

4D ultrasound as a method to assess uterine peristalsis

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Objective: To study uterine peristalsis using step-by-step 4-dimensional (4D) ultrasound assessment video, explore its relationship with progesterone levels in a select in vitro fertilization population, and assess the reproducibility of the technique.

Design: Four-dimensional uterine ultrasound and a retrospective analysis of outcomes in relation with progesterone levels. The videos were also analyzed by a senior doctor, junior doctor, and a nurse for their reproducibility.

Setting: Instituto Bernabeu of Alicante is a private clinic.

Patient(s): The study included 197 consecutive patients undergoing in vitro fertilization (from 2018 to 2019) with a history of recurrent implantation failure (defined as unsuccessful implantation of a total number of ≥ 3 blastocysts originated from oocyte donation cycles). Because it is known that most failures are attributed to the quality of the embryo, we deemed it important to explore the potential uterine factors explaining the failures in oocyte donation cycles, the use of which decreases the probability of embryo-related factors influencing it.

Intervention(s): The participants were evaluated for uterine contractions and serum progesterone levels (10–30 minutes before the embryo transfer procedure). Uterine contractility (UC) was assessed by recording a 6-minute-long video using a 4D mode (Voluson E10; General Electric, Boston, MA), which was performed by a single operator (B.M.).

Main Outcomes Measure(s): The contractions were seen like waves going through the endometrial cavity. They were counted on a $\times 15$ accelerated recording video. To define high-frequency UC, we separated uterine peristalsis (contractions per minute [cpm]) into quartiles. The highest quartile defined the hypercontractility group (>1.51 cpm; $n = 41$), considering the remaining quartiles as the normal contractility group (≤ 1.51 cpm; $n = 156$). The Mann-Whitney U test was performed. The intraclass correlation coefficient was used to validate variability. $P < .05$ was considered significant. SPSS version 21.0 was used for the statistical analysis. The institutional review board's approval was obtained.

Result(s): Overall, an average of 1.1 cpm was found in the study population. There were no differences between the groups (hypercontractility vs. normal contractility) in terms of patient age and the presence of any uterine factor (adenomyosis, myomas, adhesions, or polyps). An inverse association was observed between UC and progesterone levels. Low progesterone levels (15.9 vs. 19.5 ng/mL; $P = .027$) were observed in the HUP and NUP group, respectively. The intraclass correlation coefficient to evaluate the interobserver variability was 0.75 (0.63–0.85; $P = .000$).

Conclusion(s): Four-dimensional ultrasound assessment provides a dynamic view of uterine contractions, including their directionality and frequency. Even though recurrent implantation failure is yet a title of obscure definition and probably associated with multiple factors, a subgroup of patients with elevated UC associated with “low” progesterone levels may have a potential effect on their outcomes. Four-dimensional scan evaluation of UC constitutes a promising diagnostic tool in clinical practice; however, larger studies confirming our initial results are still pending.

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El resumen está disponible en Español al final del artículo.

Key Words: Uterine contraction, progesterone, embryo implantation, ultrasonography, diagnostic imaging

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SUGGESTED READING

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Ecografía 4D como método para evaluar la peristalsis uterina.

Objetivo: Estudiar la peristalsis uterina mediante la evaluación en video de ecografía en 4 dimensiones (4D) paso a paso, explorar su relación con los niveles de progesterona en una población seleccionada de fecundación in vitro, y evaluar la reproducibilidad de la técnica.

Diseño: Ecografía uterina en cuatro dimensiones y análisis retrospectivo de los resultados en relación con los niveles de progesterona. Los videos fueron también analizados por un doctor senior, un doctor junior y una enfermera para su reproducibilidad.

Lugar de realización: Instituto Bernabeu de Alicante, clínica privada.

Paciente (s): El estudio incluyó 197 pacientes consecutivas sometidas a fecundación in vitro (desde 2018 a 2019) con una historia de fallo de implantación recurrente (definido como implantación fallida de un número total de ≥ 3 blastocistos originados de ciclos de donación de ovocitos). Debido a que se conoce que la mayoría de los fallos se atribuyen a la calidad del embrión, consideramos que es importante explorar los factores uterinos potenciales para explicar los fallos en ciclos de donación de ovocitos, cuyo uso disminuye la probabilidad de influencia de factores relacionados con el embrión.

Intervención (es): Las participantes fueron evaluadas para contracciones uterinas y valores séricos de progesterona (10-30 minutos antes del procedimiento de transferencia embrionaria). La contractilidad uterina (UC) se evaluó mediante la grabación de un video de 6 minutos de duración utilizando el modo 4D (Voluson E10; General Electric, Boston, MA), que fue realizada por un único operador (B.M.)

Variable principal (es): Las contracciones se visualizaron como ondas a través de la cavidad endometrial. Se contaron sobre una grabación en video acelerada $\times 15$. Para definir UC de alta frecuencia, separamos la peristalsis uterina (contracciones por minuto [cpm]) en cuartiles. El cuartil más elevado definió el grupo de hipercontractibilidad (> 1.51 cpm; $n=41$), considerando los cuartiles restantes como el grupo de contractilidad normal (≤ 1.51 cpm; $n=156$). Se realizó un test U de Mann-Whitney. El coeficiente de correlación intraclase se utilizó para validar la variabilidad. Se consideró $P < .05$ como significativo. Se utilizó el SPSS versión 21.0 para el análisis estadístico. Se obtuvo la aprobación del comité de ética.

Resultados: En general, se encontró una media de 1.1 cpm en la población de estudio. No existieron diferencias entre los grupos (hipercontractibilidad vs. contractilidad normal) en términos de edad de la paciente y presencia de algún factor uterino (adenomiosis, miomas, adhesiones o pólipos). Se observó una asociación inversa entre UC y los niveles de progesterona. Se observaron bajos niveles de progesterona (15.9 vs. 19.5 ng/mL; $P = .027$) en los grupos HUP y NUP, respectivamente. El coeficiente de correlación intraclase para evaluar la variabilidad inter observador fue 0.75 [0.63-0.85; $P = .000$].

Conclusiones: La evaluación mediante la ecografía en cuatro dimensiones proporciona una visión dinámica de las contracciones uterinas, incluyendo su direccionalidad y frecuencia. A pesar de que el fallo de implantación recurrente es todavía el nombre de una definición no clara y probablemente asociada a múltiples factores, un subgrupo de pacientes con elevado UC asociado a "bajos" niveles de progesterona puede tener un efecto potencial en sus resultados. La evaluación del UC en cuatro dimensiones constituye una herramienta diagnóstica prometedora en la práctica clínica; sin embargo, son necesarios estudios mayores para confirmar nuestros resultados iniciales.