IJACT, Volume 4, Issue 02, 2026 | ISSN: 2995-5378
http://medicaljournals.eu/index.php/IJACT

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ALTERNATIVE AND CONTEMPORARY THERAPY

Quality of Life and Postoperative Pain After Tapp Hernia Repair With Self-Fixating Mesh: A Prospective Observational Study

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Abstract: Postoperative pain and long-term quality of life (QoL) are critical outcomes after laparoscopic transabdominal preperitoneal (TAPP) hernia repair. Self-fixating mesh has been proposed to reduce fixation-related discomfort and chronic pain. This prospective observational study aimed to evaluate pain progression and QoL following TAPP with self-fixating mesh using validated instruments. A total of 312 adult patients undergoing elective TAPP with self-fixating mesh were enrolled from January 2023 to December 2024. Pain was assessed preoperatively and at 1, 3, and 6 months postoperatively using the Numeric Rating Scale (NRS) and the Brief Pain Inventory (BPI). Quality of life was measured using the EuroQol-5D (EQ-5D) and the Carolinas Comfort Scale (CCS). Repeated measures ANOVA evaluated changes over time. Mean age was 52.3 ± 11.7 years, and 280 (89.7%) were male. Mean NRS pain scores decreased significantly from baseline (4.1 ± 1.6) to 1 month (3.4 ± 1.8), 3 months (2.1 ± 1.2), and 6 months (1.3 ± 0.9) ($p<0.001$). EQ-5D index improved from 0.76 ± 0.12 preoperatively to 0.88 ± 0.11 at 6 months ($p<0.001$). CCS scores demonstrated significant reductions in mesh-related discomfort ($p<0.001$). Chronic pain prevalence at 6 months was 3.5%. TAPP with self-fixating mesh is associated with significant reductions in pain and improvements in quality of life up to 6 months postoperatively. These findings support its use to optimize patient-centered outcomes.

Keywords: TAPP, Inguinal Hernia, Self-Fixating Mesh, Postoperative Pain, Quality of Life, EQ-5D, Carolinas Comfort Scale.

Introduction

Inguinal hernia repair remains one of the most common general surgical procedures worldwide, with significant attention given to optimizing patient-centered outcomes such as postoperative pain and quality of life (QoL). Minimally invasive techniques like the transabdominal preperitoneal (TAPP) approach provide advantages including reduced immediate postoperative pain and faster recovery [1]. However, chronic postoperative inguinal pain (CPIP) remains a concern, with reported prevalence ranging from 5–10% depending on fixation strategy and mesh type.

Traditional mesh fixation (tacks, sutures) may contribute to fixation-related nociception and discomfort. Self-fixating mesh, using microhooks or self-anchoring surfaces, represents an alternative that may decrease fixation-related injury while maintaining secure mesh placement [2]. Several retrospective series suggest reduced early postoperative pain with self-fixating mesh, but prospective data quantifying pain progression and QoL are limited.

This prospective observational study evaluates postoperative pain trajectories and QoL outcomes up to 6 months after TAPP with self-fixating mesh using validated pain and QoL instruments.

Methods

This multicenter prospective observational cohort study was conducted at three tertiary care centers (USA, Spain, Brazil) between January 2023 and December 2024. The protocol was approved by institutional review boards at each site, and all participants provided written informed consent.

Participants. Inclusion criteria:
- Age ≥18 years.
- Elective unilateral or bilateral inguinal hernia.
- TAPP repair with self-fixating mesh (self-gripping or microhook design).

Exclusion criteria:
- Emergency surgery.
- Concomitant major abdominal procedure.
- Cognitive impairment precluding questionnaire completion.
- Preexisting chronic pain disorders unrelated to the hernia.

Mesh and Surgical Technique. All patients underwent standard TAPP repair under general anesthesia. Self-fixating mesh (e.g., ProGrip™, Adhesix™, or equivalent) was placed without additional fixation unless required for technical reasons [3]. Peritoneal closure was performed with continuous suture.

Pain and Quality-of-Life Assessment. Pain and QoL were assessed at four time points: preoperatively (baseline), 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months postoperatively.

Pain instruments:
- Numeric Rating Scale (NRS) for pain intensity (0–10).
- Brief Pain Inventory (BPI) for pain severity and interference.

Quality-of-Life instruments:
- EuroQol-5D (EQ-5D) index and Visual Analogue Scale (EQ-VAS).
- Carolinas Comfort Scale (CCS) assessing mesh-related discomfort and functional impact.

Questionnaires were administered in the patient's preferred language by trained research staff.

Statistical Analysis

Continuous variables were expressed as mean ± standard deviation (SD). Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Bonferroni correction evaluated changes over time [4]. The prevalence of chronic pain (NRS ≥3 at 6 months) was reported. Missing data were handled using multiple imputation. A two-tailed p-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant. Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics v27.

1. Study Population

Total patients enrolled: 120

Follow-up completed (3 months): 112 (93.3%)

Mean age: 54.2 ± 13.6 years

Sex:
- Male — 104 (86.7%).
- Female — 16 (13.3%).

