

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Dexamethasone versus ondansetron for prevention of PONV in laparoscopic gynecologic procedures: a randomized comparative study**¹Shafali Dhadich, ²Alpana Arya¹Assistant Professor, Department of Obs & Gynae, Major S D Singh Medical College & Hospital, Farukhabad, Uttar Pradesh, India;²Assistant Professor, Department of Anesthesia, Major S D Singh Medical College & Hospital, Farukhabad, Uttar Pradesh, India**ABSTRACT:**

Background: Postoperative nausea and vomiting (PONV) is a common and distressing complication following general anesthesia, particularly in women undergoing laparoscopic gynecologic procedures. Despite the availability of several antiemetic agents, PONV continues to affect postoperative recovery, patient satisfaction, and healthcare utilization. Ondansetron, a 5-HT₃ receptor antagonist, and dexamethasone, a corticosteroid with antiemetic properties, are widely used for prophylaxis; however, their relative effectiveness as single-agent prophylaxis in laparoscopic gynecologic surgery remains a subject of clinical interest. **Aim:** The present study aimed to compare the efficacy of intravenous dexamethasone and intravenous ondansetron for the prevention of postoperative nausea and vomiting in patients undergoing laparoscopic gynecologic procedures under general anesthesia. **Material and Methods:** This randomized comparative study was conducted at a tertiary care hospital and included 82 women aged 18–60 years with American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) physical status I–II scheduled for elective laparoscopic gynecologic surgery. Patients were randomly allocated into two equal groups (n = 41 each). The dexamethasone group received intravenous dexamethasone 8 mg immediately after induction of anesthesia, while the ondansetron group received intravenous ondansetron 4 mg near the end of surgery. Anesthetic and surgical techniques were standardized. Patients were assessed for the incidence and severity of PONV over the first 24 postoperative hours. The primary outcome was the overall incidence of PONV, while secondary outcomes included incidence of nausea and vomiting separately, severity of nausea, need for rescue antiemetic, and adverse effects.

Results: The overall incidence of PONV within 24 hours was significantly lower in the dexamethasone group compared with the ondansetron group (21.95% vs 39.02%; p < 0.05). Dexamethasone also significantly reduced the incidence of nausea (19.51% vs 36.59%) and vomiting/retching (9.76% vs 24.39%). A higher complete response rate was observed with dexamethasone (78.05%) compared to ondansetron (60.98%). The requirement for rescue antiemetic was significantly lower in the dexamethasone group. Adverse effects were infrequent and comparable between groups. **Conclusion:** Intravenous dexamethasone is more effective than ondansetron alone in preventing postoperative nausea and vomiting in laparoscopic gynecologic surgery, with better symptom control and reduced need for rescue antiemetics. Dexamethasone may be considered a preferred single-agent prophylactic antiemetic in this patient population.

Keywords: Postoperative nausea and vomiting; Dexamethasone; Ondansetron; Laparoscopic gynecologic surgery; Antiemetic prophylaxis.

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INTRODUCTION

Postoperative nausea and vomiting (PONV) remains one of the most frequent and distressing complications after general anesthesia, particularly in ambulatory and minimally invasive procedures where early mobilization, oral intake, and timely discharge are key recovery goals. Although refinements in anesthetic practice and the availability of multiple antiemetic classes have improved perioperative comfort, a substantial proportion of patients still experience nausea, retching, or vomiting either in the post-anesthesia care unit (PACU) or after discharge. These symptoms may delay oral intake and mobilization, reduce overall satisfaction, and contribute to unplanned admissions or extended observation. Contemporary practice increasingly emphasizes prevention over treatment because rescue therapy

after symptom onset may be less effective and can disrupt recovery pathways, making risk assessment and prophylaxis central components of perioperative care.¹ The burden of PONV extends beyond patient discomfort. Nausea and vomiting can lead to dehydration, electrolyte disturbances, wound stress, and impaired participation in early rehabilitation, and they commonly necessitate additional medications and extended nursing supervision. From a health-system perspective, these downstream effects translate into longer PACU stays, additional staff time, and higher costs for outpatient services. Time-and-motion analyses in ambulatory surgery have shown that patients with PONV and postdischarge nausea and vomiting (PDNV) consume more recovery-related resources and incur a measurable incremental cost, supporting the value of effective prophylaxis as both a

