


EFFICACY OF THE ERAS (ENHANCED RECOVERY AFTER SURGERY) PROTOCOL IN THE POSTOPERATIVE RECOVERY OF ABDOMINAL SURGERIES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Lo-Amy David de Oliveira Silva¹, Antônio Anderson Lucena Ribeiro², Isadora Borba de Souza³, Verena Adélia de Moura e Silva⁴, Vanessa Noronha de Moraes⁵, Anuska Erika Pereira Bezerra⁶, Beatriz Queiroz Mahon de Gusmão⁷, Beatriz de Almeida Paulo⁸, Tiago Farrant Braz Pedrosa⁹, Egidio Gomes Bezerra Neto¹⁰, Daniel Victor Barbosa Carvalho¹¹ and Hamilton Belo de França Costa¹².

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Postoperative recovery is a significant challenge in abdominal surgeries due to the complications associated with surgical trauma. The Enhanced Recovery After

¹ Graduated in Medicine
Institution: Unifacisa University Center
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
E-mail: loamydavidmed@gmail.com

² Graduated in Medicine
Institution: Unifacisa University Center
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
E-mail: anderson.lr@hotmail.com

³ Graduated in Medicine
Institution: Unifacisa University Center
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
E-mail: isadoraborba@hotmail.com

⁴ Graduated in Medicine
Institution: Unifip University Center
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
E-mail: verenaadeliams@gmail.com

⁵ Graduated in Medicine
Institution: Unifacisa University Center
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
Email: van.noronhamoraes@gmail.com.br

⁶ Master in Neuroscience
Institution: UFPB
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
E-mail: anuskaerika@hotmail.com

⁷ Graduated in Medicine
Institution: Unifacisa University Center
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
Email: drbeatrizmahon@gmail.com

⁸ Graduated in Medicine
Institution: Unifacisa University Center
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
Email: bia.almeida.paulo@gmail.com

⁹ Graduated in Medicine
Institution: Unifacisa University Center
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
Email: tiagofbpedrosa@gmail.com

¹⁰ Graduated in Medicine
Institution: Unifacisa University Center
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
Email: egidio.medicina@gmail.com

¹¹ Undergraduate student in Dentistry
Institution: Unifacisa University Center
Address: Campina Grande – Paraíba - Brazil
E-mail: danielcarvalho.odonto@gmail.com

¹² Master of General Surgery
Institution: UFPE
Address: Campina Grande - Paraíba - Brazil
E-mail: hamiltonbelo1@gmail.com

Surgery (ERAS) protocol was developed as a multimodal approach to optimize perioperative management, reduce complications, and accelerate hospital discharge. However, the variability of results between different types of surgery and patient populations suggests the need for a systematic review to consolidate the available evidence.

Methodology: This systematic review followed the PRISMA guidelines for article selection, using the acronym PICO to formulate the research question: "Is the ERAS protocol effective in postoperative recovery of patients undergoing abdominal surgery compared to conventional care?". The search was carried out in databases such as PubMed, Cochrane and SciELO, including randomized controlled trials and cohort studies published in the last ten years. The methodological quality of the articles was analyzed based on established criteria, and the agreement between reviewers was evaluated by the Kappa index. **Results:** The studies analyzed demonstrated that the application of the ERAS protocol is associated with a significant reduction in the length of hospital stay, ranging from 2.5 to 3.5 days compared to the control group. In gastrointestinal surgeries, the complication rate was 15% in the ERAS group versus 30% in the control group. In procedures such as hepatectomy, the adoption of the protocol resulted in a decrease in postoperative complications and a reduced length of hospital stay ($p < 0.001$). However, some surgeries, such as hysterectomies and pancreaticoduodenectomy, did not show significant differences between the groups. The rate of hospital readmission presented conflicting findings, being reduced in some studies, but without statistical difference in others. **Discussion:** The findings confirm that the ERAS protocol has a positive impact on reducing postoperative complications, length of hospital stay, and improving functional recovery. The observed benefits are attributed to strategies such as early mobilization, optimized analgesia management, and reduction in opioid use. However, the variability of results between different types of surgery suggests that the effectiveness of ERAS depends on the complexity of the procedure and the clinical status of the patient. In addition, the hospital readmission rate still does not present a clear consensus, which reinforces the need for studies with prolonged follow-up to assess the safety of the protocol. **Conclusion:** The systematic review demonstrates that the ERAS protocol is effective in postoperative recovery from abdominal surgeries, especially in gastrointestinal and hepatic procedures. However, its applicability should be adjusted according to the surgical complexity and the individual conditions of the patient. The heterogeneity of the studies analyzed highlights the importance of robust randomized controlled trials and long-term studies to refine the implementation of ERAS and consolidate its clinical advantages.

