

Minimally invasive pancreas surgery leads to fewer complications, study finds

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When surgeons need to remove part of the pancreas, performing the operation with minimally invasive techniques offers patients a shorter hospital stay and fewer complications, researchers have concluded.

A study of more than 660 operations to remove pancreatic tumors and cysts over five years found that after laparoscopic surgery, patients stayed a third less time in the hospital without experiencing more complications such as leaks.

David Kooby, MD, assistant professor of surgical oncology at Emory University School of Medicine and the Emory Winship Cancer Institute, will present his findings at the American Surgical Association meeting in New York.

During laparoscopic surgery, doctors make smaller incisions than in traditional surgery and monitor their progress with fiber optics and video cameras. The less invasive approach has become well accepted for gallstone removal, repair of stomach valves and weight loss surgery, Kooby says.

"Data on patient outcomes has been scarce when it comes to extending this approach to the surgical care of other organs," he says. "Still, more surgeons and institutions are doing these procedures and more patients and referring doctors are requesting them. Our study shows that this approach is not only viable but may be preferable for the pancreas."

He and colleagues at eight universities across the Midwest and Southeast collected information on left pancreatectomies, where part but not all of the pancreas is removed, from 2002 to 2006. About a quarter were attempted laparoscopically.

About half the operations had complications, and a sixth had a leak of pancreatic fluid, the researchers found. Laparoscopic procedures had fewer complications (40 percent v. 57 percent) than standard surgery, and patients experienced lower blood loss and stayed about six days in the hospital compared with the standard nine.

Source: Emory University

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