World Journal of Internal Medicine and Surgery
ISSN (O): 3048-510X ISSN (P): 3051-2565

Review Article

2025, Volume 2, Issue 6, Page: 21-29. www.wjims.com

TRAUMATIC COLON INJURIES

Noura Zakhour*[1], Bashar Al khalifa[1], Ghassan Al khalifa[1], Maher Bouzo[2]

[1]Faculty of Medicine, Al-Sham Private University, Rif Dimashq, Syria.
[2]Instructor General and Laparoscopic Surgery, Al-Sham Private University, Rif Dimashq, Syria.

Article Info

Article Received: 18 June 2025,
Article Revised: 11 July 2025,
Published on: 01 August 2025.

***Corresponding author:**

Noura Zakhour
Faculty of Medicine, Al-Sham Private University, Rif Dimashq, Syria.

Email: nell.1985812@gmail.com
maamounalfawares064@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background: Traumatic colon injuries, although relatively infrequent, are associated with high morbidity and mortality due to the risk of peritoneal contamination, delayed diagnosis, and postoperative complications. Management of these injuries remains a subject of ongoing debate, particularly regarding the selection of surgical technique, the timing of intervention, and criteria for diversion. **Objective:** This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the anatomy, pathophysiology, mechanisms, diagnosis, classification, and surgical management of traumatic colon injuries, emphasizing evidence-based approaches to improve patient outcomes. **Methods:** Relevant peer-reviewed articles, clinical guidelines, and trauma surgery textbooks published between 2000 and 2024 were systematically reviewed. Key topics included anatomical considerations, histological and physiological features of the colon, mechanisms of injury (blunt, penetrating, and iatrogenic), classification systems such as the Flint Scale, Colonic Injury Score (CIS), and Penetrating Abdominal Trauma Index (PATI), as well as surgical techniques including primary repair, stapled anastomosis, and diversion. Postoperative complications such as wound infection, intra-abdominal abscess, and anastomotic leak were also analyzed. **Results:** Colon trauma represents 0.1–0.5% of trauma admissions in civilian settings and up to 10–12% in military settings. Most injuries result from penetrating mechanisms, with the transverse and sigmoid colon being most frequently involved. CT scanning with IV and enteric contrast remains the gold standard for diagnosis in hemodynamically stable patients. Primary repair and resection with anastomosis are favored over diversion in most cases, provided contamination is controlled and the patient is stable. Complication rates remain high (infection: 30–50%, abscess: 10–20%, leak: 5–10%). **Conclusion:** Traumatic colon injuries require a high index of suspicion and prompt surgical management tailored to injury severity, contamination level, and patient physiology. Advances in trauma protocols and surgical techniques have significantly improved outcomes. Future studies should aim to validate standardized scoring systems and refine operative decision-making in resource-limited settings.

KEYWORDS: Colon injury, abdominal trauma, penetrating trauma, primary repair, colostomy, anastomotic leak, trauma surgery.

1. INTRODUCTION

Traumatic colon injuries represent a relatively uncommon but clinically significant subset of gastrointestinal trauma. Although the colon is less frequently injured than other intra-abdominal organs such as the small intestine, liver, or spleen, colonic injuries carry a disproportionately high rate of morbidity and mortality when not promptly recognized and adequately managed. The anatomical complexity, variable presentation, and risk of contamination all contribute to the challenges in diagnosis and surgical decision-making associated with these injuries.[1]

Colon injuries can result from both blunt and penetrating abdominal trauma, with penetrating mechanisms — including stab wounds and gunshot injuries — accounting for the majority of cases in both military and civilian settings [2]. Blunt trauma, although less common, can lead to significant colonic disruption due to high-energy impacts in vehicular accidents or falls from height.[3]

The clinical presentation of colon injury is often subtle or masked by other concomitant injuries. Delayed diagnosis may result in catastrophic outcomes including peritonitis, abscess formation, wound dehiscence, and sepsis.[4]

Therefore, a systematic approach to the diagnosis and management of colonic trauma is critical in reducing morbidity and improving patient outcomes.

The evolution of trauma surgery over the past few decades has seen a significant shift from mandatory laparotomy to more selective and minimally invasive approaches. Surgical options have similarly evolved from traditional diversion techniques toward primary repair and anastomosis in selected cases.[5] This change reflects a deeper understanding of injury patterns, host immune response, and perioperative management.

2. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This review addresses a critical and complex area of trauma surgery. Despite advances in imaging and critical care, the management of traumatic colon injuries remains controversial, especially concerning the choice between primary repair and fecal diversion, and the optimal management strategy in the context of contamination, hemodynamic instability, or multiple associated injuries.[6]

The importance of this study lies in several key areas

- Rising Trauma Incidence: With increasing rates of urban violence and motor vehicle collisions, trauma-related injuries remain a major public health burden. Colon injuries, though less frequent, significantly contribute to postoperative complications and extended hospitalization.[7]
- Diagnostic Challenges: Due to nonspecific symptoms and often subtle physical findings, colon injuries are frequently diagnosed late, especially in blunt trauma. Delayed treatment is associated with higher rates of sepsis, peritonitis, and mortality.[8]
- Surgical Decision-making: Choosing between primary repair, resection with anastomosis, and diversion (colostomy or ileostomy) remains a topic of debate. Factors such as mechanism of injury, degree of contamination, patient stability, and timing play a critical role.[9]
- Evidence Gap: There is a relative paucity of large, high-quality studies providing definitive guidance for the management of colonic injuries, particularly in low-resource settings. This review attempts to consolidate current evidence to inform better clinical decision-making.
- Outcome Optimization: By identifying risk factors associated with postoperative complications such as wound infection, intra-abdominal abscess, and anastomotic leak, clinicians can tailor management strategies and improve outcomes.[10]

3. AIMS OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this comprehensive review are as follows

- To provide an anatomical and physiological overview of the colon, relevant to trauma assessment and surgical intervention.
- To describe the epidemiology and mechanisms underlying traumatic colon injuries, including differences between blunt and penetrating trauma.
- To review current classification systems used to assess the severity and complexity of colon trauma (e.g., Flint Classification, Colonic Injury Score, PATI).
- To analyze diagnostic approaches, including clinical, radiological, and intraoperative findings critical to timely identification of colon injuries.
- To evaluate surgical management options, including primary repair, resection with anastomosis, stapled anastomosis, and fecal diversion, with discussion of indications, contraindications, and outcomes.
- To assess postoperative complications such as wound infection, abscess, dehiscence, and anastomotic leak, and review current strategies for prevention and management.
- To provide evidence-based recommendations, drawing from recent literature, guidelines, and case series, aimed at optimizing outcomes in both high- and low-resource trauma settings.

4. ANATOMICAL OVERVIEW OF THE SMALL AND LARGE INTESTINE

The small and large intestines are integral components of the gastrointestinal (GI) system, extending from the pyloric sphincter of the stomach to the anus. Understanding their anatomy is essential for assessing the impact and implications of traumatic injuries.

4.1 Small Intestine

The small intestine is approximately 6–7 meters in length and is subdivided into three regions: the duodenum, jejunum, and ileum. It is suspended from the posterior abdominal wall by the mesentery, which houses vital blood vessels, lymphatics, and nerves.[11]

- Duodenum: The first 25 cm; retroperitoneal in position (except for its first part) and closely associated with the pancreas and biliary tract.
- Jejunum: Begins at the duodenojejunal flexure and comprises the proximal two-fifths of the remaining small bowel.
- Ileum: Forms the distal three-fifths, terminating at the ileocecal valve.

  Vascular supply is via the superior mesenteric artery (SMA), with venous drainage into the portal system. The extensive mobility of the jejunum and ileum, particularly due to the mesentery, makes them more susceptible to shearing injuries in blunt trauma.[12]

4.2 Large Intestine

The colon is approximately 1.5 meters long and is anatomically divided into:

- Cecum
- Ascending colon
- Transverse colon
- Descending colon
- Sigmoid colon
- Rectum

The colon is primarily supplied by branches of the SMA (proximal colon) and the inferior mesenteric artery (IMA) (distal colon), with watershed areas at the splenic flexure and rectosigmoid junction — making them particularly vulnerable to ischemia during hypoperfusion or trauma.[13]

Retroperitoneal fixation of the ascending and descending colon renders them relatively immobile and more prone to blunt force compression against the posterior abdominal wall. In contrast, the transverse and sigmoid segments are more mobile, increasing the likelihood of mesenteric tears or torsion-type injuries.[14]

5. HISTOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF SMALL AND LARGE INTESTINE

Both the small and large intestines share a similar basic wall architecture comprising four layers: mucosa, submucosa, muscularis propria, and serosa. However, significant histological differences exist that influence their response to trauma and healing potential.

