

# Enhanced Recovery Pathways in Pancreatic Surgery



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## KEYWORDS

- Enhanced recovery after surgery • ERAS • Fast-track • Pancreatoduodenectomy
- Distal pancreatectomy

## KEY POINTS

- Enhanced recovery after surgery (ERAS) protocols, or fast-track pathways, use evidence-based medicine to improve recovery from surgery via institutional guidelines, nursing protocols, and order templates.
- ERAS protocols address factors in preoperative, intraoperative, and postoperative settings.
- ERAS protocols in pancreatic surgery focus on early mobilization, early oral intake, neutral fluid balance, optimal analgesia, drain management, and antibiotic selection.

## INTRODUCTION

Mortality following pancreatic surgery, particularly pancreatoduodenectomy (PD), has improved dramatically over the past 4 decades. Mortality in the 1970s was as high as 25% and is now commonly lower than 2% in high-volume centers.<sup>1</sup> Morbidity, however, often remains in excess of 40%, despite advances in surgical technique, anesthesia, preoperative imaging, and antimicrobials. In fact, the complications most particular to pancreatic surgery, postoperative pancreatic fistula (POPF) and delayed gastric emptying (DGE), have not improved.<sup>1</sup>

Enhanced recovery after surgery (ERAS), or fast-track protocols, were first introduced in the 1990s to help recovery following colorectal surgery.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of such pathways is to use evidence-based medicine in a multidisciplinary fashion to optimize recovery from surgery and potentially decrease postoperative pain, improve complications, and shorten hospital stay. Enhanced recovery protocols focus on the entire range of surgical care, including preoperative assessment, intraoperative technique, postoperative care, and outpatient follow-up. There is significant evidence

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No disclosures.

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Surg Clin N Am 96 (2016) 1301–1312

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.suc.2016.07.003>

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supporting the utility of enhanced recovery protocols following colorectal surgery with few dissenting studies.<sup>3</sup> Studies have shown earlier resolution of postoperative ileus, shorter hospital stay, and fewer complications.<sup>4,5</sup> ERAS protocols have since been studied in a variety of other general surgery specialties and even orthopedics with similarly promising results.<sup>6–9</sup>

## STUDIES ON ENHANCED RECOVERY AFTER SURGERY PROTOCOLS IN PANCREATIC SURGERY

Enhanced recovery protocols following pancreatic surgery have been studied since the early 2000s.<sup>10–20</sup> Each study, however, used different institutional-based protocols, which makes comparisons difficult. Furthermore, not all studies share the details of the protocol used. To address the difficulty of comparing studies and implementing protocols in institutions interested in ERAS, the ERAS Society, European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN), and the International Association for Surgical Metabolism (IASMEN) recently published a framework to guide future ERAS programs and studies in pancreatic surgery based on best-practices and clinical evidence.<sup>21</sup>

None of the available studies on ERAS in pancreatic surgery contain high levels of evidence.<sup>22</sup> Studies covering ERAS protocols are limited to retrospective case series or comparative case-control studies using historical controls. No completely prospective, randomized studies have been published. Despite the limited strengths of studies covering ERAS protocols in pancreatic surgery, several important findings have been made. Of 8 studies assessing length of stay (LOS), 7 found that their ERAS protocols decreased LOS by 6 to 10 days with no increase in readmission rates.<sup>10,11,13–15,17,18,20</sup> All the studies found that their protocols were safe with none finding an increase in morbidity or mortality. Only 1 study found a reduction in morbidity from 59% to 47% and was the largest study to date.<sup>10</sup> Two of 4 studies assessing hospital costs found a reduction when using ERAS protocols<sup>11,14,15,18</sup> (Table 1).