patient-centered and system-level intervention.²Laparoscopic gynecologic surgery represents a particularly high-risk setting for PONV. The patient population is predominantly female and frequently non-smoking, and the surgical technique involves pneumoperitoneum and peritoneal irritation, both of which can promote nausea through visceral afferent pathways. Even when opioid-sparing analgesic techniques are used, supplemental opioids may still be required, adding another established contributor to nausea and vomiting. Because laparoscopic techniques facilitate earlier discharge, residual nausea may become one of the main barriers to oral intake, ambulation, and timely home readiness. Evidence from gynecologic surgical populations also indicates that, despite prophylaxis, clinically meaningful nausea and vomiting remain common, and the need for rescue antiemetic therapy persists in a subset of patients, highlighting the need to optimize preventive regimens for this group.³Another challenge in PONV research and clinical care is the variability in how outcomes are measured and reported. Simple binary outcomes such as “any nausea” may overestimate clinical impact and fail to capture severity, duration, and functional consequences. Conversely, focusing only on vomiting may underestimate the burden because nausea alone can be profoundly distressing and disabling. To improve relevance and comparability, validated tools have been developed to quantify clinically important PONV by incorporating symptom intensity and the extent to which nausea and vomiting affect recovery and patient well-being. Such structured assessment methods strengthen trial interpretation and allow prophylactic strategies to be judged not only by event reduction but also by improvements in recovery experience.⁴Modern prevention strategies are guided by risk stratification and a multimodal approach, selecting antiemetics from different mechanistic classes for patients at moderate-to-high risk. However, in routine clinical settings—especially in resource-constrained environments—single-agent prophylaxis is still commonly practiced due to simplicity, cost considerations, and protocol preferences. Among widely used agents, ondansetron (a 5-HT₃ receptor antagonist) has become a standard choice because of its ease of administration and favorable tolerability, with established efficacy in reducing postoperative vomiting and nausea relative to no prophylaxis. Nevertheless, clinically important residual PONV can remain, particularly in high-risk groups such as women undergoing laparoscopic gynecologic surgery, making comparative effectiveness evaluation of commonly used agents clinically relevant.⁵Dexamethasone, a corticosteroid with anti-inflammatory and central antiemetic effects, has also become an established component of PONV prophylaxis. It is often administered at induction, reflecting its onset profile and the intent to provide coverage into later postoperative periods. In

laparoscopic surgery populations, dexamethasone has been evaluated both alone and in combination with other agents, and evidence supports its ability to reduce PONV and rescue antiemetic requirement. The comparison between dexamethasone and ondansetron is particularly relevant in laparoscopic gynecology because both are widely available, commonly used as prophylaxis, and incorporated into routine anesthesia workflows, yet their clinical performance may differ depending on timing, patient risk, and the predominance of nausea versus vomiting.⁶

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This randomized comparative study was conducted at a tertiary care hospital among women undergoing elective laparoscopic gynecologic procedures under general anesthesia. The study population comprised 82 patients who were allocated into two equal groups to receive either intravenous dexamethasone or intravenous ondansetron for prevention of postoperative nausea and vomiting (PONV). Women scheduled for elective laparoscopic gynecologic surgeries (including procedures such as laparoscopic hysterectomy, ovarian cystectomy, myomectomy, diagnostic laparoscopy, and tubal procedures) were screened for eligibility. Patients aged 18–60 years with American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) physical status I–II were included. Patients were excluded if they had known hypersensitivity to dexamethasone or ondansetron, pregnancy or lactation, pre-existing nausea/vomiting within 24 hours, history of motion sickness or prior severe PONV, use of antiemetics/steroids within 24 hours, chronic steroid therapy, uncontrolled diabetes mellitus, significant hepatic/renal dysfunction, prolonged QT interval or clinically relevant arrhythmias, gastrointestinal obstruction, conversion to open surgery, or inability to comprehend the PONV scoring system.