5.1 Small Intestine Histology

- Mucosa: Lined with villi and microvilli to increase absorptive surface area. Contains enterocytes, goblet cells, and neuroendocrine cells.
- Submucosa: Rich in blood vessels and lymphatics.
- Muscularis: Organized in circular and longitudinal layers that facilitate peristalsis.
- Serosa: Complete visceral peritoneal covering except in retroperitoneal duodenum.

  The small intestine has a highly vascular submucosa and a thin muscular wall, making it susceptible to perforation from high-velocity trauma.[15]

5.2 Large Intestine Histology

- Mucosa: Lacks villi; composed primarily of absorptive colonocytes and goblet cells.
- Submucosa and Muscularis: Contains three longitudinal bands called taeniae coli, which converge at the appendix and influence segmental movement.
- Serosa: Partial peritoneal covering, particularly absent in the rectum.

  Due to its thicker wall and more robust collagen content, the colon is slightly more resistant to perforation than the small intestine but more prone to contamination-related complications when injured.[16]

6. PHYSIOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF THE SMALL AND LARGE INTESTINE

6.1 Small Intestine Physiology

The small intestine is responsible for:

- Digestion and absorption: Most enzymatic breakdown and nutrient absorption occurs here.
- Motility: Coordinated by myenteric and submucosal plexuses, with segmental and peristaltic movements.
- Immune function: Peyer's patches and lymphoid follicles play a central role in gut immunity.

  Trauma to the small intestine compromises absorption, increases permeability (leaky gut), and may result in bacterial translocation and systemic inflammatory response.[17]

6.2 Large Intestine Physiology

The colon's main functions are:

- Water and electrolyte absorption
- Storage and formation of feces
- Bacterial fermentation of undigested material

The large intestine has slower motility, making it more susceptible to bacterial overgrowth and abscess formation when injured. Disruption of the colonic mucosal barrier can rapidly lead to peritonitis, particularly in the setting of fecal contamination.[18]

Table 1: Summary of Key Differences Relevant to Trauma.

Feature	Small Intestine	Large Intestine
Length	~6 meters	~1.5 meters
Villi	Present	Absent
Peristalsis	Faster	Slower
Contamination risk	Lower	Higher
Healing capacity	Faster	Slower
Common injury mechanism	Blunt (deceleration, shearing)	Penetrating, crush
Peritoneal coverage	Complete (except duodenum)	Variable

7. TRAUMATIC COLON INJURIES

Colonic injuries resulting from trauma are among the most feared complications of abdominal trauma due to the high risk of fecal contamination, sepsis, and delayed diagnosis. These injuries can result from penetrating trauma, blunt abdominal trauma, or, less commonly, iatrogenic injury during surgical or endoscopic procedures.[19]

Penetrating colon injuries are most commonly seen in military and urban civilian settings and are frequently associated with gunshot wounds (GSWs) or stab wounds. In contrast, blunt colonic injuries are often caused by motor vehicle accidents (MVAs), falls, or direct abdominal blows, and may be underdiagnosed due to nonspecific clinical signs.[20]

The risk of morbidity increases significantly with delayed diagnosis, associated injuries, and peritoneal contamination, necessitating a prompt and systematic approach to evaluation and management.

8. COLON INJURY STATISTICS

Although overall incidence varies based on setting (civilian vs. military), colon trauma represents approximately 3–5% of all abdominal injuries in the general population.[21]

8.1 Civilian Data
- In civilian trauma centers, colon injuries occur in 0.1–0.5% of all trauma admissions.[22]
- Among penetrating abdominal injuries, the colon is involved in up to 25–35% of cases.
- Gunshot wounds to the abdomen are more likely to cause transverse and descending colon injuries, while stab wounds often affect the left colon and sigmoid.[23]

8.2 Military and War Zone Data
- Military data from Afghanistan and Iraq indicate colon injuries in up to 10–12% of abdominal trauma cases, primarily from high-velocity GSWs and explosive devices.[24]

8.3 Blunt Trauma
- Blunt trauma to the colon is rare (1–3% of blunt abdominal injuries).
- The transverse colon and sigmoid are more vulnerable in blunt trauma due to their mobility and mesenteric attachments.[25]