Authors, Year of Publication	Length of Stay, Days		Readmissions Rate n (%)		Morbidity, n (%)	
	Control	ERAS	Control	ERAS	Control	ERAS
Porter et al, <sup>18</sup> 2000	15	12 <sup>a</sup>	10 (15)	9 (11)	20 (29)	24 (30)
Vanounou et al, <sup>11</sup> 2007	8	8	4 (6)	13 (9)	40 (62)	77 (54)
Kennedy et al, <sup>15</sup> 2007	13	7 <sup>a</sup>	3 (7)	7 (8)	19 (44)	34 (37)
Berberat et al, <sup>16</sup> 2007	—	10	—	9 (4)	—	105 (41)
Balzano et al, <sup>10</sup> 2008	15	13 <sup>a</sup>	16 (6)	18 (7)	148 (59)	119 (47) <sup>a</sup>
Kennedy et al, <sup>14</sup> 2009	10	7 <sup>a</sup>	10 (25)	5 (7) <sup>a</sup>	15 (38)	11 (16)
di Sebastiano et al, <sup>12</sup> 2011	—	10	—	9 (6)	—	56 (39)
Robertson et al, <sup>19</sup> 2012	—	10	—	2 (4)	—	23 (46)
Nikfarjam et al, <sup>17</sup> 2013	14	8 <sup>a</sup>	0 (0)	3 (15)	—	—
Abu Hilal et al, <sup>13</sup> 2013	13	8 <sup>a</sup>	2 (10)	1 (4)	16 (67)	8 (40)
Coolsen et al, <sup>20</sup> 2014	20	14 <sup>a</sup>	14 (14)	11 (12.8)	19 (20)	29 (34)

<sup>a</sup> Significant difference:  $P > .05$ .  
Data from Refs. <sup>10–20</sup>

There are several systematic reviews covering ERAS protocols in pancreatic surgery and 1 meta-analysis.<sup>23–27</sup> The meta-analysis by Coolsen and colleagues<sup>24</sup> included 8 studies that met final inclusion criteria with a total of 1558 patients. Despite no overwhelming evidence within the individual studies reviewed, Coolsen and colleagues<sup>24</sup> found a significant risk reduction in postoperative complications by 8.2% with no increase in mortality or readmission rates when the data were assessed from a meta-analysis perspective.

## FACETS OF ENHANCED RECOVERY AFTER SURGERY PROTOCOLS IN PANCREATIC SURGERY

ERAS protocols cover a variety of preoperative, intraoperative, and postoperative factors that are implemented through a variety of institutional guidelines, nursing protocols, and order templates (**Box 1**). Some facets within ERAS protocols include measures commonly accepted or previously controlled by governing bodies.<sup>28</sup> These facets include the following:

1. Preoperative hair removal
2. Venous thromboembolism prophylaxis
3. Neutral fluid balance
4. Early mobilization
5. Normothermia

Other facets of ERAS protocols in pancreatic surgery are not commonly accepted or controlled by governing bodies. These facets are detailed in the following sections.

### *Perioperative Antibiotics*

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention implemented the Surgical Infection Prevention Project and Surgical Care Improvement Project (SCIP) to decrease the morbidity and mortality associated

#### **Box 1**

#### **Facets of enhanced recovery after surgery (ERAS) protocols**

1. Preoperative
  - a. Preoperative counseling (operation expectations, smoking cessation, alcohol consumption, nutrition optimization, mobility)
  - b. Biliary drainage
  - c. Mechanical bowel preparation
  - d. Deep venous thrombosis prophylaxis
  - e. Preoperative carbohydrate loading
2. Intraoperative
  - a. Perioperative antibiotics
  - b. Hypothermia management
  - c. Pain management
  - d. Fluid management
3. Postoperative
  - a. Nutrition management
  - b. Nasogastric tube management
  - c. Urinary catheter management
  - d. Pain management
  - e. Medication management (somatostatin analogues)
  - f. Drain management

with surgical site infections (SSI) in 2003.<sup>29,30</sup> SCIP measures addressing SSIs include the following:

1. Administration of antibiotics within 1 hour of incision time
2. Selection of appropriate antibiotic therapy
3. Discontinuation of antibiotics within 24 hours of surgery end time