Methodology

Eighty-two eligible patients were randomized into two groups (n = 41 each) using a computer-generated random sequence. Allocation concealment was ensured using sequentially numbered, opaque, sealed envelopes opened only after patient enrollment. To minimize bias, the study drug was prepared by an anesthesia provider not involved in intraoperative management or postoperative assessment, and the postoperative observer assessing outcomes was kept unaware of group allocation wherever feasible.

Patients in the dexamethasone group received dexamethasone 8 mg intravenously diluted to a standard volume and administered immediately after induction of anesthesia. Patients in the ondansetron group received ondansetron 4 mg intravenously diluted to the same standard volume and administered near the end of surgery (approximately 15–20 minutes before completion). The appearance and volume of

the study medications were kept similar to support blinding of the outcome assessor.

All patients were kept fasting according to institutional protocol and received standard preoperative evaluation including documentation of demographic variables, ASA status, comorbidities, prior history of PONV/motion sickness, and smoking status. Intraoperative monitoring included electrocardiography, non-invasive blood pressure, pulse oximetry, end-tidal carbon dioxide, and temperature. General anesthesia was induced with a standardized regimen (e.g., fentanyl and propofol) and neuromuscular blockade (e.g., rocuronium/vecuronium) to facilitate endotracheal intubation. Anesthesia was maintained using a volatile anesthetic (e.g., sevoflurane/isoflurane) with oxygen/air mixture, and ventilation was adjusted to maintain normocapnia. Pneumoperitoneum pressures and patient positioning were maintained as per surgical requirements but were recorded for analysis. Intraoperative fluids were administered according to body weight and clinical needs, and analgesia was standardized using non-opioid analgesics (e.g., paracetamol/NSAIDs) with opioid supplementation as required; total intraoperative opioid consumption was recorded as an important covariate.

The primary outcome was the incidence of PONV within the first 24 hours postoperatively. PONV was defined as any episode of nausea, retching, or vomiting. Secondary outcomes included incidence of nausea and vomiting separately, severity of nausea using a 10-cm visual analogue scale (VAS) or a 4-point ordinal scale (0 = none, 1 = mild, 2 = moderate, 3 = severe), number of vomiting/retching episodes, time to first PONV episode, need for rescue antiemetic, number of rescue doses, and adverse effects related to study drugs (e.g., headache, dizziness, constipation, flushing; and for dexamethasone, clinically significant hyperglycemia when relevant). Additional perioperative parameters recorded included duration of anesthesia and surgery, intraoperative hemodynamic stability, pneumoperitoneum time, postoperative pain scores, and postoperative opioid requirement, as these can influence PONV.

Postoperative assessments were performed at predefined intervals in the recovery area and ward, typically at 0–2 hours, 2–6 hours, 6–12 hours, and 12–24 hours following surgery. Nausea severity, episodes of vomiting/retching, and overall patient comfort were documented at each interval. Rescue antiemetic was administered if the patient had vomiting, persistent nausea (e.g., nausea score ≥ 2 or VAS ≥ 4), or requested treatment. A standardized rescue protocol was used, such as intravenous metoclopramide 10 mg or an alternative institutional rescue antiemetic, with repeat dosing permitted after a minimum interval if symptoms persisted. “Complete response” was defined as no nausea/vomiting and no need for rescue antiemetic during the specified observation period.

All observations were recorded on a structured proforma by trained personnel. Baseline variables (age, weight, ASA status, risk factors for PONV), intraoperative variables (type of procedure, anesthetic agents, opioid dose, pneumoperitoneum time), and postoperative variables (PONV outcomes, rescue therapy, side effects) were documented uniformly. Any protocol deviations and perioperative complications were noted and considered during analysis.

Statistical analysis

Data were entered into a spreadsheet and analyzed using standard statistical software. Categorical variables (incidence of PONV, need for rescue antiemetic, adverse effects) were expressed as frequencies and percentages and compared using chi-square test or Fisher’s exact test as appropriate. Continuous variables (age, weight, duration-related variables, nausea scores) were expressed as mean \pm standard deviation or median (interquartile range) based on distribution and compared using independent t-test or Mann–Whitney U test. A p-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant. Where relevant, relative risk (RR) with 95% confidence intervals was calculated for the primary outcome, and subgroup considerations (e.g., high-risk patients based on risk factors) were explored descriptively while maintaining the randomized group comparisons.

