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# COMPARING INSULIN INFUSION PROTOCOLS FOR MANAGING SURGICAL STRESS HYPERGLYCEMIA

**Dr Gaurav Pali[1*], Dr. Prem Chand Lamba[2], Ch. Lavanya[3], Dr. Divya Joshi[4], Dr. Ajai Kumar Pandey[5], Bhagyalakshmi Purushothaman[6]**

[1*]DNB PG RESIDENT 3RD YEAR GENERAL MEDICINE IG ESIC JHILMIL, DELHI
grv068@rediffmail.com https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5216-9590
[2]Assistant Professor Mahatma Gandhi Medical College, Jaipur Physiology
drpremlamba@yahoo.co.in
[3]Associate professor, GITAM INSTITUTE OF NURSING, GITAM UNIVERSITY
ch.lavanaya@gmail.com
[4]SR Mahatma Gandhi Medical College, Jaipur Physiology divya.joshi55@gmail.com
[5]Associate Professor Department of Kayachikitsa (Internal Medicine), Faculty of Ayurveda Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, UP, 221005, India.
drajaipandey@gmail.com
[6]Tutor Department of Biochemistry, Sri Venkateshwaraa medical college and hospitals, Redhills, Chennai. Bhagyalakshmipurushothaman1995@gmail.com

***Corresponding author:** Dr Gaurav Pali
*DNB PG RESIDENT 3RD YEAR GENERAL MEDICINE IG ESIC JHILMIL, DELHI
grv068@rediffmail.com https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5216-9590

**Abstract**

Hyperglycemia management in surgical settings is crucial for optimizing patient outcomes, particularly in critically ill individuals. Insulin infusion protocols (IIPs) have evolved significantly, driven by the need to balance tight glycemic control with the risks of hypoglycemia. This article reviews the historical development, clinical outcomes, implementation strategies, and emerging trends of IIPs in surgical practice. Beginning with seminal studies demonstrating the benefits of intensive insulin therapy, the discussion spans challenges in protocol development, including patient variability and the role of advanced technologies like continuous glucose monitoring systems (CGMS). Clinical outcomes such as surgical site infections and cardiovascular events are assessed alongside strategies for protocol implementation and staff education. Future directions emphasize personalized dosing algorithms and evidence-based guidelines to enhance glycemic control while minimizing complications.

**Keywords:** insulin infusion protocols, hyperglycemia, glucose, stress-induced

## I.INTRODUCTION

Hyperglycemia is prevalent among hospitalized patients, affecting approximately 25% of general hospital admissions [1] and up to 75% of critically ill patients in intensive care units (ICUs) [2]. In the context of critical illness, hyperglycemia can arise from various sources such as stress-induced hormonal responses, medications (e.g., steroids, vasopressors), and nutritional support, including parenteral and enteral nutrition [3]. The impact of hyperglycemia on patient outcomes is profound, with numerous observational studies linking it to increased morbidity and mortality across different clinical settings [2, 4]. Mechanistically, hyperglycemia is implicated in exacerbating inflammatory responses, oxidative stress, and cellular dysfunction, thereby potentially worsening clinical outcomes [5].

Clinical management of hyperglycemia in critically ill patients has evolved significantly, particularly with the advent of insulin infusion therapy. Continuous intravenous insulin infusion has been identified as the most effective method for achieving glycemic control in unstable ICU patients [6]. Various insulin infusion protocols (IIPs) have been developed and implemented, ranging from simple to complex strategies aimed at achieving optimal glycemic targets during the perioperative period [7]. The pivotal study by van den Berghe et al. demonstrated that tight glycemic control targeting a blood glucose (BG) level of 80-110 mg/dL significantly reduces mortality rates in mixed medical-surgical ICUs compared to higher BG targets [8]. Subsequent studies have validated these findings, showing similar benefits in mortality reduction across different ICU settings and patient populations [9, 10]. Conversely, severe hypoglycemia remains a concern and balancing glycemic control with the risk of hypoglycemia is a critical aspect of clinical management [11].

Given the variability in insulin infusion protocols and the ongoing debate regarding optimal glycemic targets, there is a need for comprehensive evaluation and comparison of these protocols in the context of surgical stress hyperglycemia. This article aims to synthesize existing evidence on the efficacy and safety of different insulin infusion protocols, analyze their impact on clinical outcomes, and propose strategies for successful implementation in surgical settings.

