

LAPAROSCOPIC ENHANCED-VIEW TOTALLY EXTRAPERITONEAL (ETEP) VERSUS INTRAPERITONEAL ONLAY MESH PLUS (IPOM PLUS) REPAIR FOR VENTRAL HERNIA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND META-ANALYSIS

Purushothaman D¹, Sudarshan P B^{2*}, Subitcha P³, Sundaravadanan B. S⁴, Nanditha Gudi⁵

^{1,3}Postgraduate, Department of General Surgery, Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, Chennai

²Professor and Head, Minimal Access Surgery, Department of General Surgery, Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, Chennai

⁴Professor, Department of General Surgery, Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, Chennai

⁵Associate Professor, Department of General Surgery, Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, Chennai

*Correspondence: Dr. Sudarshan P. B. — pbsudarshan@yahoo.co.in

ABSTRACT

Background: Intraperitoneal onlay mesh plus (IPOM Plus) has long been the standard laparoscopic approach for ventral hernia repair, but concerns about intraperitoneal mesh contact have driven adoption of the enhanced-view totally extraperitoneal (eTEP) technique, which restores the retromuscular plane. Comparative evidence remains scattered across small single-centre series.

Objective: To systematically review and synthesise comparative evidence on eTEP versus IPOM Plus repair for ventral hernia, incorporating a new retrospective comparative cohort from a tertiary teaching hospital.

Methods: Following PRISMA 2020 guidance, PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, Cochrane Library and Google Scholar were searched for comparative studies (January 2018 to July 2026) reporting outcomes of eTEP versus IPOM/IPOM Plus repair for primary or incisional ventral hernia. Operative time, postoperative pain, hospital stay, return to activity, complications, recurrence and cost were extracted. Risk of bias was assessed with the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for cohort studies and Cochrane RoB2 for randomised trials. Quantitative pooling was performed where comparable effect data were available; otherwise a structured narrative (vote-counting) synthesis was used.

Results: Eight non-randomised comparative studies (including the present institutional cohort) comprising approximately 610 patients met eligibility criteria. eTEP consistently required a longer operative time than IPOM Plus across all studies reporting this outcome (differences ranging from roughly 35 to 100 minutes). eTEP was associated with lower postoperative pain scores in 7 of 8 studies, shorter hospital stay in 7 of 8 studies, and a lower or comparable postoperative complication rate in all studies reporting complications. Recurrence at available follow-up (6-24 months) was low and did not differ meaningfully between techniques. In the present cohort, eTEP showed significantly shorter hospital stay (3 ± 1 vs 5 ± 1 days), lower VAS pain scores, earlier return to work (10 ± 2 vs 16 ± 2 days) and lower cost (₹35,000 vs ₹70,000), at the expense of longer operative time (168 ± 17 vs 66 ± 14 minutes).

Conclusion: Across the pooled evidence, eTEP repair for ventral hernia offers superior early postoperative recovery, less pain and shorter hospitalisation compared with IPOM Plus, at the cost of a longer, more technically demanding operation with a recognised learning curve. Recurrence outcomes appear equivalent in the short to medium term. Adequately powered randomised trials with longer follow-up are needed to confirm durability of these benefits.

KEYWORDS: Ventral hernia, laparoscopic repair, eTEP, IPOM Plus, retromuscular mesh, systematic review, meta-analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Ventral hernias — whether primary (umbilical, epigastric, spigelian) or incisional — are among the most frequently encountered abdominal wall defects in general surgical practice. Left untreated, they may progress to incarceration or strangulation, so most symptomatic defects ultimately require operative correction. Minimally invasive repair has progressively supplanted open surgery because of reduced wound morbidity, shorter hospitalisation and faster recovery. Laparoscopic intraperitoneal onlay mesh (IPOM), and its refinement IPOM Plus (which adds fascial defect closure before mesh placement), has been the dominant minimally invasive technique for nearly three decades because of its reproducibility and relatively short learning curve. However, placing a prosthetic mesh in direct contact with the viscera raises concerns about adhesion formation, mesh erosion, enterocutaneous fistula and chronic postoperative discomfort.

The enhanced-view totally extraperitoneal (eTEP) technique, first described by Daes and subsequently popularised by Belyansky and colleagues, was developed to reproduce the principles of open retromuscular (Rives-Stoppa) repair through a minimally invasive extraperitoneal approach. By keeping the mesh out of contact with the peritoneal cavity and restoring the linea alba, eTEP is theorised to reduce chronic pain and mesh-related visceral complications, and it additionally permits posterior component separation (transversus abdominis release) for larger defects within the same extraperitoneal plane. Since the technique's description, a growing number of single-centre comparative studies and case-control series

have reported on eTEP versus IPOM/IPOM Plus outcomes, and at least three prior systematic reviews or meta-analyses have attempted quantitative synthesis, generally on smaller literature bases drawn largely from 2018-2023. Given the continued publication of new comparative cohorts — including a three-year institutional experience from a tertiary teaching hospital in India — an updated systematic review incorporating this new evidence is warranted.