RESULTS

A total of 82 patients undergoing elective laparoscopic gynecologic procedures were included in the final analysis, with 41 patients in each group.

Demographic and baseline characteristics

As shown in **Table 1**, the demographic and baseline clinical characteristics were comparable between the dexamethasone and ondansetron groups. The mean age of patients in the dexamethasone group was 38.46 ± 8.12 years, while in the ondansetron group it was 37.91 ± 7.88 years, with no statistically significant difference ($p = 0.74$). Mean body weight was also similar between the two groups (58.73 ± 6.45 kg vs 59.12 ± 6.21 kg; $p = 0.78$). Distribution of ASA physical status was comparable, with ASA I patients comprising 63.41% in the dexamethasone group and 60.98% in the ondansetron group, while ASA II patients accounted for 36.59% and 39.02%, respectively ($p = 0.82$). All patients in both groups were non-smokers.

Intraoperative and surgical variables

Intraoperative parameters are summarized in **Table 2**. The mean duration of surgery was 82.15 ± 18.34 minutes in the dexamethasone group and 80.92 ± 17.88 minutes in the ondansetron group, with no statistically significant difference ($p = 0.74$). Similarly, the duration of anesthesia was comparable between the two groups (96.38 ± 19.12 minutes vs

95.41 ± 18.66 minutes; p = 0.81). Pneumoperitoneum time was also similar, measuring 64.29 ± 15.21 minutes in the dexamethasone group and 63.17 ± 14.86 minutes in the ondansetron group (p = 0.78). Intraoperative opioid consumption, expressed as fentanyl equivalent dose, did not differ significantly between groups (128.05 ± 21.64 µg vs 130.12 ± 22.11 µg; p = 0.66).

Incidence of postoperative nausea and vomiting

The incidence of PONV within the first 24 postoperative hours is detailed in **Table 3**. The overall incidence of PONV was significantly lower in patients who received dexamethasone compared to those who received ondansetron (21.95% vs 39.02%; p = 0.048). The incidence of postoperative nausea alone was also significantly reduced in the dexamethasone group (19.51%) compared with the ondansetron group (36.59%), achieving statistical significance (p = 0.041). Similarly, vomiting or retching episodes occurred less frequently in the dexamethasone group (9.76%) than in the ondansetron group (24.39%), with a statistically significant difference (p = 0.038). A complete response—defined as absence of nausea and vomiting without the need for rescue antiemetic—was observed in 78.05% of patients in the dexamethasone group compared to 60.98% in the ondansetron group (p = 0.048).

Severity of postoperative nausea

The highest recorded nausea severity within the first 24 hours postoperatively is presented in **Table 4**. A

greater proportion of patients in the dexamethasone group experienced no nausea (80.49%) compared to the ondansetron group (63.41%), and this difference was statistically significant (p = 0.047). Mild nausea was reported in 12.20% of patients receiving dexamethasone and 17.07% of those receiving ondansetron. Moderate nausea occurred in 4.88% of patients in the dexamethasone group and 12.20% in the ondansetron group, while severe nausea was reported in 2.43% and 7.32% of patients, respectively.

Rescue antiemetic requirement and adverse effects

Rescue antiemetic requirements and adverse effects are summarized in **Table 5**. The need for rescue antiemetic medication was significantly lower in the dexamethasone group, with 17.07% of patients requiring rescue therapy compared to 34.15% in the ondansetron group (p = 0.039). The proportion of patients requiring two or more rescue doses was lower in the dexamethasone group (4.88%) than in the ondansetron group (14.63%); however, this difference did not reach statistical significance (p = 0.14). Adverse effects such as headache and dizziness were infrequent and comparable between the two groups, with no statistically significant differences observed. Clinically significant hyperglycemia was noted in 4.88% of patients in the dexamethasone group, while none of the patients in the ondansetron group developed hyperglycemia; this difference was not statistically significant (p = 0.15).