Keywords: Abdominal Surgeries. ERAS Protocol. Postoperative.

INTRODUCTION

Postoperative recovery has been one of the main challenges of abdominal surgery, due to the impact of surgical trauma on patient homeostasis. In this context, Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) protocols have emerged as an evidence-based, multimodal approach to optimize perioperative management and reduce postoperative complications. Since its introduction in the 1990s by Henrik Kehlet, ERAS has been widely studied and applied, especially in colorectal surgeries, with documented benefits in reducing the length of hospital stay and complications associated with the surgical procedure [1,2].

The ERAS protocol combines several perioperative interventions, including preoperative preparation with nutritional counseling, tight analgesia control to minimize opioid use, multimodal anesthesia strategies, and accelerated rehabilitation with early mobilization [3]. Studies have shown that the implementation of this protocol can significantly reduce the length of hospital stay without increasing complication or readmission rates, being a safe and effective method for postoperative recovery [4,5].

Although the effectiveness of ERAS is widely recognized in colorectal surgeries, its impact on other abdominal surgeries is still the subject of investigations. A recent meta-analysis involving 39 studies and more than 6,500 patients demonstrated that the adoption of the ERAS protocol reduced the average length of hospital stay by 2.5 days and complication rates by 30%, without increasing hospital readmission rates [6]. These findings reinforce the importance of expanding ERAS to procedures beyond colorectal surgery, such as liver and pancreatic resections [7].

In hepatobiliopancreatic surgery, the adoption of ERAS has shown benefits, but its implementation is still limited due to the complexity of these procedures. Studies indicate that accelerated recovery after liver resections can reduce hospital stay by up to three days, without negatively impacting morbidity and mortality rates [8]. Similarly, in pancreatic surgery, ERAS has been associated with shorter hospital stay and reduced incidence of postoperative ileus [9].

In addition to the clinical benefits, the adoption of ERAS has a positive impact on hospital costs. Reduced hospital stays, lower opioid requirements, and faster patient recovery result in significant savings for healthcare systems. A recent study pointed out that the implementation of ERAS can reduce hospital costs by up to 5,000 dollars per patient [10]. However, challenges in adhering to the protocol, including institutional resistance and the need for staff training, still limit its broad implementation [11].

The applicability of ERAS in emergency surgery settings has also been explored. Although the protocol was initially developed for elective surgeries, studies suggest that its

strategies can be adapted to patients undergoing emergency procedures, resulting in shorter hospital stay and better functional recovery [12]. However, there are still controversies about the safety of its implementation in situations of hemodynamic instability or severe peritoneal infection [13].

In view of the growing evidence of the benefits of ERAS, several international guidelines have recommended its implementation in multiple types of abdominal surgery. The ERAS® Society has published specific guidelines for different surgical specialties, reinforcing the need for protocols adapted to each type of procedure [14]. However, the heterogeneity in the inclusion criteria of the studies and the variability in the adherence to the protocols make it difficult to standardize the findings and extrapolate the results to different clinical contexts [15].

Thus, this systematic review aims to critically evaluate the efficacy of the ERAS protocol in postoperative recovery from abdominal surgeries, comparing its effects with conventional care. The analysis of the available data will allow a better understanding of the benefits and limitations of this protocol, helping in decision-making for its broad implementation in clinical practice.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is a Systematic Review whose steps for its construction are described in the protocol PRISMA16 The guiding question was established based on the acronym PICO: "Is the ERAS protocol effective in improving the clinical complications of postoperative recovery in patients undergoing abdominal surgeries, when compared to conventional postoperative care?". The selection of articles was carried out in a double-blind manner and the search for articles in the databases was carried out during the second half of 2024 through the electronic platforms of *PubMed (National Library of Medicine and National Institute of Health)*, *Cochrane Collaboration* and *SciELO*.

