h)	11.64	11.50	54.80	2.32
Volume of distribution (V <sub>ss</sub> ) (L/kg)	11.33	11.36	380.62	6.86
Relative bioavailability <sup>a</sup> (F <sub>rel</sub> )	-	-	1	24

$$^a F_{rel} = (AUC_{NE} \times \text{dose}_{FREE}) / (AUC_{FREE} \times \text{dose}_{NE})$$

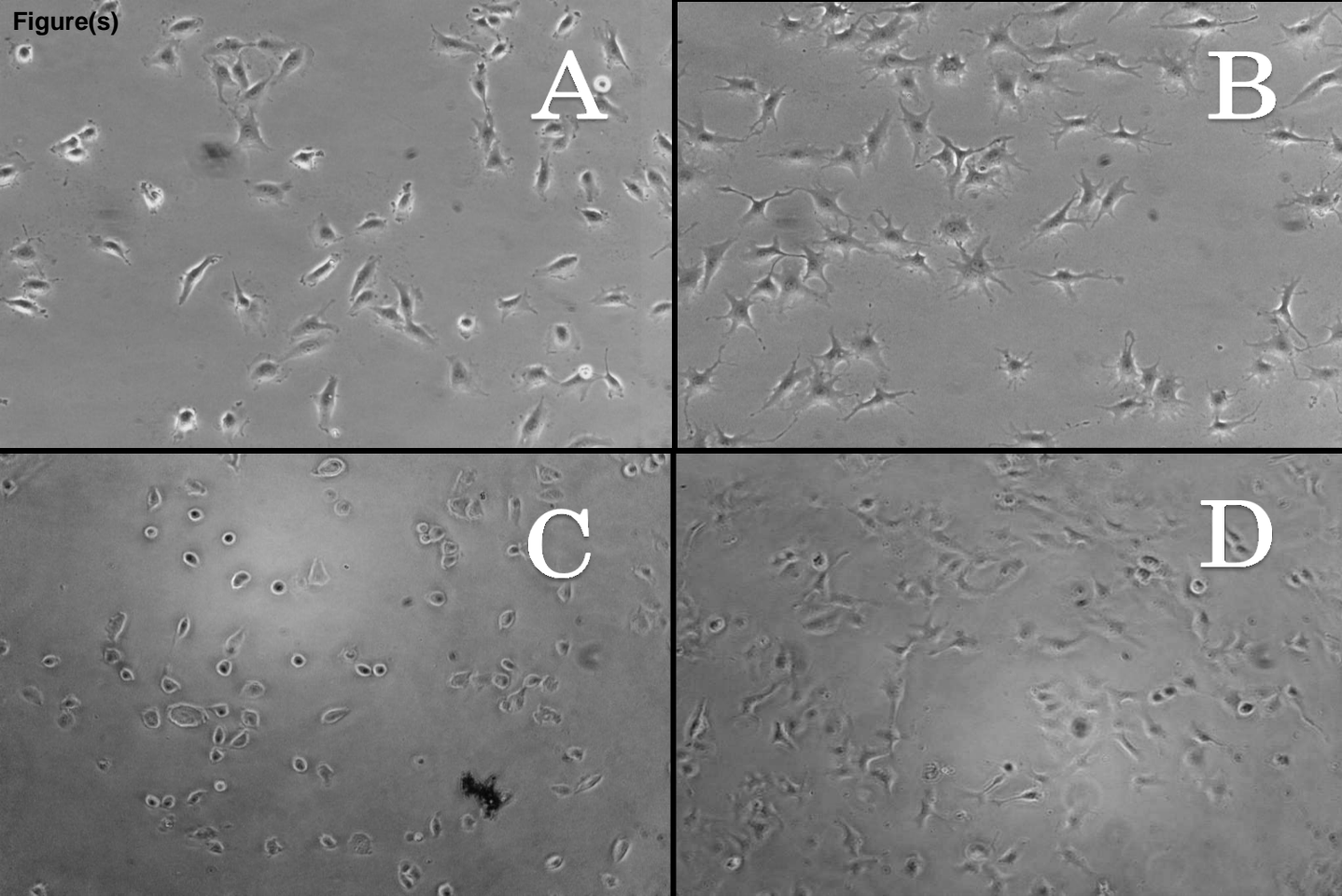
**Figure captions**

Figure 1. Morphologic effects of fisetin on Eahy 926 endothelial cells after a 2 h exposure  
635 period. A, control with 1% DMSO; B, free fisetin (25  $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ ); C, fisetin-free nanoemulsion  
(0.25%); D, fisetin nanoemulsion 12.5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ . Original magnification, 100X.