Table 1. Demographic and baseline characteristics

Parameter	Dexamethasone (n = 41)	Ondansetron (n = 41)	p value
Age (years), mean ± SD	38.46 ± 8.12	37.91 ± 7.88	0.74
Weight (kg), mean ± SD	58.73 ± 6.45	59.12 ± 6.21	0.78
ASA I, n (%)	26 (63.41%)	25 (60.98%)	0.82
ASA II, n (%)	15 (36.59%)	16 (39.02%)	0.82
Non-smokers, n (%)	41 (100.00%)	41 (100.00%)	—

Table 2. Intraoperative and surgical variables

Parameter	Dexamethasone (n = 41)	Ondansetron (n = 41)	p value
Duration of surgery (min), mean ± SD	82.15 ± 18.34	80.92 ± 17.88	0.74
Duration of anesthesia (min), mean ± SD	96.38 ± 19.12	95.41 ± 18.66	0.81
Pneumoperitoneum time (min), mean ± SD	64.29 ± 15.21	63.17 ± 14.86	0.78
Intraoperative opioid use (µg fentanyl), mean ± SD	128.05 ± 21.64	130.12 ± 22.11	0.66

Table 3. Incidence of postoperative nausea and vomiting (0–24 hours)

Outcome	Dexamethasone (n = 41)	Ondansetron (n = 41)	p value
Any PONV, n (%)	9 (21.95%)	16 (39.02%)	0.048
Nausea, n (%)	8 (19.51%)	15 (36.59%)	0.041
Vomiting/retching, n (%)	4 (9.76%)	10 (24.39%)	0.038
Complete response*, n (%)	32 (78.05%)	25 (60.98%)	0.048

*Complete response = no nausea/vomiting and no rescue antiemetic within 24 hours.

Table 4. Severity of nausea (highest recorded score within 24 hours)

Nausea severity	Dexamethasone (n = 41)	Ondansetron (n = 41)	p value
None, n (%)	33 (80.49%)	26 (63.41%)	0.047
Mild, n (%)	5 (12.20%)	7 (17.07%)	
Moderate, n (%)	2 (4.88%)	5 (12.20%)	
Severe, n (%)	1 (2.43%)	3 (7.32%)	

Table 5. Rescue antiemetic requirement and adverse effects

Parameter	Dexamethasone (n = 41)	Ondansetron (n = 41)	p value
Rescue antiemetic required, n (%)	7 (17.07%)	14 (34.15%)	0.039
≥2 rescue doses, n (%)	2 (4.88%)	6 (14.63%)	0.14
Headache, n (%)	3 (7.32%)	4 (9.76%)	0.69
Dizziness, n (%)	2 (4.88%)	3 (7.32%)	0.64
Clinically significant hyperglycemia, n (%)	2 (4.88%)	0 (0.00%)	0.15

DISCUSSION

The incidence of PONV in laparoscopic gynecologic procedures is typically high because most patients are female, non-smokers, and may require perioperative opioids, which collectively increase baseline risk. In the present study, the overall 24-hour PONV in the ondansetron group was 39.02% (16/41), while dexamethasone reduced it to 21.95% (9/41). Apfel et al. [1999] proposed a simplified risk score showing that the presence of two major predictors corresponds to an approximate 39% risk of PONV, and the close match between that estimate and our ondansetron-arm incidence supports that our control event rate is clinically plausible for this cohort.⁷ Baseline comparability between groups reduces the likelihood that differences in outcomes were driven by confounding variables. In this trial, age (38.46 ± 8.12 vs 37.91 ± 7.88 years), weight (58.73 ± 6.45 vs 59.12 ± 6.21 kg), and ASA distribution (ASA I: 63.41% vs 60.98%) were similar, with uniform intraoperative exposure, strengthening causal attribution to the study drugs. D'souza et al. [2011] similarly emphasized balanced groups in gynecologic laparoscopy and reported higher overall 24-hour PONV with ondansetron (61%), while dexamethasone demonstrated lower early-period PONV (first 3 hours: 22.6% and 36.6% with dexamethasone 4 mg and 8 mg vs 51.6% with ondansetron), and although absolute rates differed from ours, the direction of benefit toward dexamethasone is consistent.⁸ The timing of prophylaxis likely influences clinical performance and may partly explain variation across trials. In our protocol, dexamethasone (8 mg) was given at induction and ondansetron (4 mg) near the end of surgery, and dexamethasone showed better overall protection (PONV 21.95% vs 39.02%) and a higher complete response (78.05% vs 60.98%). Yuksek et al. [2003] administered both agents before induction in day-case gynecologic laparoscopy and observed 24-hour PONV of 35% with ondansetron and 55% with dexamethasone, with significance mainly confined to early outcomes, suggesting that differences in dosing time relative to pharmacologic effect windows can shift which agent appears superior at different

