

Anaesthesia recommendations for patients suffering from

Ellis-van Creveld syndrome

Disease name: Ellis van-Creveld syndrome (EVC)

ICD 10: Q77.6

Synonyms: Chondroectodermal dysplasia, Mesodermic dysplasia

Disease summary:

Ellis van-Creveld syndrome (EVC) is a rare, autosomal recessive disorder with unknown prevalence (about 150 cases were published in the last 50 years, higher prevalence in Amish communities). It is characterized by a tetrad of short stature, short limbs, postaxial polydactylysm (supernumerary fingers and / or toes), ectodermal dysplasia and a high prevalence of congenital heart defects (mainly abnormalities of atrial septation). [1,2] Mutations in the EVC, EVC2 and DYNC2LI1 genes are causative for this disease. Relevant clinical symptoms arise from the disorder of chondral and ectodermal tissues in the body. A narrow thorax due to the shortness of ribs may result in severe postnatal respiratory distress. [1] Dysplastic nails and teeth are further typical symptoms for the disorder. There is no cure for this disease and treatment is mostly symptomatic, involving treatment of respiratory distress due to the narrow chest and the combination with heart failure due to cardiac abnormalities. [1] Cardiac surgery is regularly performed in childhood for correction of congenital heart defects. During childhood and adulthood, patients undergo frequently surgical procedures due to cardiac abnormalities[2],[3] dental problems as well as orthopaedic disabilities. Life expectancy is impaired mainly due to the severity of respiratory distress as well as congenital heart disease in EVC patients. [1-3] [4,5] Perioperative medicine (e.g. surgical procedures, anaesthesia) should be performed after careful evaluation of the specific patient and her/his specific clinical features.

Medicine in progress



Perhaps new knowledge

Every patient is unique

Perhaps the diagnostic is wrong



Find more information on the disease, its centres of reference and patient organisations on Orphanet: www.orpha.net

Typical surgery

In neonatal patients:

Cardiosurgical procedures for correction of cardiac abnormalities (mainly atrial septation defects, frequently with multiple coexisting malformations like hypoplastic left ventricle, VSD were reported). [1-3]

In childhood and adulthood:

Cardiosurgical procedures for correction of cardiac abnormalities (mainly atrial septation defects, common atrium, AV septal defects. Sometimes with coexisting cardiac malformations) [1-3].

Dental surgery due to hypoplastic or absent teeth, orthopaedic surgery (due to bone deformities like progressive valgus deformity, profound contractures, lateral patellar subluxation). [6] Amputation of supernumerary fingers / toes (due to medical / anthropological reasons).

Type of anaesthesia

A general recommendation regarding an ideal anaesthetic approach cannot be given, as both general anaesthesia and regional anaesthesia techniques might present potential problems in specific EVC patients. An individual approach with the surgeon as well as the patient and the competent anaesthetist will possibly rule out the optimal technique.

General anaesthesia might be difficult due to respiratory and cardiac status of the patient with EVC. Airway management should be performed after careful evaluation of potential intubation or mask ventilation which are mainly unrelated to the Ellis-van Creveld syndrome.

Neuraxial regional anaesthesia techniques might be difficult due to skeletal abnormalities like lumbar lordosis or (but only in few patients) scoliosis. Therefore, there is no specific contraindication against neuraxial blockades in patients with EVC which is only based by the disease itself. One case report describes problems with an obstructed epidural catheter in a young man after uncomplicated placement. The obstruction was linked with some spinal abnormalities including short pedicles and a "very narrow bony canal". [7] Catheter removal was only possible after maximal back flexion.

Peripheral regional anaesthesia techniques should be performable in most patients. Due to deformities in the extremities, landmark-guided approach is discouraged for peripheral nerve blocks. An ultrasound examination will help to find the relevant structures for nerve blocks.

Necessary additional diagnostic procedures (preoperative)

A thorough evaluation of the patient's history should focus on cardiac problems (corrected or uncorrected cardiac abnormalities), respiratory status (stable/unstable respiratory dysfunction). Specific laboratory results are usually not helpful in preoperative evaluation if no specific questions arise from anamnesis or clinical examination (e.g. potential bleeding disorder in the anamnesis unrelated to EVC).