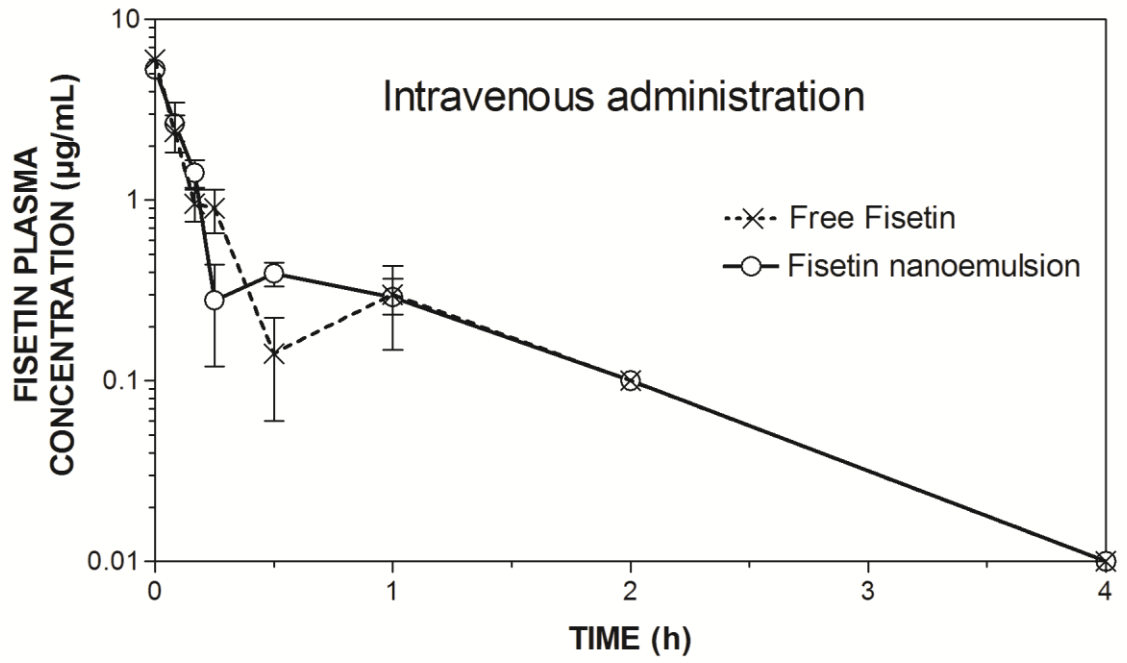
Figure 2. Fisetin pharmacokinetics in mice after intravenous administration of free fisetin  
(dotted line) at 13 mg/kg, and after the intravenous administration of fisetin nanoemulsion at  
640 13 mg/kg (solid line). Error bars, SEM.

Figure 3. Fisetin pharmacokinetics in mice after intraperitoneal administration of free fisetin  
(dotted line) at 223 mg/kg, and after intraperitoneal administration of fisetin nanoemulsion at  
112.5 mg/kg (solid line). Mean  $\pm$  SEM.

645  
Figure 4. Antitumour activity of the nanoemulsion of fisetin. Lewis carcinoma bearing mice  
received the fisetin nanoemulsion (NE Fisetin) by intraperitoneal injection at 18.3 and 36.6  
mg/kg for 12 consecutive days (indicated by arrows). Control mice received the  
nanoemulsion without fisetin (NE control). The asterisks represent a P value significant at  
650 0.05 (\*), 0.01 (\*\*) or 0.005 (\*\*\*) level. Mean  $\pm$  SEM of 8 tumours per time point.