postoperative intervals.⁹ The magnitude of reduction in vomiting/retching observed in our study also aligns with evidence from other laparoscopic procedures. Here, vomiting/retching occurred in 9.76% with dexamethasone compared with 24.39% with ondansetron, alongside a lower overall PONV incidence (21.95% vs 39.02%). Erhan et al. [2008] reported in laparoscopic cholecystectomy that total PONV was 25% with dexamethasone and 35% with ondansetron (both substantially below placebo), showing a comparable directional trend favoring dexamethasone, even though their between-antiemetic difference was not statistically significant, which may reflect differences in baseline risk and sample size.¹⁰ Beyond incidence, the present study demonstrates improved symptom control and reduced rescue requirement with dexamethasone, which is clinically relevant in postoperative recovery pathways. Rescue antiemetic was required in 17.07% with dexamethasone versus 34.15% with ondansetron, and the proportion with no nausea was higher with dexamethasone (80.49% vs 63.41%). Henzi et al. [2000], in a quantitative systematic review, reported typical placebo incidences of early and late PONV around 35% and 50% and concluded that dexamethasone provides clinically meaningful prophylaxis, supporting the biological plausibility of the lower late-period symptom burden and reduced rescue requirement seen in our dexamethasone arm.¹¹ The dexamethasone dose used in our trial is supported by pooled evidence showing efficacy across commonly used dose ranges. In our study, dexamethasone 8 mg produced 21.95% overall PONV, 19.51% nausea, and 9.76% vomiting/retching, all lower than ondansetron (39.02%, 36.59%, and 24.39%, respectively). De Oliveira Jr et al. [2013] updated meta-analytic evidence and reported that dexamethasone 8–10 mg significantly reduced 24-hour PONV versus control (with clinically favorable effect sizes), while also noting that 4–5 mg can provide similar benefit in many settings, indicating our chosen regimen is within an evidence-supported range for prophylaxis in moderate-to-high risk patients.¹² Ondansetron remains an effective single

agent, but our findings illustrate that substantial residual PONV can persist when it is used alone in higher-risk laparoscopic populations. In this study, the ondansetron arm had 39.02% overall PONV and 60.98% complete response, confirming incomplete protection despite prophylaxis. Tramèr et al. [1997] quantitatively reviewed ondansetron trials and demonstrated that, while ondansetron reduces PONV compared with placebo, clinically important rates of nausea/vomiting remain, particularly in higher-risk surgical groups, which is consistent with our observed residual symptom burden in the ondansetron group.¹³ Although this study evaluated monotherapy, the outcome pattern supports why many protocols recommend multimodal prophylaxis for high-risk patients. Our complete response was 78.05% with dexamethasone alone and 60.98% with ondansetron alone, and rescue antiemetic requirement remained 17.07% even with dexamethasone. McKenzie et al. [1994] demonstrated in gynecologic surgery that combining ondansetron with dexamethasone improved complete response (52% with combination vs 38% with ondansetron alone) and reduced emesis (15% vs 34%), indicating that additive mechanisms can further improve outcomes beyond single-agent strategies, and this contextualizes our residual PONV rates despite effective prophylaxis.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this randomized comparative study demonstrates that intravenous dexamethasone is more effective than ondansetron alone in preventing postoperative nausea and vomiting in patients undergoing laparoscopic gynecologic procedures. Dexamethasone significantly reduced the overall incidence and severity of PONV, increased the complete response rate, and decreased the requirement for rescue antiemetic therapy. Both drugs were well tolerated with comparable adverse-effect profiles. These findings support the use of dexamethasone as an effective and safe prophylactic antiemetic in laparoscopic gynecologic surgery.

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