To prospect the articles, the descriptors in English were searched in the DeCS (Health Sciences Descriptors) and MeSH (*Medical Subject Headings*) databases. In addition, they were separated through the Boolean operators *AND* and *OR*, which provided a more refined search. In all databases, the following combination was applied: ("Enhanced Recovery After Surgery" OR ERAS OR "fast track surgery") AND ("abdominal surgery" OR "gastrointestinal surgery" OR "colorectal surgery" OR "hepatectomy" OR "pancreatectomy" OR "gastrectomy" OR "general surgery") AND ("postoperative recovery" OR "length of stay" OR "hospital stay" OR "postoperative complications" OR "pain

management" OR "readmission rates") AND (randomized controlled trial OR "cohort study")".

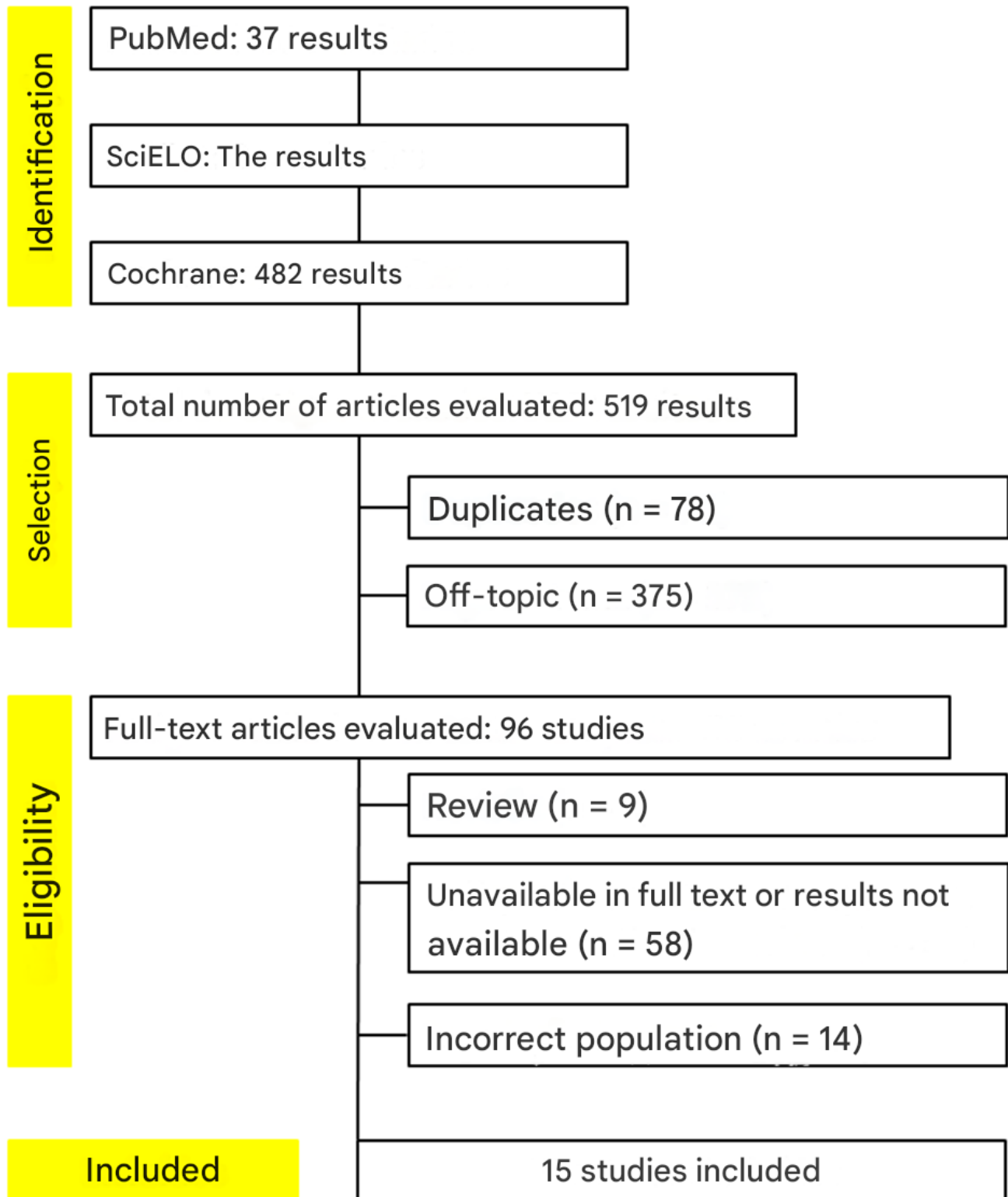
The inclusion criteria and filters used for this study were: (1) Randomized clinical trials and cohort studies evaluating the application of the ERAS protocol in patients undergoing abdominal surgery; (2) Works available in full text and free of charge; (3) Studies in humans over the age of 18 years and (4) English, Portuguese, and Spanish language studies published within the last 10 years; (5) Studies evaluating outcomes such as length of hospital stay, readmissions, and postoperative complications. The exclusion parameters were: (1) Duplication; (2) Escape from the theme; (3) Studies not available in full text and free of charge; (4) Works that did not fit the inclusion criteria and (5) Review articles. Thus, of the identified texts, those that met all the inclusion criteria were chosen considering their titles and abstracts.

