



Complications after pancreatic resection: diagnosis, prevention and management

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BACKGROUND: Although mortality after pancreaticoduodenectomy (PD) or distal pancreatectomy (DP) has decreased, morbidity still remains high. The aim of this review article is to present, define, predict, prevent, and manage the main complications after pancreatic resection (PR).

METHODS: A non-systematic literature search on morbidity and mortality after PR was undertaken using the PubMed/MEDLINE and Embase databases.

RESULTS: The main complications after PR are delayed gastric emptying (DGE), pancreatic fistula (PF), and bleeding, as defined by the International Study Group on Pancreatic Surgery. PF occurs in 10% to 15% of patients after PD and in 10% to 30% of patients after DP. The different techniques of pancreatic anastomosis and pancreatic remnant closure do not show significant advantages in the prevention of PF, nor does the perioperative use of somatostatin and its analogues. The trend is for conservative or interventional radiology therapy for PF (with enteral nutrition), which achieves a success rate of approximately 80%. DGE after PD occurs in 20% to 50% of patients. Prophylactic erythromycin may reduce the incidence of DGE. Gastric aspiration with erythromycin is usually effective in one to three weeks. Bleeding (gastrointestinal and intraabdominal) occurs in 4% to 16% of patients after PD and in 2% to 3% of patients after DP. Endovascular treatment can only be used for a haemodynamically stable patient. In cases of haemodynamic instability or associated septic complications, surgical treatment is necessary. In expert centres, the mortality rates can be less than 1% after DP and less than 3% after PD.

CONCLUSION: There is a need for improved strategies to prevent and treat complications after PR.

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