Perspective

Pharmaceutical BIOPROCESSING

# Nanofiltration in Downstream Processing: Enhancing Purity and Safety of Biopharmaceuticals

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## Introduction

Nanofiltration is a critical unit operation in downstream bioprocessing used to remove viruses, impurities, and unwanted contaminants from biopharmaceutical products. Positioned between ultrafiltration and reverse osmosis in terms of pore size, nanofiltration membranes typically have pore diameters in the nanometer range, allowing selective separation based on molecular size and charge [1,2]. In the production of biologics such as monoclonal antibodies, vaccines, and recombinant proteins, nanofiltration plays a key role in ensuring product safety, purity, and regulatory compliance.

## Discussion

Nanofiltration is most commonly applied as a virus removal step during downstream processing. By using membranes with defined pore sizes, nanofiltration effectively retains viral particles while allowing the target protein to pass through. This size-exclusion mechanism provides a robust and orthogonal viral clearance strategy that complements other inactivation and removal steps, such as low-pH treatment and chromatography [3,4].

In addition to virus removal, nanofiltration can reduce levels of host cell proteins, DNA, and aggregates, contributing to overall product purity. The operation is typically performed under gentle conditions, preserving protein structure and biological activity. Advances in membrane materials and module design have improved flux, throughput, and fouling resistance, making nanofiltration more efficient and scalable [5].

Process optimization is essential for successful nanofiltration implementation. Key parameters include transmembrane pressure, flow rate, temperature, and buffer composition. Fouling and membrane blockage remain challenges, particularly when processing complex feed streams with high impurity loads. Pre-filtration steps, such as depth filtration or clarification, are often required to protect nanofiltration membranes and extend their operational lifetime.

Nanofiltration is compatible with both batch and continuous processing strategies. In continuous biomanufacturing, nanofiltration systems can be integrated into downstream workflows to support uninterrupted purification while maintaining consistent performance. Regulatory agencies recognize nanofiltration as a reliable viral clearance step, provided that process validation demonstrates consistent and robust virus removal.

## Conclusion

Nanofiltration is a vital technology in downstream processing, offering effective virus removal and enhanced product purity while maintaining protein integrity. Its robustness, scalability, and regulatory acceptance make it a cornerstone of biopharmaceutical purification strategies. Although challenges related to membrane fouling and process optimization persist, ongoing advancements in membrane technology and process integration are improving performance and reliability. As biomanufacturing continues to evolve toward intensified and continuous processes, nanofiltration will remain an

essential component of safe and high-quality biologics production.

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