Finally, the search was performed by two independent reviewers, and the analysis of interobserver agreement was performed using the *Kappa test* in the BioStatistics V.1.1.0 application and calculated according to the classical categorical method¹⁷. The value found was $K = 0.713$ (substantial agreement). The selected articles were critically evaluated by two double-blind observers and one reviewer, in order to assess their individual quality^{18,19}. The 12 items of evaluation of the quality of the articles are expressed by scores and the calculation of the percentage corresponds to the result of the sum of the points achieved in each criterion divided by the maximum expected in each item, which also confers the result of the evaluation for the selected articles (Table 1).

RESULTS

Below is the flowchart with the summary of the selection process of articles in the databases according to the criteria Main Items for Reporting Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA).

Figure 1: Flowchart based on the PRISMA protocol of the studies selected for this review.



Source: Prepared by the author, 2025.

Below is the analysis of the quality of the trials selected to compose the review. The analysis demonstrates a high level of methodological rigor in most of the included studies. It is observed that most studies obtained a score higher than 90%, indicating a high level of

compliance with the established methodological guidelines. Only two studies had lower scores, Han L et al. (92%) and Koek et al. (87.5%), suggesting small gaps in the methodological approach or in the presentation of data. The main weakness identified in almost all studies was in criterion 4 (Appropriate scope of psychometric properties), where all received a score of 1 (incomplete), which may indicate a limitation in the description or application of psychometric assessment methods. In general, the selected studies have good methodological quality, which strengthens the reliability of the review results.

Table 1: Analysis of the quality of the articles selected to compose the qualitative and quantitative analysis of this review. Legend: 1 - Review and detailing of studies in the literature to define the research question; 2 - Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria; 3 - Specific objectives; 4 - Appropriate scope of psychometric properties; 5 - Justification and presentation of sample size; 6 - Patient follow-up; 7 - Specific procedures for administration, execution and interpretation of results; 8 - Appropriate medication/evaluation techniques; 9 - Detailed data for each hypothesis; 10 - Appropriate statistics; 11 - Estimates of statistical errors; 12 - Valid conclusions and clinical recommendations. Score - 0 = absent; 1 = incomplete; 2 = complete.

Studies	Evaluation Criteria												Total (%)
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Lqbal A et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Raymond B et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Lu DH et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Piovano E et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Pagano E et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Fornmo HM et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Knab K et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Han L et al.,	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	92%
Pedziwiatr M et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Koek et al.,	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	87,5%
Jun S et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Qi S et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Parakonhthun et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Akbar A et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%
Tian Y et al.,	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	96%

Source: Author

Table 2: Table of the main data of the articles selected to compose the qualitative and quantitative analysis of this review. Legend: TE - Type of Study; IG - Intervention Group; CG - Control Group; CT - Complication Rate between groups; IT - Hospitalization Time; TR - Readmission Rate; TS - Follow-up Time; NE - Not Specified; RCT - Randomized Clinical Trial; WERE-. Enhanced Recovery After Surgery; OR - Odds Ratio; CCR - Colorectal Cancer.