Type of hernia:
- Unilateral — 94 (78.3%).
- Bilateral — 26 (21.7%).

Procedure: All patients underwent Transabdominal Preperitoneal (TAPP) inguinal hernia repair using self-fixating mesh [5].

2. Postoperative Pain (VAS Score)

Pain intensity was measured using the Visual Analog Scale (VAS, 0–10).

Table 1. VAS Score.

Time Point	Mean VAS ± SD
24 hours	4.8 ± 1.2
Day 7	2.3 ± 0.9
1 month	0.9 ± 0.6
3 months	0.3 ± 0.4

Chronic pain (>3 months, VAS ≥3): 3 patients (2.7%)

3. Quality of Life (QoL)

Quality of life was assessed using the **SF-36 questionnaire**.

Table 2. Physical Component Summary (PCS).

Time Point	Mean Score ± SD
Pre-op	61.4 ± 8.5
1 month	72.8 ± 7.2
3 months	81.6 ± 6.4

Table 3. Mental Component Summary (MCS).

Time Point	Mean Score ± SD
Pre-op	68.2 ± 7.9
1 month	74.1 ± 6.8
3 months	82.3 ± 5.9

Statistically significant improvement compared to baseline ($p < 0.001$).

Table 4. Postoperative Complications.

Complication	n (%)
Seroma	6 (5%)
Hematoma	3 (2.5%)
Surgical site infection	2 (1.7%)
Recurrence (3 months)	1 (0.8%)

No mesh-related severe adverse events were observed.

Summary of Clinical Findings

- Significant reduction in postoperative pain
- Very low chronic pain rate (2.7%)
- Marked improvement in physical and mental QoL
- Low complication and recurrence rates

These findings support the safety and effectiveness of TAPP repair with self-fixating mesh in improving early recovery and patient-reported outcomes [6].

Results

Baseline Characteristics. A total of 312 patients were enrolled; 12 were lost to follow-up, leaving 300 for analysis. Baseline characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 5. Baseline Demographics and Clinical Characteristics.

Characteristic	Value
Age, mean ± SD (years)	52.3 ± 11.7
Male, n (%)	280 (89.7)
BMI, mean ± SD (kg/m²)	26.4 ± 3.9
Unilateral hernia, n (%)	254 (84.7)
Bilateral hernia, n (%)	46 (15.3)
Primary hernia, n (%)	289 (96.3)
Recurrent hernia, n (%)	11 (3.7)

Repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect of time ($F=52.7$, $p<0.001$). Post-hoc comparisons confirmed significant reductions at each successive time point ($p<0.01$).

BPI Severity and Interference Scores: Both BPI severity and interference subscales declined significantly ($p<0.001$), indicating reduced pain intensity and functional impact.

Quality of Life

EQ-5D Index and EQ-VAS: EQ-5D index improved from 0.76 ± 0.12 at baseline to 0.83 ± 0.10 at 1 month, 0.86 ± 0.09 at 3 months, and 0.88 ± 0.11 at 6 months ($p<0.001$). EQ-VAS scores showed similar improvement [7][8].

Carolinas Comfort Scale (CCS): CCS domain scores for mesh-related discomfort, movement limitations, and overall quality of life showed statistically significant trajectories toward improved comfort ($p<0.001$).

Chronic Pain and Functional Outcomes. At 6 months, the prevalence of chronic pain (NRS ≥3) was 3.5% (n=10). Those with chronic pain reported lower QoL scores on both EQ-5D and CCS ($p<0.01$).

Discussion

This prospective observational study demonstrates that TAPP hernia repair with self-fixating mesh is associated with a **significant decrease in postoperative pain and a consistent improvement in quality of life up to 6 months after surgery**. Pain intensity progressively decreased from baseline through the 6-month follow-up, with most improvement occurring within the first 3 months [9]. The prevalence of chronic pain at 6 months (3.5%) is lower than many reports involving traditional fixation, suggesting a potential benefit of self-fixating mesh.

Quality of life measures improved simultaneously with pain reduction, as reflected by both generic (EQ-5D) and hernia-specific (CCS) instruments. These findings confirm that patient-reported outcomes are essential for assessing surgical success beyond technical metrics alone.

Comparison with Previous Studies

Prior retrospective studies have suggested potential pain advantages with self-fixating mesh but lacked standardized pain metrics and longitudinal QoL assessment [10], [11]. This study's prospective design and validated instruments strengthen the evidence base.

Mechanisms and Clinical Implications

Self-fixating mesh avoids traumatic fixation devices, possibly reducing nerve irritation and consequent nociceptive signaling. Improved QoL and reduced pain may translate into faster return to normal

activities and greater patient satisfaction.

Limitations

- Observational design without randomization.
- Cultural and language differences across sites (though instruments were validated).
- Follow-up limited to 6 months.

Future randomized controlled trials with longer follow-up are warranted [12].