Transthoracic echocardiography is recommended in all patients (due to the high prevalence of cardiac abnormalities).

Particular preparation for airway management

A standardized approach for airway examination and detection of airway challenges is recommended. A particular preparation for airway management should be based on the examination results. Small-diameter equipment is recommended in many patients according to the short stature. Orofacial features in EVC patients are regularly no particular issue regarding airway management. [8,9] However, positioning and fixation of a laryngeal mask might be challenging in some patients.

Particular preparation for transfusion or administration of blood products

No specific recommendations are given. No typical bleeding disorders were reported for EVC patients.

Particular preparation for anticoagulation

In patients with cardiac abnormalities and/or cardiac surgery, anticoagulation should be restarted early after operation if anticoagulation is needed e.g. due to atrial fibrillation, in presence of mechanical valves.

Particular precautions for positioning, transport or mobilisation

Due to existing contractures in many EVC patients, careful patient positioning should be performed for surgery.

Probable interaction between anaesthetic agents and patient's long-term medication

Not reported.

Anaesthesiologic procedure

Preoperative evaluation: see details above

Premedication: might be performed weighing the benefits and risks in individual patients.

Prophylaxis for endocarditis: should be performed on patients with congestive heart disease according to current international guidelines and / or after discussion with the responsible cardiologist. [10]

Patient positioning & monitoring: avoid overdilatation in limbs with contractures. Size of the blood pressure cuff should be properly selected to avoid severe measurement error.

IV line: placement might be difficult due to small vein calibres.

Anaesthesia: Induction of anaesthesia should be performed under consideration of patient-specific risk factors unrelated to EVC. Ventilation should be performed carefully with adequately low tidal volumes and properly adjusted ventilator settings to reduce baro-/volutrauma in these patients with thoracic deformities and lower chest wall compliance. [11] There are no absolute or known relative contraindications for anaesthesia-related drugs just because of the disease EVC. There is no specific risk for malignant hyperthermia.

Total intravenous or balanced anesthesia using volatile anaesthetics can be performed safely.

Regional anaesthesia can be performed as described above.

Particular or additional monitoring

Not reported.

Possible complications

In patients with cardiac abnormalities, current guidelines for prophylaxis for endocarditis should be followed. [10] No specific complications were reported regarding complications after surgery in patients with EvC syndrome. However, two single-centre reports described an unexpected high mortality in EVC patients after cardiac surgery. [2,3,5] However, the mortality after surgery of these defects is usually lower than 1% in a general population. Further studies are needed to evaluate this topic adequately.

Lack of larger patient populations results in uncertainty of specific recommendations to reduce postoperative morbidity or mortality in non-cardiac surgery.

Postoperative care

Postoperative care should be based upon the patient's pre-existing conditions as well as the surgical or interventional procedure. Respiratory and cardiac function should be monitored in an appropriately extended stay in PACU, IMC or ICU before transfer to the normal ward or discharge at home is acceptable.

Information about emergency-like situations / Differential diagnostics

Deterioration of pre-existing respiratory or cardiac impairment.

Ambulatory anaesthesia

Specific recommendations for or against ambulatory anaesthesia cannot be given as no published literature exists regarding this topic. Cardiac dysfunction and / or respiratory dysfunction might be a relevant factor for not performing ambulatory anaesthesia in some patients.

Obstetrical anaesthesia

Patients with EVC are fertile, thus obstetrical anaesthetist might face women with EVC for labour analgesia. In general, neuraxial as well as general anaesthesia might be performed in this patient population. Severe complications were not reported. However, the lack of reports of obstetrical anaesthesia should result in proper shared decision making regarding the selection of anaesthesia techniques for specific women. A single case report describes a patient undergoing caesarean section after unsuccessful spinal anaesthesia and performance of uncomplicated general anaesthesia. [11]

Literature and internet links

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Last date of modification: August 2017

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Please note that this guideline has not been reviewed by two anaesthesiologists, but two disease experts instead.