Autor	TE	Amostra	GI	GC	Cirurgia	TC	TI	TR	TS
Lqbal A et al.,	Coorte	120	60 submetidos ao ERAS	60 em cuidados convencionais	Cirurgia GI	15% GI vs. 30% GC	3,5 dias GI vs. 5,8 dias GC	5% GI vs 13,3% GC	NI
Raymond B et al.,	ECR	1544	772 submetidos ao ERAS (ketamina perioperatória)	772 pacientes com placebo perioperatório	Cirurgia abdominal maior (CR, Hérnia)	NE	NR	NE	48h pós-operatório
Lu DH et al.,	ECR	57	Bloqueio do gânglio estrelado pré-op	Sem bloqueio de gânglio estrelado pré-op	Cirurgia colorretal laparoscópica	NE	6,61 dias GI vs. 8,72 GC	NE	3 anos
Piovano E et al.,	ECR	2086	Pacientes submetidos ao ERAS	Pacientes submetidos a cuidados convencionais	Histerectomia	Sem diferença significativa entre os grupos	3,2 dias GI vs. 3,5 dias GC	NE	30 dias
Pagano E et al.,	ECR	2397	1337 submetidos ao ERAS	1060 em cuidados convencionais	Cirurgia colorretal	Sem diferença significativa entre os grupos (OR 1.22)	7,5 dias GI vs. 8,5 dias GC	Sem diferença significativa entre os grupos	30 dias
Fornmo HM et al.,	Coorte	122	61 submetidos ao ERAS e educação sobre estoma	61 em cuidados convencionais sobre estoma	Ressecção colorretal em estoma	Sem diferença significativa entre os grupos	6 dias GI vs. 9 dias GC	Sem diferenças significativas entre os grupos	30 dias
Knab K et al.,	Coorte	153	100 submetidos ao ERAS	53 em cuidados convencionais	Cirurgia colorretal eletiva	Menor incidência de PONV e uso de opioides no grupo ERAS	NE	NE	NE
Han L et al.,	Coorte	116	33 pacientes com alimentação oral precoce em pós-op	40 pacientes com SNG e 40 com SNE	Gastrectomia laparoscópica	Menor taxa de distensão abdominal no grupo de alimentação oral precoce	Sem diferença entre os grupos	NE	7 dias
Pedziwiatr M et al.,	Coorte	188	Pacientes com CCR estágio IV submetido ao ERAS	Pacientes com CCR estágio I-III submetido ao ERAS	Ressecção colorretal laparoscópica	26,8% GI vs. 20% GC	5,7 dias GI vs. 4,7 dias	10% GI vs. 6% GC	30 dias
Koek et al.,	Coorte	169	126 submetidos a fluidoterapia dentro do ERAS	29 em cuidados convencionais	Pancreaticoduodenectomia	Sem diferença significativa entre os grupos na morbidade	Menor tempo no grupo ERAS (sem diferença significativa)	Sem diferença significativa	Até a alta hospitalar
Jun S et al.,	ECR	104	51 recebendo mosapride dentro do ERAS	53 em cuidados convencionais	Gastrectomia laparoscópica	Sem diferença significativa entre os grupos	Sem diferença significativa entre os grupos	NE	Até 5 dias pós-operatório
Qi S et al.,	ECR	160	80 submetidos ao ERAS	80 em cuidados convencionais	Hepatectomia	Menor taxa de complicações no grupo ERAS (p = 0.009)	Menor no grupo ERAS (p < 0.001)	Sem diferença significativa entre os grupos	30 dias
Parakonthun et al.,	Coorte	158	67 submetidos ao ERAS	58 em cuidados convencionais	Cirurgia esofagogástrica e gástrica	Menor taxa de complicações no GI	Menor TI no GI (p < 0.001)	Sem diferença significativa entre os grupos	6 meses
Akbar A et al.,	Coorte	650	325 submetidos ao ERAS	325 em cuidados convencionais	Cirurgia abdominal eletiva	Menor taxa de complicações no GI	Menor tempo no GI	Menor taxa no GI	30 dias
Tian Y et al.,	ECR	80	40 submetidos ao ERAS	40 em cuidados convencionais	Gastrectomia radical	Menor taxa de complicações no GI	Menor tempo no GI	NE	30 dias

Source: Prepared by the author, 2025.

Table 2 highlights the main clinical outcomes of the included studies, demonstrating that, in general, the application of the ERAS protocol leads to lower complication rates, reduced length of hospital stay, and, in some cases, lower hospital readmission rates. Studies with randomized controlled trials (RCTs) were predominant in Table 2, and those

with larger samples, such as Pagano et al. (2397 patients) and Raymond et al. (1544 patients), have greater statistical power to demonstrate the benefits of the ERAS protocol. In these studies, the length of hospital stay was significantly reduced in the ERAS group compared to the control group. In addition, Qi et al. (160 patients, hepatectomy) reported a statistically significant reduction in the complication rate and length of hospital stay ($p < 0.001$), reinforcing the superiority of the protocol in certain types of surgery.