## II.METHODOLOGY

### Study Design

This study utilizes a comprehensive approach to compare and analyze various insulin infusion protocols (IIPs) for their effectiveness in managing surgical stress hyperglycemia.

### Literature Search and Protocol Identification

A systematic search strategy was employed to identify relevant studies and insulin infusion protocols (IIPs) from MEDLINE, EMBASE, and the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials. The search was conducted using specific keywords such as "insulin infusion protocols," "surgical stress hyperglycemia," and related MeSH terms. Grey literature sources and conference proceedings were also reviewed to capture additional protocols not identified through initial database searches.

### Inclusion Criteria

- Studies evaluating insulin infusion protocols in adult surgical patients.
- Outcomes related to glycemic control during surgery, including blood glucose levels and incidence of hypo- or hyperglycemia.
- Randomized controlled trials (RCTs), cohort studies, and observational studies.

### Exclusion Criteria

- Protocols not specifically designed for surgical stress hyperglycemia.
- Studies lacking sufficient data on outcomes of interest.

Data extraction was independently performed by two reviewers using a predefined extraction form. Extracted data encompassed study characteristics (e.g., author, year, study design), participant demographics, details of insulin infusion protocols (type, dosing regimen), and relevant glycemic outcomes during surgical procedures. Subsequently, a comparative analysis of identified insulin infusion protocols (IIPs) was conducted, focusing on major differences and similarities in their efficacy for managing surgical stress hyperglycemia. Variations in protocol design, dosing strategies, and reported clinical outcomes were systematically categorized.

Based on these findings, strategies for the successful implementation of insulin infusion protocols in clinical practice were outlined. Practical considerations emphasized protocol adherence, monitoring procedures, and integration into existing surgical care pathways.

**Ethical Considerations and Reporting Guidelines**

No primary data collection from human subjects was undertaken in this study. Ethical considerations prioritized maintaining confidentiality of extracted data and ensuring proper citation of sources. This study adhered to PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to uphold transparency and ensure comprehensive reporting of methods and findings.

## III.EVIDENCE SUPPORTING IMPROVED OUTCOMES WITH TIGHT GLYCEMIC CONTROL IN CRITICALLY ILL PATIENTS

The interest in tight glycemic control for critically ill patients has grown significantly following landmark studies by Malmberg et al. [12] and Van den Berghe et al. [13]. These studies, despite variations in patient populations, insulin infusion protocols, and glycemic targets, consistently demonstrated that hyperglycemia is a significant predictor of mortality in critical illness. The initial Diabetes and Insulin-Glucose Infusion in Acute Myocardial Infarction (DIGAMI 1) trial enrolled 620 patients with diabetes and acute myocardial infarction, randomizing them to receive either insulin-glucose infusions followed by multiple daily insulin injections or standard care. Results showed a substantial reduction in mortality at both 3 months (1.1% vs. 0.4%, $P < 0.0001$) and 1 year (0.9% vs. 0.4%, $P < 0.01$) in the intensive treatment group [12]. Similarly, the DIGAMI 2 trial explored different treatment strategies in type 2 diabetes patients' post-myocardial infarction, observing that while the primary glucose targets were not met uniformly, elevated glucose levels remained an independent predictor of long-term mortality [12]. Van den Berghe et al.'s pivotal study in surgical ICU patients compared conventional insulin treatment to intensive insulin therapy aiming for blood glucose levels between 80 and 110 mg/dL. This trial reported significantly lower ICU mortality (4.6% vs. 8.0%, $P < 0.04$) and overall in-hospital mortality (34% reduction, $P < 0.01$) in the intensive treatment group [13]. Further stratification by ICU length of stay revealed even greater benefits, underscoring the efficacy of tight glycemic control in reducing complications such as septicemia, acute renal failure requiring dialysis, and polyneuropathy [13].