8.4 Morbidity and Mortality
- Complications include wound infection (up to 30–50%), intra-abdominal abscess (10–20%), and anastomotic leak (5–10%).[26]
- Mortality rates range from 4–15%, increasing with delayed diagnosis, associated injuries, or hemodynamic instability.[27]

9. CLASSIFICATION OF ABDOMINAL TRAUMA
To guide surgical management, abdominal trauma is typically classified into:

9.1 Blunt vs. Penetrating Trauma
- Blunt trauma: Caused by non-penetrating forces such as deceleration, compression, or shear forces (e.g., seatbelt injuries, falls).
- Penetrating trauma: Involves skin-breaching injuries such as gunshots, stab wounds, or impalements.[28]

9.2 Open vs. Closed Injuries
- Open injuries: Associated with external wounds or evisceration.
- Closed injuries: No obvious skin breach, often challenging to detect.

9.3 Peritoneal Violation
- Colon injuries are further stratified based on whether the peritoneal cavity has been breached, influencing the risk of contamination and surgical planning.[29]

10. MECHANISM OF COLON INJURY
Understanding the mechanism of colon injury is essential for anticipating injury patterns and planning appropriate interventions.

10.1 Penetrating Injuries
- Gunshot wounds: Often cause multiple perforations due to the high-velocity projectile and cavitation effect.
- Stab wounds: Usually result in localized, lower-energy injuries and have a more predictable trajectory.
- Injuries can range from small serosal tears to full-thickness perforations or segmental devascularization.[30]

10.2 Blunt Injuries
- Deceleration and compression: Common in motor vehicle accidents; can lead to hematoma, perforation, or mesenteric tears.
- Injuries often occur when the colon is compressed against the spine or pelvis.
- The splenic flexure and sigmoid colon are most vulnerable in blunt trauma due to their anatomical fixation points.[31]

10.3 Iatrogenic Injuries
- Occur during colonoscopy, abdominal surgery, or percutaneous procedures.
- Although rare, they require a high index of suspicion, especially in elderly or debilitated patients.[32]

10.4 Blast Injuries
- Common in military contexts.
- Cause complex colon damage due to the combination of pressure wave, flying debris, and secondary blunt trauma.

Table 2: Mechanisms of Colon Injury.

Severity	Injury Pattern	Common Context	Mechanism
High	Multiple perforations, devascularization	Military, civilian crime	Gunshot wound
Moderate	Single trajectory, localized damage	Assaults, self-inflicted	Stab wound
Variable	Serosal tears, hematomas, perforations	MVAs, falls	Blunt trauma
Usually mild	Perforation or ischemia	Colonoscopy, surgery	Iatrogenic
Very high	Devastating multi-organ injury	Explosions, war zones	Blast injury

11. EVALUATION OF COLON INJURIES
Prompt and accurate evaluation of suspected colonic injury is critical to avoid delayed diagnosis, which is associated with increased morbidity and mortality. Evaluation includes clinical examination, imaging, and intraoperative findings.

11.1 Initial Assessment
Evaluation begins with the Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) protocol, focusing on stabilization through the

primary survey: airway, breathing, circulation, disability, and exposure. Once life-threatening conditions are addressed, attention turns to abdominal assessment.[33]

11.2 Current Symptoms

Symptoms of colon injury are often nonspecific and depend on the severity, mechanism, and associated injuries. Common signs and symptoms include:

- Abdominal pain or tenderness
- Rebound tenderness or guarding
- Abdominal distension
- Nausea and vomiting
- Hypotension or signs of hemorrhage
- Rectal bleeding (in lower colonic injuries)

In penetrating trauma, a high suspicion is warranted even in the absence of overt symptoms. In blunt trauma, signs may evolve gradually over several hours.[34]

11.3 Clinical Examination

A focused abdominal exam is vital but may be limited by altered mental status, intoxication, or distracting injuries. Important findings include:

- Rigidity or involuntary guarding
- Localized tenderness (especially in the left or right lower quadrant)
- Absent bowel sounds (ileus or peritonitis)
- Signs of peritonitis (indicating perforation)
- Evidence of evisceration in open wounds

Digital rectal examination (DRE) may reveal blood in cases of distal colonic or rectal trauma.[35]

11.4 Radiological Investigations

Imaging is essential for the diagnosis of colon injuries, particularly in hemodynamically stable patients.

a. Focused Assessment with Sonography in Trauma (FAST)