SCIP measures do not specifically address antibiotic selection for pancreatic operations. For patients who are not allergic to penicillin, SCIP measures recommend cefotetan, cefoxitin, ampicillin-sulbactam, ertapenem, or cefazolin/cefuroxime with metronidazole for colonic surgery.<sup>31</sup> SCIP antibiotic selection for colonic surgery is often used in pancreatic surgery. Interestingly, guidelines published by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP), the Infectious Disease Society of America, the Surgical Infection Society, and the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America specify antibiotic selection for pancreatoduodenectomy, and this recommendation is limited to cefazolin.<sup>32</sup>

Several studies have found that antibiotics recommended by SCIP and ASHP do not address SSI concerns in pancreatic surgery adequately.<sup>33–35</sup> This is likely due to the prevalence of *Enterococcus* and *Enterobacter* species in SSIs following pancreatic operations. As such, piperacillin-tazobactam is considered a more appropriate choice for antibiotic prophylaxis in pancreatic surgery, particularly pancreatoduodenectomy<sup>34</sup> in patients who have had preoperative biliary stenting.

### ***Preoperative Biliary Drainage***

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Obstructive jaundice is the most common presenting symptom of peri-ampullary carcinomas. Preoperative biliary drainage (PBD) is commonly done in the setting of obstructive jaundice to alleviate symptoms and prevent complications, namely vitamin K–associated coagulopathy. Several studies have supported the role of PBD and have indicated it is associated with a decrease in morbidity and mortality.<sup>36–38</sup> Other studies, including 2 meta-analyses, however, failed to show positive or negative effects of PBD.<sup>39–41</sup> In fact, a multicenter, randomized trial comparing routine plastic endoscopic biliary stenting with surgery alone showed that routine PBD increases the rate of complications following PD.<sup>42</sup> A follow-up study on that trial assessing fully covered self-expanding metal stents (FCSEMS) reaffirmed that surgery alone was associated with fewer complications, but indicated that FCSEMS were superior to plastic stents with regard to stent-related complications (but not surgery-related complications).<sup>43</sup> The preponderance of evidence indicates that PBD should be done only when surgery cannot be scheduled within a reasonable time frame (eg, neoadjuvant therapy) or if prolonged prothrombin time indicates that there is a risk of vitamin K–deficient coagulopathy.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Oral Bowel Preparation***

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Historically, oral bowel preparation was used in a vast majority of gastrointestinal operations, not only as means of decreasing intracolonic bacterial counts and, hence, decreasing SSIs, but also to aid in the manipulation of bowel and conducting operations in general.<sup>45</sup> The negative physiologic effect of bowel preparation is not insignificant.<sup>46</sup> Dehydration associated with oral bowel preparation can lead to adverse effects, particularly in the elderly. Multiple clinical and animal studies fail to reveal any benefit of oral bowel preparations in colon surgery.<sup>47,48</sup> As a result, current recommendations by the ERAS Society recommend against oral bowel preparation for colon operations.<sup>49</sup>

Oral bowel preparation in pancreatic surgery has not been well studied. Retrospective studies have not found a benefit with oral bowel preparation in pancreatic surgery.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, oral bowel preparation is not recommended in pancreatic surgery.

### ***Intra-Abdominal Drainage***

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Intra-abdominal drainage following pancreatic surgery has been an intensely debated and studied topic. In 2001, a single-institution randomized trial indicated that intra-abdominal drainage failed to reduce the morbidity and mortality following PD. Additionally, this study indicated that patients with drains were more likely to develop intra-abdominal abscesses and various fistulae, including POPF.<sup>51</sup> Subsequent studies, including meta-analyses, supported the findings that intra-abdominal drainage following pancreatic surgery may not offer any benefit and might increase complications, particularly in patients undergoing PD.<sup>52–54</sup>