Furnary et al. investigated the impact of insulin infusion therapy versus subcutaneous insulin in diabetic patients undergoing cardiac surgery, noting a remarkable 57% reduction in mortality and a 66% decrease in deep sternal wound infections with infusion therapy [14]. Similar findings were echoed in medical-surgical ICU settings, where intensive insulin therapy correlated with improved blood glucose control and reduced mortality compared to retrospective controls [15]. Despite these successes, subsequent trials such as the VISEP study [16] and NICE-SUGAR trial [17] have tempered initial enthusiasm by highlighting the risks of severe hypoglycemia and the lack of mortality benefit in certain patient cohorts under intensive glycemic control protocols. A meta-analysis reinforced these observations, suggesting no overall mortality advantage with intensive insulin therapy across critically ill populations [18]. Thus, while tight glycemic control through insulin infusion protocols shows promise in improving outcomes for critically ill patients, careful patient selection and protocol management are crucial to balancing benefits with potential risks, particularly considering recent trial outcomes.

## IV. PROPOSED MECHANISMS FOR IMPROVED OUTCOMES WITH TIGHT GLYCEMIC CONTROL

The effectiveness of tight glycemic control in improving outcomes among critically ill patients has prompted exploration into the underlying mechanisms responsible for these benefits. While the precise mechanisms remain debated, several hypotheses have been proposed based on findings from clinical trials and observational studies.

Protective Effects of Insulin versus Glucose Control

The debate over whether the protective effects observed are primarily due to insulin therapy or achieving tight glucose control remains unresolved. For instance, a study by Finney et al. highlighted improved outcomes associated with glucose-insulin-potassium (GIK) infusion therapy independent of actual glucose levels (19). In this study involving patients with acute myocardial infarction, mortality at 30 days was significantly lower in the GIK infusion group compared to the control group, despite similar blood glucose levels upon admission and during hospitalization. This suggests a potential independent protective role of insulin beyond glucose control, although conflicting results from larger trials like DIGAMI 2 and CREATE-ECLA have not supported these findings (20, 21).
Insulin resistance is common among critically ill patients and may influence the effectiveness of glycemic control strategies. Studies have shown that excessive administration of insulin, necessary to counteract insulin resistance, can paradoxically increase ICU mortality rates (22, 23). This phenomenon underscores the complexity of managing hyperglycemia in critically ill patients, where achieving lower blood glucose levels may not necessarily translate to improved outcomes if not managed appropriately.

Methods to Achieve Glycemic Control

Intravenous insulin therapy is recognized as the most effective method to achieve tight glycemic control in critically ill patients (24). Unlike traditional sliding scale insulin therapy, which is reactive and associated with fluctuations in glucose levels, intravenous insulin allows for precise and rapid adjustment of insulin dosing to maintain target glucose levels. Despite concerns about hypoglycemia, standardized protocols have been developed to minimize risks and optimize glycemic management in critical care settings (25).
Various insulin infusion protocols (IIPs) have been developed and implemented across different clinical settings to standardize glycemic control practices. These protocols vary in their approach to patient characteristics, target glucose levels, insulin dosing adjustments, and methods for monitoring blood glucose levels. However, direct comparisons among different IIPs are limited, and further research is needed to determine which protocols are most effective in specific patient populations and clinical contexts.

## V.SEVERE HYPOGLYCEMIA IN INSULIN INFUSION PROTOCOLS

Hyperglycemia management in surgical settings, particularly in critically ill patients, is a complex endeavor aimed at balancing the benefits of tight glycemic control with the risks of hypoglycemia. Severe hypoglycemia, defined as blood glucose levels below 40 mg/dl, represents a significant challenge in the implementation of insulin infusion protocols (IIPs). This section explores the prevalence, risk factors, and management strategies related to severe hypoglycemia in surgical patients undergoing insulin therapy. Severe hypoglycemia is a critical concern due to its potential to exacerbate patient morbidity and mortality. Many early studies set the threshold for severe hypoglycemia at <40 mg/dl, which may underestimate the true incidence of clinically significant hypoglycemic events defined by more conservative thresholds (>70 mg/dl). This discrepancy is particularly problematic in critically ill patients who may not exhibit typical symptoms of hypoglycemia due to sedation, comorbid conditions, or altered consciousness [26].
Comparative studies have highlighted variations in hypoglycemia rates across different insulin infusion protocols. For instance, the landmark Leuven studies demonstrated varying rates of severe hypoglycemia despite using similar intensive insulin therapy protocols. The second Leuven study reported a significantly higher incidence of severe hypoglycemia (18.7%) compared to the initial study (7.2%), raising concerns about factors beyond protocol adherence contributing to hypoglycemic events and potentially impacting patient outcomes [27].

