

Publication

Stress doses of hydrocortisone, traumatic memories, and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder in patients after cardiac surgery: a randomized study

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Traumatic experiences associated with cardiac surgery (CS) can result in traumatic memories and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Because it is known that subjects who develop PTSD often show sustained reductions in circulating cortisol concentrations, we performed a prospective, randomized study to examine whether exogenously administered stress doses of hydrocortisone during the perioperative period of CS reduces the long-term incidence of chronic stress and PTSD symptoms.; Patients (n = 91) were prospectively randomized to receive either stress doses of hydrocortisone or standard treatment during the perioperative period of CS. Of 48 available patients at 6 months after CS, 26 had received stress doses of hydrocortisone and 22 standard treatment. Traumatic memories and PTSD symptoms were diagnosed with previously validated questionnaires.; As compared with patients after standard therapy, patients from the hydrocortisone group had significantly lower chronic stress symptom scores ($p < .05$). There was no significant difference regarding the number or type of traumatic memories between the hydrocortisone and the standard treatment groups.; Stress doses of hydrocortisone in patients undergoing CS are associated with a lower intensity of chronic stress and PTSD symptoms at 6 months after CS.

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