Reduced complication rates were one of the most consistent findings among the included studies. For example, Lqbal et al. (gastrointestinal surgery) showed that the complication rate in the ERAS group was 15% versus 30% in the control group. Other studies, such as Akbar et al. (elective abdominal surgery) and Tian et al. (radical gastrectomy), also reported a significant reduction in complications among patients who followed the ERAS protocol. However, some studies, such as Pagano et al. (colorectal surgery) and Piovano et al. (hysterectomy), found no significant differences between the groups, suggesting that the efficacy of ERAS may vary according to the type of surgical procedure.

The length of hospital stay was reduced in most studies that implemented the ERAS protocol. In particular, Lqbal et al. (3.5 vs. 5.8 days), Lu DH et al. (6.61 vs. 8.72 days), and Fornmo et al. (6 vs. 9 days) demonstrated a significant decrease in length of hospital stay. This finding is one of the main clinical benefits of ERAS, as it is directly related to lower hospital costs, reduced risk of nosocomial infections, and greater comfort for patients. Despite this, some studies, such as Koek et al. (pancreaticoduodenectomy), did not find a statistically significant difference in the length of hospital stay, which may be related to the complexity of the surgical procedure.

The rate of hospital readmission showed more varied results among the studies. While Akbar et al. and Lqbal et al. indicated a reduction in the readmission rate in patients in the ERAS group, other studies, such as Pagano et al. and Fornmo et al., did not find significant differences. This suggests that the impact of the ERAS protocol on readmission may be influenced by additional factors, such as the quality of postoperative follow-up and the patients' preconditions. In addition, some studies have not reported data on this variable, making it difficult to draw a definitive conclusion about this outcome.

Another relevant factor in the analysis of the studies was the follow-up time of the patients. While some studies, such as Lu DH et al. (3 years) and Parakonthon et al. (6 months), had a prolonged follow-up, allowing a better assessment of long-term outcomes, others were limited to the period of hospital stay or up to 30 days after surgery. The short

follow-up time may underestimate possible late complications, compromising the evaluation of the long-term efficacy of the ERAS protocol.

Comparing the clinical outcomes with the methodological quality of the studies, it is clear that studies with greater methodological rigor (with high scores in Table 1) tend to present more reliable results. For example, Lqbal et al. and Pagano et al., who obtained 96% methodological quality, demonstrated a significant reduction in the length of hospital stay and in the complication rate. On the other hand, studies with lower scores, such as Koek et al. (87.5%), presented less consistent findings.

In conclusion, the integrated analysis of the two tables confirms that the ERAS protocol is effective in most of the clinical scenarios evaluated, especially in reducing complications and length of stay. However, the variation in results between different types of surgery suggests that the applicability of ERAS should be adjusted according to the complexity of the procedure and the individual characteristics of the patients. In addition, further studies with long follow-up periods and robust samples are needed to consolidate the benefits of the ERAS protocol on long-term outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The reduction in the length of hospital stay was one of the main benefits observed, corroborating data from previous studies that demonstrate a positive impact of ERAS on this outcome^{20,21}. Recent meta-analyses indicate that the adoption of this protocol can reduce the length of hospital stay by up to 2.37 days compared to conventional care, without a significant increase in complication or mortality rates²¹. However, the heterogeneity of the included studies should be considered when interpreting these findings.

The rate of postoperative complications was also reduced in most of the studies analyzed, which is one of the most consistent findings in the literature. According to Changsheng et al.²³ The application of the ERAS protocol in radical gastrectomy significantly reduced the incidence of pulmonary infection ($p = 0.02$), in addition to reducing the time to the first evacuation and the hospital cost. Similar results were found in the meta-analysis by Ni et al.²², which demonstrated a significant reduction in postoperative complications ($RR = 0.66$; $p = 0.005$) in patients undergoing hepatectomy under the ERAS protocol. These findings reinforce the role of ERAS in reducing postoperative physiological stress and improving clinical outcomes.