In 2005, the International Study Group on Pancreatic Fistula (ISGPF) proposed a unifying definition of POPF.<sup>55</sup> Using a modern definition of POPF, a recent multicenter, randomized trial found that the elimination of drainage in PD was associated with a fourfold increase in mortality.<sup>56</sup> The findings were so profound that the trial was stopped early despite the study group hypothesizing that routine intra-abdominal drainage was unnecessary. Additionally, 2 prospective randomized trials found that early drain removal was not only safe, but actually improved postoperative morbidity, even when they were removed aggressively. Accordingly, intra-abdominal drains are recommended following pancreatic surgery with early removal on postoperative day 3 when the drain amylase content is less than 3 times the normal serum amylase (ISGPF definition of POPF).<sup>57,58</sup>

### ***Preoperative Fasting and Carbohydrate Loading***

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Current guidelines from the American Academy of Anesthesiologists recommend the cessation of liquids and solids 2 and 6 hours before the induction of anesthesia, respectively. Although the ingestion of a carbohydrate-rich liquid approximately 2 hours before the induction of anesthesia may not result in decreased postoperative morbidity, it does decrease patient discomfort, and it may improve insulin sensitivity and skeletal muscle preservation without increasing aspiration or complications. Because it may offer some benefit and does not violate the recommended fasting guidelines, the ingestion of a carbohydrate liquid 2 hours before induction of anesthesia is recommended before pancreatic surgery.<sup>59–61</sup>

### ***Gastric Decompression***

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Gastric decompression via nasogastric (NG) intubation is likely one of the more dogmatically adhered to principles in gastrointestinal surgery with little substantive evidence supporting its usage. Although NG tubes are commonly thought to prevent pulmonary complications, decrease the length of ileus, and decrease the risk of anastomotic dehiscence and fistula, routine usage has been long shown to be unwarranted and possibly not necessary at all,<sup>62–65</sup> even following pancreatoduodenectomy.<sup>66</sup> One of the most common facets of studies assessing ERAS protocols in pancreatic surgery is either the removal of NG tubes at the end of operation<sup>12,16,20</sup> or on postoperative day 1,<sup>10,14,15,19</sup> with no increase in overall complications. Although DGE is not an insignificant complication following pancreatic surgery,<sup>1,67</sup> gastric decompression does not appear to be preventive, and NG tube insertion should be used if it develops. Therefore, it is recommended that NG tubes be removed ideally

at the end of pancreatic operations or on postoperative day 1 with usage only for the treatment of DGE.

### ***Postoperative Nutrition***

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In a manner similar to the placement of NG tubes, maintaining a nil per os (NPO) status until bowel function returns has been adhered to particularly after upper gastrointestinal surgery, including pancreatic surgery, despite a lack of supporting evidence. A multicenter, randomized controlled trial indicated that withholding oral nutrition does not offer any benefit.<sup>68</sup> Along those lines, feeding jejunostomy tubes are not beneficial and possibly harmful following pancreatic surgery.<sup>69,70</sup> The early resumption of oral intake on postoperative day 1 is a common feature of published studies assessing ERAS protocols after pancreatic surgery and has not been associated with increased morbidity.<sup>12–16,20</sup>

### ***Somatostatin Analogues***

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The use of somatostatin analogues in the postoperative setting to decrease the incidence of POPF is not entirely agreed on. Randomized trials have shown both that it is effective<sup>71–73</sup> and ineffective.<sup>74,75</sup> A meta-analysis involving 17 trials and 2143 patients found that although somatostatin analogues appear to decrease postoperative complications and overall POPF, they do not decrease LOS, mortality, or clinically significant POPF (ISGPF Grades B and C).<sup>76</sup> It is theorized that the utility of somatostatin analogues may be found in using it only for high-risk glands (soft texture and/or small duct diameter), but even this usage has dissenting evidence.<sup>75</sup> Until further subset studies are conducted, the routine use of somatostatin analogues cannot be recommended.

