AI and Digital Simulations in Predicting Toxicological Effects of Bioactive Compounds

Co-funded by the European Union

ERASMUS KA220-HED - Cooperation partnerships in higher education
Project no. 2023-1-RO01-KA220-HED-000164767
Title: Partnership for innovation on the exchange of best practices and the design of joint collaborative initiatives at European level related to the awareness of the effects of contamination on human health
Acronym: INNO-SAFE-LIFE

Introduction

Bioactive compounds from plants, microbes, or synthetic sources are central to drug discovery, nutraceuticals, and cosmetics

Traditional toxicology relies on **in vitro**, **in vivo**, and clinical studies — expensive, time-consuming, ethically complex

AI and computational toxicology offer powerful tools to **predict safety risks** early in the development pipeline

Goal: Use AI and simulations to **reduce cost, time, and animal testing**, while increasing accuracy

What Are Bioactive Compounds?

- Naturally occurring or synthetically produced substances with **biological activity**
- Found in **plants, foods, marine organisms, fungi**, etc.
- Roles: antioxidants, anti-inflammatory agents, anticancer drugs, antimicrobials
- Toxicological risks: genotoxicity, hepatotoxicity, endocrine disruption, etc.

Challenges in Toxicological Assessment

- **Diverse chemical structures** and complex biological pathways
- Limited availability of **toxicological data** for novel or rare compounds
- **Species variability:** animal models don’t always translate to human outcomes
- Regulatory push for **non-animal testing alternatives** (EU REACH, US EPA)

Role of AI in Toxicology

AI algorithms can analyze **large-scale chemical, genomic, and toxicological data**

Machine learning (ML) and **deep learning (DL)** models identify patterns in structure-toxicity relationships

Predict outcomes such as:

- Mutagenicity
- Carcinogenicity
- Skin sensitization
- Acute/chronic toxicity

Digital Simulations & Modeling Approaches

QSAR (Quantitative Structure–Activity Relationship): Correlates molecular features with toxicity

PBPK Models (Physiologically Based Pharmacokinetic Modeling): Simulates ADME processes in silico

Molecular docking & dynamics simulations: Assess interaction with biological targets (e.g., DNA, enzymes, receptors)

Virtual organs / Organ-on-a-chip simulations: Model tissue-specific toxicity digitally

AI Tools & Platforms in Use

ProTox-II: Predicts organ toxicity, LD50, pathways

Derek Nexus: Knowledge-based expert system for chemical toxicity

ToxCast & Tox21: Large toxicology databases used to train AI models

DeepTox: Deep learning framework for toxicity prediction from molecular structures

Applications in Drug and Product Development

- Early **screening of natural products** and novel molecules for toxicity red flags
- **Cosmetic ingredient safety** assessment (e.g., skin sensitization prediction)
- **Food and nutraceuticals**: Predicting allergenicity and metabolic effects
- **Environmental impact**: Assessing bioaccumulation and ecotoxicity potential

Case Studies

Curcumin analogs: AI-based QSAR models predicted low hepatotoxicity with high anti-inflammatory activity

Marine-derived compounds: Deep learning used to identify neurotoxic potential before extraction and testing

Green tea catechins: In silico metabolism simulation helped assess long-term toxicity risk for supplements

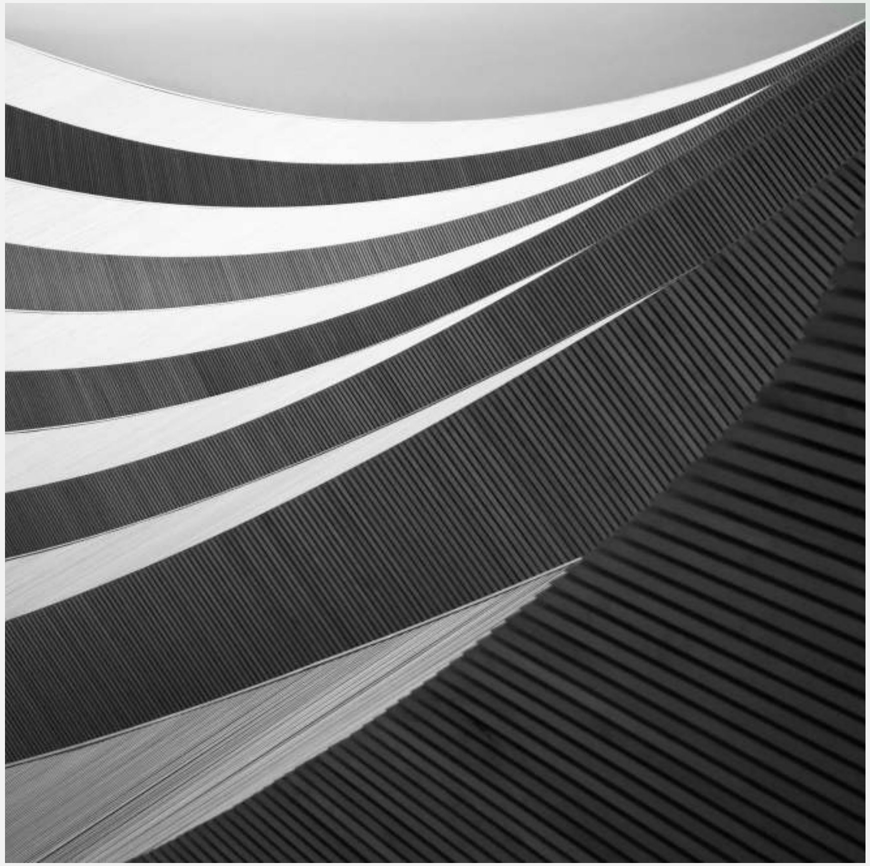
Advantages of AI in Toxicology

Faster predictions than lab testing

Lower costs and fewer animal studies

Ability to handle **large, diverse chemical datasets**

Supports **personalized safety profiling** and precision medicine



Limitations & Challenges

DATA QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY LIMIT MODEL ACCURACY

BLACK-BOX NATURE OF SOME AI MODELS REDUCES INTERPRETABILITY

NOT ALL BIOLOGICAL RESPONSES CAN BE SIMULATED (E.G., IMMUNE INTERACTIONS)

REGULATORY BODIES STILL CAUTIOUS ABOUT REPLACING TRADITIONAL METHODS ENTIRELY

Future Trends

- Integration of **multi-omics data** (genomics, proteomics, metabolomics) into toxicity prediction
- Use of **generative AI** to design safer bioactive compounds
- Increasing adoption of **hybrid models** combining AI, lab data, and human clinical insights
- Movement toward **regulatory acceptance** of in silico toxicology

Conclusion

AI and digital simulations are transforming how we assess the **safety of bioactive compounds**

They offer rapid, cost-effective, and scalable solutions for modern toxicology

With continued advances in **data science, molecular biology, and computing**, these tools will become central to safer, more sustainable innovation in health and wellness