However, the rate of hospital readmission presented heterogeneous results among the studies. While some studies have indicated a reduction in readmission in patients

undergoing ERAS, others have suggested an increased risk, especially in gastric surgeries^{23,24}. The meta-analysis by Huang et al.²⁴ pointed out that, although ERAS significantly reduced the length of hospital stay and the risk of pulmonary complications, there was a significant increase in the risk of readmission ($p = 0.007$), possibly due to the high precocity of hospital discharge in some protocols.

The applicability of ERAS in minimally invasive surgeries has also been a topic of increasing interest. According to the review by Li et al.²², the combination of the ERAS protocol with laparoscopic surgery showed additional benefits, such as shorter recovery time for bowel function and lower postoperative opioid use. However, some authors suggest that laparoscopy, by itself, already reduces surgical stress, and the addition of ERAS may not bring significant additional benefits²². Thus, the optimization of protocols should consider the surgical approach used.

Another important point in the discussion is the variation of results according to the type of abdominal surgery. In hepatectomy, for example, the implementation of ERAS resulted in a reduction in hospitalization time by 2.77 days and a 19.69-hour shorter time for first evacuation ($p < 0.0001$)²³. On the other hand, in pancreaticoduodenectomy, the impact of the protocol was more limited, with some studies showing no significant difference in the length of hospital stay²⁰. This suggests that the complexity of the procedure may influence the effectiveness of ERAS.

In the context of emergency surgery, the applicability of the ERAS protocol is still controversial. The meta-analysis by McKechnie et al.²⁵ indicated that, although there was a reduction in the length of hospital stay for emergency gastrointestinal surgeries, the quality of the evidence is considered low to very low, due to the variability in the inclusion criteria and outcomes evaluated. In addition, modification of the ERAS protocol for critically ill patients may be necessary to ensure its safety and efficacy.

The methodological analysis of the reviewed studies reveals that those with greater scientific rigor tend to present more robust results. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) included in this review demonstrated a significant reduction in length of hospital stay and postoperative complications, while observational studies showed greater variability in findings^{20,21}. This highlights the importance of well-designed, larger-sample clinical trials to consolidate the evidence on the benefits of ERAS in different surgical settings.

Finally, the implementation of the ERAS protocol faces logistical and institutional challenges. Adherence to the protocol requires a multidisciplinary approach, involving surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, and physical therapists²⁰. In addition, the lack of standardization between studies makes it difficult to compare results and create universal

guidelines. However, the growing acceptance of ERAS in international guidelines suggests that its application will continue to expand in the coming years.

In conclusion, the findings of this systematic review corroborate the efficacy of the ERAS protocol in reducing the length of hospital stay and postoperative complications in several abdominal surgeries. However, the variability of results in different types of procedures and the need for greater standardization of protocols indicate that new high-quality studies are essential to refine and adapt ERAS to the specific needs of each patient and surgical procedure.

CONCLUSION

The findings confirm that the ERAS (*Enhanced Recovery After Surgery*) protocol is an effective strategy to optimize postoperative recovery in abdominal surgeries, significantly reducing the length of hospital stay and the incidence of complications. The studies analyzed demonstrated that patients undergoing ERAS had shorter hospitalizations, especially in gastrointestinal and hepatic procedures, with significant reductions in length of stay. These results indicate that the ERAS protocol may be an efficient approach to minimize the impacts of surgery, promoting a faster and safer recovery.

However, the effectiveness of ERAS can vary according to the type of surgery and the individual conditions of the patients. While some studies have pointed to significant reductions in postoperative complications, others have not identified significant differences between the ERAS and control groups, suggesting that the applicability of the protocol should be adapted to each surgical procedure. In addition, the hospital readmission rate showed inconsistent results, indicating that factors such as the quality of postoperative follow-up may influence this outcome. Thus, future research should explore the determinants of variability in the efficacy of ERAS in different clinical settings.

Finally, the need for additional studies with longer follow-up time stands out as one of the main limitations of the current literature. Many studies have restricted their analyses to the length of hospital stay or up to 30 days after surgery, which may not capture late complications and long-term impacts on patients' recovery. In addition, the heterogeneity in the methodological criteria makes it difficult to compare the results between different studies. Thus, future investigations should include robust randomized controlled trials and extended follow-up, allowing for a more comprehensive evaluation of the efficacy of the ERAS protocol and its applicability in different patient profiles and types of surgery.

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