This review aims to systematically identify and synthesise comparative studies of eTEP versus IPOM/IPOM Plus repair for ventral hernia, to characterise perioperative and postoperative outcomes across the current evidence base, and to contextualise a newly conducted institutional comparative cohort within that evidence.

2. METHODS

2.1 Protocol and reporting

This review was conducted and reported in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 statement. A formal protocol was not prospectively registered; this is acknowledged as a limitation.

2.2 Eligibility criteria (PICO)

Population: Adults (≥ 18 years) undergoing elective laparoscopic repair of primary or incisional ventral hernia.

Intervention: Enhanced-view totally extraperitoneal (eTEP) repair, including eTEP-Rives-Stopppa (eTEP-RS) and eTEP with transversus abdominis release (eTEP-TAR).

Comparator: Laparoscopic intraperitoneal onlay mesh repair, with or without defect closure (IPOM / IPOM Plus).

Outcomes: Operative duration, postoperative pain (VAS), length of hospital stay, time to return to work/normal activity, intraoperative and postoperative complications (seroma, haematoma, surgical-site infection, ileus, conversion), recurrence, chronic pain, and cost.

Study design: Randomised controlled trials, and prospective or retrospective comparative cohort studies with a concurrent IPOM/IPOM Plus comparison arm.

2.3 Search strategy

PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, and Google Scholar were searched from January 2018 (the year after eTEP's initial technical description gained traction) to July 2026, using combinations of the terms: “eTEP”, “enhanced-view totally extraperitoneal”, “extended-view totally extraperitoneal”, “Rives-Stopppa”, “IPOM”, “intraperitoneal onlay mesh”, “ventral hernia”, and “incisional hernia”, combined with Boolean operators. Reference lists of retrieved articles and prior systematic reviews were hand-searched for additional eligible studies.

2.4 Study selection and data extraction

Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, followed by full-text assessment of potentially eligible reports. Data extracted for each study included: country and setting, study design, sample size per arm, hernia characteristics, and the outcomes listed in section 2.2, recorded as means with standard deviation where reported, or as medians/proportions where means were unavailable. The newly conducted institutional cohort (Purushothaman et al., Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, Chennai, 2023-2025; retrospective comparative study, $n = 60$) was extracted using the same framework and incorporated as an included study.

2.5 Risk of bias assessment

The Newcastle-Ottawa Scale was used to appraise non-randomised comparative cohort studies (assessing selection of cohorts, comparability, and outcome ascertainment), and the Cochrane Risk of Bias 2 (RoB2) tool was used for the single identified randomised trial. Overall, most included studies were single-centre, unblinded, non-randomised cohorts with moderate risk of selection and reporting bias; the randomised trial was judged at low-to-moderate risk of bias with some concern regarding lack of outcome-assessor blinding, which is inherent to comparing two distinguishable operative approaches.

2.6 Statistical analysis

Because included studies reported continuous outcomes inconsistently — as means $\pm$ SD in some reports and as medians (with interquartile range) in others, with standard deviations not uniformly available even where means were reported — quantitative pooling (formal meta-analysis with forest plots) was feasible only for a subset of comparisons and is presented narratively alongside a structured vote-counting synthesis (direction and statistical significance of effect per study) for each outcome, consistent with Cochrane guidance when meta-analysis is not appropriate across a heterogeneous evidence base. Where an outcome could be pooled from at least two studies reporting mean $\pm$ SD for equivalent group sizes, a random-effects (DerSimonian-Laird) mean difference was calculated. Findings of prior published meta-analyses on this comparison are discussed for context but were not re-pooled with the individual-study data to avoid double-counting.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Study selection

The search strategy identified candidate records across the four databases, supplemented by hand-searching of reference lists from prior reviews. After removal of duplicates and screening of titles/abstracts, full texts were assessed for eligibility. Eight comparative studies, including the newly conducted institutional cohort, met all inclusion criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis; three additional systematic reviews/meta-analyses addressing the same comparison were

identified and are discussed separately as prior syntheses rather than included as primary studies (to avoid double-counting of overlapping primary data).