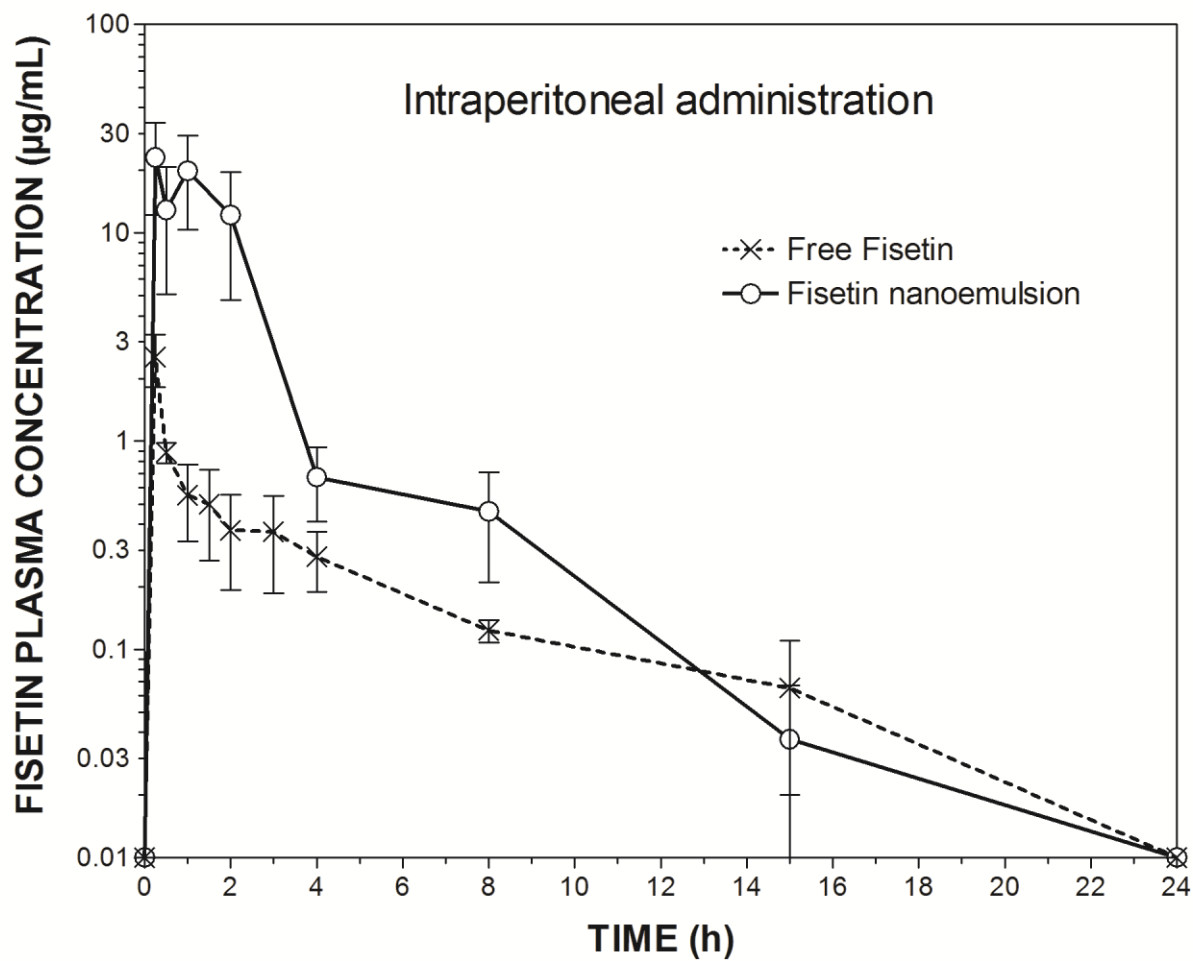
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Fig 1



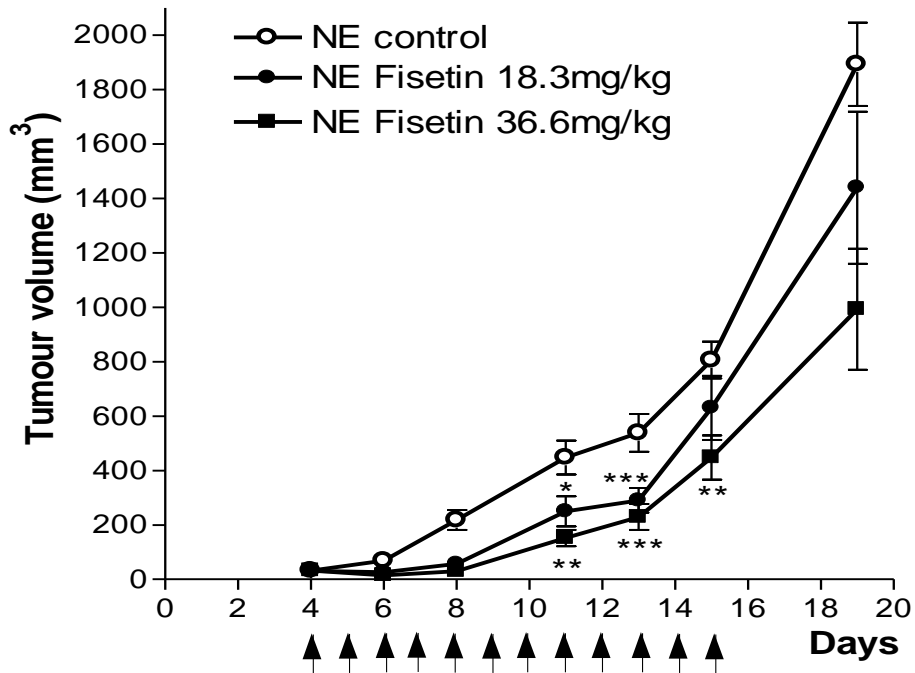
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Fig 2



Figure(s)



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Fig 3



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Fig 4