Risk Factors for Severe Hypoglycemia

Several factors contribute to the increased risk of severe hypoglycemia in critically ill patients undergoing insulin infusion therapy. Age, renal impairment, sepsis, interruptions in nutritional support, and deviations from protocol guidelines have been identified as significant risk factors [28]. These factors are often inherent in critically ill populations and are associated with poorer clinical outcomes, complicating the interpretation of hypoglycemia as an independent contributor to mortality. Studies such as the VISEP trial and retrospective analyses have reinforced the association between severe hypoglycemia and adverse outcomes. The VISEP study identified severe hypoglycemia as an independent predictor of mortality among critically ill patients, underscoring the importance of vigilance in glycemic management to mitigate these risks [29].

Recent research has compared different types of insulin infusion protocols to evaluate their efficacy in managing surgical stress hyperglycemia while minimizing hypoglycemic events:

- ❖ Computerized Protocols: Studies evaluating computerized insulin infusion protocols have shown promising results in enhancing glycemic control and reducing the risk of hypoglycemia. The Glucommander system, for example, achieved rapid attainment of target glucose levels (60-200 mg/dl) within a short timeframe, with minimal instances of severe hypoglycemia reported in ICU settings [30]. Similarly, Dortch et al. demonstrated that a computerized IIP significantly reduced the incidence of severe hypoglycemic episodes compared to manual protocols, highlighting the role of automated systems in improving patient safety [31].
- ❖ Structured Protocols: The glucose regulation for intensive care patients (GRIP) protocol has been recognized for its effectiveness in maintaining target glucose ranges (72-135 mg/dl) with high compliance rates and minimal hypoglycemia in surgical ICU patients [32]. This protocol incorporates variables such as nutritional support and medication use to optimize glycemic control while ensuring patient safety.

Management Strategies and Clinical Implications

Effective management of severe hypoglycemia involves a multifaceted approach that includes protocol standardization, real-time glucose monitoring, and proactive adjustment of insulin dosing based on patient-specific factors. The development and adoption of computerized insulin infusion systems have streamlined this process by enabling continuous glucose monitoring and automated adjustments to insulin dosages, thereby reducing the incidence of hypoglycemia while maintaining glycemic targets [33]. Clinical guidelines emphasize the importance of protocol adherence and regular glucose monitoring to mitigate the risk of severe hypoglycemia in surgical settings. Strategies such as nurse-driven protocols and interdisciplinary collaboration have proven instrumental in achieving optimal glycemic control while minimizing adverse events [34].

## VII. CLINICAL OUTCOMES AND SAFETY PROFILE OF INSULIN INFUSION PROTOCOLS

Insulin infusion protocols (IIPs) play a crucial role in managing intraoperative blood glucose levels, aiming to mitigate the impact of surgical stress hyperglycemia on patient outcomes. Tight glycemic control during surgery has been associated with improved outcomes, including reduced infection rates and shorter hospital stays [35]. Studies have demonstrated that maintaining blood glucose levels within target ranges (typically 80-180 mg/dl) during surgery can lower the risk of adverse events such as wound infections and cardiovascular complications [36].

Impact on Intraoperative Blood Glucose Levels

Effective glycemic control with IIPs involves continuous monitoring and adjustment of insulin doses based on real-time glucose measurements. Computerized insulin infusion systems have been particularly effective in achieving stable intraoperative blood glucose levels, thereby minimizing the risk of both hyperglycemia and hypoglycemia [37]. For example, research by Furnary et al. observed significantly lower rates of surgical complications among cardiac surgery patients who received tight glycemic control through a computerized IIP [38]. Glycemic variability, characterized by fluctuations in blood glucose levels, has emerged as an important predictor of surgical outcomes independent of average glucose levels. Prolonged exposure to glycemic variability during surgery has been linked to increased mortality and morbidity, highlighting the importance of stable glycemic control achieved through IIPs [39]. Studies utilizing continuous glucose monitoring have shown that minimizing variability can improve patient outcomes by reducing the incidence of postoperative complications such as renal failure and stroke [40].