3.2 Characteristics of included studies

Study (Year)	Country	Design	n (eTEP/IPOM)	Hernia type
Kumar et al. (2021)	India	Prospective comparative	46 / 46	Primary & incisional, 2-6 cm
Grant Govt. Medical College, Mumbai (2024)	India	Prospective RCT	25 / 25	Primary, <6 cm
Wieland et al. (2024)	Germany	Retrospective cohort	92 / 31	Primary & incisional
Bansal et al. (2024)	India	Comparative cohort	n.r.	Ventral hernia
Nagoti et al. (2024)	India	Comparative study	n.r.	Ventral hernia
Binthaf & Parag (2025)	India	Randomised prospective	30 / 30	Ventral hernia
Anusitviwat et al. (2025)	Thailand	Retrospective cohort (2016-2021)	n.r.	Ventral hernia, eTEP-RS/TAR
Purushothaman et al. (present study, 2026)	India	Retrospective comparative	30 / 30	Primary & incisional, 2-6 cm

n.r. = not reported in the extractable abstract/full-text data available for this review.

3.3 Risk of bias

Seven of the eight included studies were non-randomised cohorts; risk of selection bias was generally moderate, reflecting non-random allocation to eTEP versus IPOM Plus based on surgeon preference, hernia characteristics, or chronological practice shift toward eTEP. The single randomised trial (Binthaf & Parag, 2025) was at low risk of selection bias but, as with all included studies, outcome assessors were not blinded to the operative technique, which is unavoidable given the visibly different access routes and incision patterns.

3.4 Operative time

Every included study that reported operative duration found eTEP to take significantly longer than IPOM Plus, consistent with the additional retromuscular dissection, midline crossover and posterior-layer reconstruction required. Reported eTEP durations ranged from approximately 106 to 211 minutes, against 66 to 178 minutes for IPOM Plus, a mean difference on the order of 35-100 minutes depending on case mix and use of concomitant transversus abdominis release. In the present institutional cohort, eTEP required 168 ± 17 minutes versus 66 ± 14 minutes for IPOM Plus ($p = 0.001$), a larger gap than in most other series, plausibly reflecting the larger mean defect size (4.3 cm) and the seven cases requiring posterior component separation in the eTEP arm.

3.5 Postoperative pain

Postoperative pain, measured by VAS at 12-24 hours and/or on postoperative day 1, favoured eTEP in every study reporting this outcome, attributed consistently to the retromuscular mesh position and reduced or absent transfascial fixation compared with the double-crown tacking used in IPOM Plus. The present cohort demonstrated this pattern (VAS day 1: 2 ± 1 for eTEP vs 3 ± 1 for IPOM Plus, $p = 0.001$; VAS day 2: 1 vs 2 ± 1).

3.6 Hospital stay

Shorter hospital stay with eTEP was reported in the large majority of included studies, ranging from a reduction of roughly one to three days compared with IPOM Plus. The present cohort showed a mean stay of 3 ± 1 days for eTEP versus 5 ± 1 days for IPOM Plus ($p = 0.001$), in keeping with the pooled direction of effect across the wider literature.

3.7 Complications, conversion and recurrence

Intraoperative complication rates were low and did not differ meaningfully between techniques in any included study. Conversion from eTEP to IPOM or to open repair was reported in a minority of eTEP cases (0-2 patients per study), generally attributable to dense adhesions encountered during retromuscular dissection or difficulty achieving an adequate working space. Seroma was the most commonly reported postoperative complication in both groups, with no consistent between-group difference. One study reported a significantly lower overall postoperative complication rate with eTEP (4.2% vs 25.0%), while others found no significant difference. Recurrence at available follow-up (6 months to 2 years) was uniformly low (0-1 case per group per study) across the included evidence, with no study reporting a significant between-group difference; longer-term recurrence data beyond two years remain sparse for eTEP.

3.8 Return to activity and cost

Where reported, return to work/normal activity was earlier after eTEP. The present cohort recorded 10 ± 2 days for eTEP versus 16 ± 2 days for IPOM Plus ($p = 0.001$). Cost data were sparsely reported across the wider literature; in the present cohort, eTEP was associated with a lower overall treatment cost (₹35,000 vs ₹70,000), attributed to a shorter admission and lack of routine mesh fixation despite longer operating-room time.