### ***Postoperative Analgesia***

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The management of postoperative pain can be difficult. Although patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) with intravenous opioids can control pain, midthoracic continuous epidural analgesia (CEA) appears to provide better pain relief<sup>77</sup> with fewer postoperative complications.<sup>78,79</sup> CEA catheter malfunction, however, can occur frequently and is associated with complications and increased workload.<sup>80</sup>

Continuous wound infusion (CWI) with local anesthetics (OnQ Pain Relief System; Halyard Health, Inc, Alpharetta, GA) in conjunction with PCA appears to be superior to PCA alone<sup>81</sup> and provides pain relief equal to CEA<sup>82</sup> following colorectal surgery. Few studies other than case series have been conducted following pancreatic surgery, but CWI with PCA appears to at least decrease opioid consumption compared with PCA alone.<sup>83</sup> Alternatively, transversus abdominis plane (TAP) blocks may be equivalent to CEA in relief of pain.<sup>84</sup> If an institution's CEA malfunction rate can be optimized, CEA should be considered. Otherwise, CWI plus PCA or TAP block can be used.

## **SUMMARY**

ERAS protocols were designed to optimize postoperative management in several surgical specialties. An example of an ERAS protocol used at the St. Luke's Center for Pancreatic and Liver Diseases in Boise, Idaho, is provided (**Box 2**). ERAS protocols in colorectal surgery have been shown to be effective at improving several patient outcomes, including LOS and, perhaps, morbidity. Although outcomes specific to pancreatic surgery have not been completely studied, they appear to be similar to outcomes in colorectal surgery.

**Box 2****St. Luke's Center for Pancreatic and Liver Diseases ERAS protocol in pancreatic surgery***Daily pathway*

## Preoperative evaluation

- <30-day-old imaging
- Counseling (nutrition, hand hygiene, mobility exercises)
- Informed consent

## Day before operation

- Normal oral intake until 6 hours before anesthesia
- Chlorhexidine shower <sup>PM</sup> before or <sup>AM</sup> of operation

## Day of operation

- Carbohydrate drink 2 hours before anesthesia
- Hair clipping in preoperative holding
- SCD placement in preoperative holding
- Heparin 5000 IU subcutaneously in preoperative holding
- Preoperative piperacillin-tazobactam within 1 hour of incision
- Removal of nasogastric tube at end of operation
- Usage of wound protector
- Closing instruments separated from main instruments
- Gloves changed for closing
- OnQ catheters + patient-controlled analgesia (PCA)<sup>a</sup>

## POD 1

- Up and out of bed in <sup>AM</sup> and then > 4 times a day (QID)
- Clear liquids limited 60–100 mL/h
- Acetaminophen intravenously (IV) and ketorolac<sup>b</sup> adjunct to analgesia
- IV fluids decreased for neutral fluid balance
- Incision cleaned with chlorhexidine wipes

## POD 2

- Ambulating in hallways > QID
- Unlimited full liquids if clear liquids tolerated
- IV fluids reduced to keep vein open if oral intake >500 mL on POD 1
- Remove urinary catheter
- Incision cleaned with chlorhexidine wipes

## POD 3

- Continue ambulation
- Regular diet
- Discontinue IV fluids if liquids tolerated >1000 mL
- Discontinue PCA and start oral analgesics

## POD 4+

- See discharge criteria

*Drain management*

Check daily drain amylase

Remove on POD 3 regardless of volume if

- Drain amylase <3× normal serum value
- No sinister appearance of fluid

*Discharge criteria<sup>c</sup>*

Ambulating independently

Pain controlled with oral analgesia

Bowel function resumed

- Tolerating >67% of kcal needs orally
- Capable of self-care
- Patient consenting to discharge

**Abbreviations:** POD, post-operative day; SCD, sequential compression device.

<sup>a</sup> We have abandoned epidural usage at our institution due to a high malfunction rate.

<sup>b</sup> If not contraindicated due to renal function or bleeding risk.

<sup>c</sup> Evaluate daily (especially beyond POD 5). If ambulation or self-care criteria are not met while all other criteria are met, then consider referral to rehabilitation center.

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