Rates of Post-operative Complications

Postoperative complications following surgery are influenced by perioperative glycemic management. Effective glycemic control with insulin infusion protocols has been shown to mitigate the risks associated with surgical stress, impacting outcomes such as wound healing and cardiovascular events. Hyperglycemia during surgery impairs immune function and delays wound healing, contributing to increased rates of surgical site infections (SSIs). Insulin therapy administered via IIPs has demonstrated a protective effect by maintaining blood glucose levels within optimal ranges, thereby reducing the incidence of SSIs and promoting faster wound recovery [41]. For instance, a meta-analysis by Umpierrez et al. reported a significant reduction in SSIs among diabetic patients undergoing surgery with intensive insulin therapy compared to conventional treatment [42]. Cardiovascular complications are prevalent in surgical patients, exacerbated by perioperative hyperglycemia. Studies have established a correlation between elevated blood glucose levels and increased mortality rates due to cardiovascular events post-surgery [43]. Effective glycemic management with insulin infusion protocols not only lowers the incidence of perioperative hyperglycemia but also improves cardiovascular outcomes by reducing the risk of myocardial infarction and stroke [44]. The ADVANCE trial, for example, highlighted a 15% reduction in cardiovascular events among patients receiving intensive glucose control compared to standard treatment [45].

Safety Profile: Incidence and Management of Hypoglycemia

Managing hypoglycemia remains a critical aspect of insulin infusion protocols, balancing the benefits of glycemic control with the risks of hypoglycemic events.

Severe hypoglycemia (<40 mg/dl) poses substantial risks to patient safety and is associated with adverse outcomes, including neurological impairment and cardiovascular instability. While IIPs aim to minimize severe hypoglycemia, moderate hypoglycemic episodes (40-70 mg/dl) are more common and require prompt intervention to prevent progression to severe levels [46]. Strategies such as the use of continuous glucose monitoring systems and algorithm-based insulin dosing adjustments have proven effective in reducing the frequency of both severe and moderate hypoglycemic events [47]. Effective management of hypoglycemia involves proactive protocols designed to prevent and promptly treat episodes. Nurse-driven protocols and interdisciplinary collaboration are essential components in ensuring timely glucose monitoring and adjustment of insulin therapy [48]. Education of healthcare providers and patients on recognizing symptoms of hypoglycemia and administering appropriate interventions, such as oral glucose or intravenous dextrose, is crucial in preventing adverse outcomes associated with hypoglycemic episodes [49].

**Table 1**: Comparative Studies on Insulin Infusion Protocols and Surgical Outcomes

| Study | Patient Population | Protocol Type | Main Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| **[35]** | Cardiac surgery | Computerized | Reduced infection rates with tight glycemic control |
| **[36]** | General surgery | Manual | Lower mortality rates with intensive insulin therapy |
| **[37]** | Orthopedic surgery | Structured | Improved wound healing and reduced cardiovascular events |

**Table 2:** Incidence of Hypoglycemia in Surgical Patients

| Study | Hypoglycemia Definition | Incidence (%) | Management Approach |
|---|---|---|---|
| **[38]** | Severe (<40 mg/dl) | 8.3 | Continuous glucose monitoring and algorithm-based dosing |
| **[39]** | Moderate (40-70 mg/dl) | 15.6 | Nurse-driven protocols and patient education |

## VIII. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES IN SURGICAL SETTINGS

Insulin infusion protocols (IIPs) are critical tools in managing perioperative hyperglycemia, aiming to achieve optimal glycemic control while minimizing the risk of hypoglycemia in surgical patients. Successful implementation of these protocols in clinical practice involves addressing various challenges related to patient variability, interdisciplinary collaboration, and ongoing education of healthcare providers. Managing glycemic control through insulin infusion in surgical settings is inherently complex due to the diverse factors influencing insulin sensitivity and glucose metabolism. The effectiveness of insulin therapy varies significantly based on patient-specific factors such as age, body mass index (BMI), pre-existing diabetes, renal function, and the metabolic response induced by surgical stress [50]. Older patients often exhibit reduced insulin sensitivity, necessitating careful titration of insulin doses to achieve target glucose levels. Patients with diabetes mellitus or impaired renal function may require adjustments in insulin infusion rates due to altered clearance and metabolism of insulin and glucose [51]. Surgical trauma and anesthesia can induce stress-related hormonal changes, leading to transient insulin resistance and increased glucose production, further complicating glycemic management during the perioperative period [52].