3.9 Vote-counting synthesis

Outcome	Studies reporting	Favours eTEP	Favours IPOM Plus	No significant difference
Operative time	7	0	7	0
Postoperative pain (VAS)	7	6	0	1
Hospital stay	7	6	0	1
Postoperative complications	6	2	0	4
Recurrence	6	0	0	6
Return to work / cost	4	4	0	0

3.10 Quantitative pooling

Formal inverse-variance meta-analysis was limited by inconsistent reporting of dispersion (SD vs IQR vs range) and by outcome definitions that were not fully harmonised (e.g., VAS at differing postoperative timepoints). A random-effects mean difference for operative time, pooling the two studies reporting mean $\pm$ SD with comparable group sizes (present cohort and one other randomised comparison), indicated a mean prolongation of eTEP over IPOM Plus of approximately 70-100 minutes, with wide between-study heterogeneity ($I^2 > 75\%$) attributable to differing case complexity and rates of concomitant component separation. Given the small number of poolable studies, this estimate should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive; the direction and general magnitude are nonetheless consistent with the pooled estimate of a prior published meta-analysis of five randomised trials (mean difference 44.8 minutes, 95% CI 26.6-63.0), and with a further meta-analysis restricted to studies published through 2024, both of which likewise found significantly longer operative time, less acute postoperative pain, and shorter hospital stay with eTEP, and no significant difference in seroma, haematoma, intraoperative complications or postoperative ileus.

4. DISCUSSION

This updated systematic review, incorporating a newly conducted three-year institutional cohort alongside seven previously published comparative studies spanning India, Germany and Thailand, reaffirms a consistent pattern first suggested by earlier, smaller meta-analyses: eTEP repair trades a longer, more technically demanding operation for meaningfully better early postoperative recovery — less pain, shorter hospitalisation, and earlier return to normal activity — compared with IPOM Plus, without any signal of increased short- to medium-term recurrence or intraoperative complications.

The magnitude of the operative-time penalty varied appreciably between studies, from roughly half an hour to well over an hour, and appears to track with defect size, incisional (versus primary) hernia status, and the proportion of cases requiring concomitant transversus abdominis release — all of which were more prevalent in the present cohort's eTEP arm and likely explain why its operative-time gap (102 minutes) exceeded that reported by several other series. This is consistent with the learning-curve and case-complexity effects previously described by Belyansky et al. and Daes, and reinforces that comparative operative-time figures should be interpreted alongside case-mix rather than as a fixed procedural constant. The consistent pain and length-of-stay advantage for eTEP across nearly all included studies lends support to the retromuscular mesh-plane hypothesis articulated by Holihan et al. — that avoiding direct peritoneal/visceral mesh contact and minimising fixation-related nerve irritation translates into a measurably more comfortable early recovery. This mirrors the pooled findings of the two prior published meta-analyses on this comparison, both of which found significantly lower acute pain and shorter stay with eTEP despite longer operative time and no significant difference in wound or intraperitoneal complications.

Recurrence data remain the least mature part of the evidence base. Follow-up across included studies rarely extended beyond two years, and events were too infrequent in any single series to draw firm conclusions about long-term durability, particularly for large or complex defects requiring transversus abdominis release. This mirrors a broader limitation noted in prior eTEP literature: the technique's most distinctive theoretical advantage — anatomical restoration of the linea alba and true retromuscular mesh placement — is precisely the outcome domain (chronic pain, long-term recurrence, abdominal wall function) least well captured by studies with under two years of follow-up. Cost data were sparse across the wider literature but, where available, favoured eTEP, which is somewhat counterintuitive given its longer operative time; this likely reflects the offsetting effect of a shorter admission and the frequent avoidance of routine transfascial mesh fixation in eTEP, both of which reduce consumable and bed-day costs even as theatre time increases.

4.1 Limitations

This review's protocol was not prospectively registered, and searches were limited to four databases plus hand-searching, which may have missed unindexed or non-English reports.

Included studies were overwhelmingly non-randomised, single-centre, and unblinded, with heterogeneous case-mix, defect sizes, and surgeon experience, limiting causal inference.

Inconsistent reporting of dispersion measures (SD vs IQR vs range) precluded a fully quantitative forest-plot meta-analysis across the complete set of included studies; the vote-counting synthesis used here is a recognised but lower-resolution alternative.

Follow-up duration across included studies was generally under two years, limiting conclusions about long-term recurrence and chronic pain.

Publication and reporting bias cannot be excluded, as studies with null or unfavourable eTEP outcomes may be under-represented in the published literature.

5. CONCLUSION

Synthesising the current comparative evidence, including a new three-year institutional cohort, eTEP repair for ventral hernia is associated with significantly longer operative time but consistently better early postoperative outcomes — less pain, shorter hospital stay, and earlier return to activity — compared with IPOM Plus, with comparable short-term recurrence and complication rates. eTEP additionally offers the technical flexibility to incorporate posterior component separation for large or complex defects within the same extraperitoneal plane. Given its steep learning curve, wider adoption will depend on structured training pathways; future adequately powered multicentre randomised trials with follow-up beyond two years are needed to confirm the durability of these benefits, particularly for chronic pain and long-term recurrence.

Acknowledgments

We thank the Department of General Surgery and the medical records department, Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, for their support in patient follow-up and data collection.

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