Ice packs reduce postoperative midline incision pain and narcotic use: a randomized controlled trial


We know ...

- Adequate postoperative analgesia is essential for patient recovery, mobility and satisfaction.
- Narcotic analgesia is the mainstay of pain relief in the first few days after major surgery. Given the known side effects of narcotics, there has been a trend towards the use of multimodal strategies for pain relief in the hope of reducing the need for narcotics.

We don’t know ...

- Cryotherapy - the application of cold modalities - is an option for pain relief due to trauma, injury or disease. It has few deleterious side effects.
- Cryotherapy’s potential as a postoperative analgesic after major abdominal surgery is not established.

The author(s) conclude ...

- Ice packs are a simple, cost-effective adjuvant for decreasing postoperative pain and narcotic use in patients undergoing major abdominal operations. The lack of effect on narcotic utilisation after the first postoperative day might be attributed to discontinuation of cryotherapy after the first 24 hours.

We can see that:

**1: Population**

Patients undergoing open, transperitoneal abdominal surgery through a midline incision (excluding laparoscopic procedures).

**2: Indicator variable**

Ice packs (cryotherapy) used continuously for first 24 hrs.

**3: Outcome variable**

- **Primary:** Pain scores on days 0 - 3. **Secondary:** narcotic use, length of hospital stay.
  - Patients were instructed to rate and record pain intensity on a continuous visual analogue pain scale (VAS) in which “0” represented no pain and “10” equated with the worst pain imaginable.
  - VAS was recorded 1 hour postoperative and at 8 AM and 4 PM each day.

**4: [Comparison]**

No cryotherapy.