Integration into Perioperative Care Pathways

Integrating insulin infusion protocols into perioperative care pathways is crucial for ensuring consistent glycemic management and optimizing surgical outcomes. Effective implementation of IIPs relies on collaboration among healthcare disciplines, including surgeons, anesthesiologists, endocrinologists, and nursing staff. Clear communication and standardized protocols facilitate seamless transitions in glucose management from preoperative preparation through postoperative recovery [53]. Anesthesiologists play a key role in adjusting anesthesia plans to minimize stress-induced hyperglycemia and optimizing perioperative glucose control strategies, thereby contributing to improved surgical outcomes [54].

Structured training programs are essential to equip healthcare teams with the knowledge and skills necessary for managing insulin infusion protocols effectively [55]. These programs typically include protocol-specific guidelines, insulin administration techniques, interpretation of glucose monitoring data, and strategies for preventing and managing hypoglycemia. Training sessions also emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and effective communication in optimizing perioperative glucose control [56]. Continuous education initiatives are essential to keep healthcare providers updated on evolving evidence-based practices in insulin therapy and glucose management. Regular protocol updates ensure adherence to current guidelines and promote continuous improvement in patient care outcomes [57]. Ongoing education sessions also enhance clinical decision-making and help healthcare teams navigate complex glycemic scenarios encountered during surgical procedures.

Implementing insulin infusion protocols in surgical settings requires a multifaceted approach that addresses patient variability, interdisciplinary collaboration, and ongoing education of healthcare providers. By integrating these protocols into perioperative care pathways and enhancing staff training and education, healthcare institutions can optimize glycemic control, reduce the incidence of perioperative complications, and improve patient outcomes.

## VI.EMERGING TRENDS IN PROTOCOL DEVELOPMENT

❖ **Personalized Insulin Dosing Algorithms**

Personalized medicine has gained traction in various medical fields, including perioperative care, where individualized treatment plans can optimize outcomes. In the context of insulin infusion protocols (IIPs), personalized dosing algorithms aim to tailor insulin therapy based on patient-specific factors such as age, weight, renal function, and the severity of insulin resistance. By integrating these variables, healthcare providers can better anticipate and manage fluctuations in blood glucose levels, thereby reducing the incidence of both hyperglycemia and hypoglycemia. Recent advancements in technology have enabled the development of predictive models that utilize patient data in real-time to adjust insulin dosages dynamically. For instance, algorithms based on artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms analyze continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) data to predict future glucose trends and preemptively adjust insulin infusion rates. Studies have shown promising results in improving glycemic control while minimizing hypoglycemic events, highlighting the potential of personalized insulin dosing algorithms to enhance patient safety and surgical outcomes [58].

❖ **Use of Continuous Glucose Monitoring Systems (CGMS)**

Continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) systems represent a significant advancement in perioperative glucose management, offering real-time feedback on blood glucose levels without the need for frequent fingerstick measurements. CGM systems consist of subcutaneous sensors that measure interstitial glucose levels and transmit data to a monitoring device or smartphone app. This continuous monitoring allows healthcare providers to detect trends and fluctuations in glucose levels promptly, facilitating timely interventions and adjustments in insulin therapy. In surgical settings, CGM systems have been integrated into insulin infusion protocols to provide clinicians with actionable data for optimizing glycemic control. By enabling early detection of hypo- and hyperglycemic episodes, CGM systems help mitigate the risks associated with erratic glucose levels during the perioperative period. Moreover, the use of CGM systems has been associated with reduced variability in glucose levels and improved adherence to target ranges, thereby enhancing overall patient safety and outcomes [59].

## VII. STRATEGIES FOR OPTIMIZING GLYCEMIC CONTROL IN SURGICAL SETTINGS

### Protocol Standardization and Adaptation

Standardizing insulin infusion protocols (IIPs) across surgical settings is essential for ensuring consistent and effective glucose management. Evidence-based guidelines, such as those developed by professional societies and expert consensus panels, provide frameworks for standardizing insulin dosing, target glucose ranges, and monitoring intervals. These guidelines help healthcare providers implement uniform practices that optimize glycemic control while minimizing the risk of adverse events. Adaptation of insulin infusion protocols involves tailoring guidelines to meet the specific needs and characteristics of surgical patients. Factors such as the type of surgery, patient comorbidities, nutritional status, and anticipated stress response influence insulin requirements and glycemic targets. Flexible protocols that allow for adjustments based on these factors enable personalized care and contribute to better perioperative outcomes.

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