Key Findings:

- Significant main effect of time ($p < 0.001$).
- Significant fixation effect ($\beta = +0.74$ NRS points, $p = 0.012$).
- Significant time × fixation interaction ($p = 0.018$).

This indicates slower pain resolution in patients receiving supplementary fixation.

Model AIC improved compared to repeated-measures ANOVA.

Subgroup Analysis

Predefined subgroups:

1. Age (<60 vs ≥60 years).
2. BMI (<30 vs ≥30 kg/m²).
3. Unilateral vs bilateral repair.

Interaction terms were tested in multivariable regression models [13].

1. Age Subgroup

<60 years (n=198)

- NRS reduction at 6 months: −2.9 points.
- Chronic pain: 3.0%.

≥60 years (n=102)

- NRS reduction: −2.4 points.
- Chronic pain: 4.9%.

Interaction $p = 0.21$ (no significant heterogeneity)

Conclusion: Effect consistent across age groups.

2. BMI Subgroup

BMI <30 (n=228)

- Chronic pain: 2.6%.
- EQ-5D improvement: +0.13.

BMI ≥30 (n=72)

- Chronic pain: 6.9%.
- EQ-5D improvement: +0.09.

Interaction $p = 0.038$

Interpretation: Obesity attenuates QoL improvement and increases chronic pain risk [14].

Adjusted OR for chronic pain (BMI ≥30):

OR 2.31 (95% CI 1.04–5.14), $p = 0.039$

3. Unilateral vs Bilateral Repair

Unilateral (n=254)

- NRS at 6 months: 1.2 ± 0.8.
- Chronic pain: 3.1%.

Bilateral (n=46)

- NRS at 6 months: 1.6 ± 1.1.

- Chronic pain: 6.5%.

Interaction p = 0.047

Bilateral repair is independently associated with higher pain scores:

Adjusted β = +0.42 NRS points, p = 0.031

Multivariable Logistic Regression for Chronic Pain (6 Months)

Table 6. Independent predictors.

Variable	Adjusted OR	95% CI	p
Supplementary fixation	3.12	1.21–8.02	0.018
BMI ≥30	2.31	1.04–5.14	0.039
Bilateral repair	2.08	1.01–4.91	0.046
Age ≥60	1.29	0.61–2.73	0.49

Model discrimination:
- AUC = 0.81.
- Hosmer–Lemeshow p = 0.71.

Quality of Life Subgroup Findings

Table 7. EQ-5D at 6 months.

Subgroup	Mean EQ-5D	p
Pure fixation	0.90 ± 0.08	—
Supplementary fixation	0.83 ± 0.11	0.014

CCS Discomfort Domain:

Significantly higher discomfort in the supplementary fixation group (p=0.009).

Sensitivity Analyses
1. Excluding bilateral repairs → fixation effect remained (p=0.021).
2. Excluding obese patients → fixation effect remained (p=0.029).
3. Multiple imputation vs complete-case analysis → consistent estimates.
   Results robust [15].

Conclusions

TAPP hernia repair with self-fixating mesh results in clinically meaningful reductions in postoperative pain and significant improvements in quality of life up to 6 months after surgery. These findings support broader adoption of self-fixating mesh in laparoscopic inguinal hernioplasty when feasible and appropriate.

Advanced Statistical Analysis

Propensity Score Matching. Although this was a prospective cohort, the decision to use self-fixating mesh without additional fixation was surgeon-dependent in 14% of cases (additional absorbable tack fixation). To minimize treatment-selection bias, propensity score matching (PSM) was performed comparing:
- Pure self-fixating mesh (no additional fixation) vs
- Self-fixating mesh + supplementary fixation

Propensity Model. A multivariable logistic regression model estimated the probability of receiving supplementary fixation based on:

1. Age.
2. Sex.
3. BMI.
4. ASA class.
5. Hernia type (direct/indirect/scrotal).
6. Defect size.
7. Bilateral repair.
8. Recurrent hernia.
9. Operative time.

Nearest-neighbor 1:1 matching without replacement was used with caliper width = 0.2 SD of logit propensity.

Matching Results

- Initial cohort: n=300; Supplementary fixation: n=42; After matching: 40 matched pairs (n=80).

All baseline covariates achieved balance: Standardized mean differences (SMD) <0.1; Variance ratios within 0.8–1.25. Love plot confirmed adequate balance.

Results After Propensity Score Matching

Pain Outcomes (Matched Cohort)

NRS at 6 months: Pure self-fixating mesh: 1.1 ± 0.8; Supplementary fixation: 2.3 ± 1.2; p = 0.008

Chronic pain (NRS ≥3 at 6 months): Pure fixation: 2.5%; Supplementary fixation: 12.5%; p = 0.041; Absolute risk reduction: 10%; Number Needed to Harm (supplementary fixation): 10.

To analyze pain trajectory over time (baseline, 1, 3, 6 months), a linear mixed-effects model with random intercepts was constructed.

Fixed effects included time, supplementary fixation, age, BMI, bilateral repair and time × fixation interaction too.

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