- Quick, bedside ultrasound to detect free fluid.
- Limited in detecting hollow organ injuries.
- Sensitivity for colon injury is low.[36]

b. Computed Tomography (CT) Scan with IV and Oral Contrast

- Gold standard in stable patients with blunt or penetrating trauma.
- Findings suggestive of colon injury:
- Pneumoperitoneum
- Focal bowel wall thickening
- Extraluminal air or contrast
- Mesenteric stranding or hematoma
- Discontinuity of the bowel wall

Multidetector CT increases sensitivity and specificity for colonic injuries, especially when used with enteric contrast.[37]

c. Diagnostic Peritoneal Lavage (DPL)

- Once widely used; now largely replaced by CT and laparoscopy.
- Positive result (fecal material or high leukocyte/RBC count) suggests hollow viscus injury.

d. Laparoscopy

- Increasingly used in stable patients with penetrating trauma.
- Allows direct visualization and immediate repair.
- Minimally invasive and diagnostic, though limited in cases with dense adhesions or bowel distension.[38]

12. CLASSIFICATION OF BOWEL INJURIES

Standardized classification systems help stratify injuries and guide management decisions.

12.1 Flint Classification of Bowel Injuries

This early system divides colon injuries into five categories based on the extent and nature of damage.[39]

Table 3: Flint Classification of Bowel Injuries.

Grade	Description	Recommended Treatment
I	Serosal tear only	Observation or primary repair
II	<50% bowel wall laceration	Primary repair
III	>50% bowel wall laceration without devascularization	Primary repair or resection
IV	Full-thickness injury with devascularization	Resection with or without anastomosis
V	Massive destruction or segmental loss	Resection ± diversion

12.2 Colonic Injury Score (CIS)

The Colonic Injury Score (CIS) is a validated tool developed by the American Association for the Surgery of Trauma (AAST) to grade colonic injuries from I to V.[40]

Table 4: Colonic Injury Score (CIS).

Grade	Injury Description
I	Contusion or hematoma without devascularization
II	Laceration <50% of circumference
III	Laceration >50% of circumference without devascularization
IV	Full-thickness laceration with segmental devascularization
V	Transection with >10 cm tissue loss or complete devascularization

Higher CIS grades correlate with increased complication rates and guide the need for resection or diversion.

12.3 Penetrating Abdominal Trauma Index (PATI)

The PATI is a scoring system used to predict the risk of morbidity based on the severity and number of abdominal injuries. Each organ is assigned a risk factor and injury score; the final score helps determine prognosis and treatment.[41]

- Colon has a risk factor of 4. Scores ≥25 are associated with higher morbidity and may warrant diversion.
- Incorporates both anatomical and physiological parameters (e.g., blood pressure, contamination, number of injuries).

Table 5: Utility of Classification Systems.

Limitations	Pros	Main Use	System
Not widely standardized	Simple, surgical decision aid	Early intraoperative grading	Flint
Requires intraoperative assessment	Predicts complications/outcomes	Universal trauma grading	CIS (AAST)
Complex, not specific to colon only	Quantitative, outcome-predictive	Predictive of overall severity	PATI

13. CLINICAL APPROACH TO TRAUMATIC COLONIC INJURIES

Surgical management of colonic injuries begins with triage and initial evaluation, followed by intraoperative decision-making based on injury severity, contamination, and hemodynamic status.

13.1 Initial Clinical Scene – Emergency Department

In the emergency department (ED), patients with suspected colon trauma undergo rapid resuscitation and trauma assessment following ATLS principles. The presence of peritonitis, hypotension, or evisceration indicates a need for immediate surgical exploration.[42]

Key considerations

- Penetrating injuries: Higher risk of multi-organ involvement and fecal contamination.
- Blunt injuries: Often associated with mesenteric tears and require high clinical suspicion.

Patients are classified as:

- Hemodynamically stable: Proceed to imaging or laparoscopy.
- Hemodynamically unstable: Proceed directly to laparotomy.

13.2 Operating Room Evaluation

Intraoperatively, decisions are based on:

- Extent of colon damage (e.g., depth, devascularization)
- Degree of contamination (minimal, moderate, gross fecal)
- Presence of associated injuries (solid organ, vascular)
- Patient status (shock, comorbidities, immunosuppression)

Key options include

- Primary repair
- Resection and anastomosis
- Colostomy (diversion)

The trend over recent decades favors primary repair or anastomosis in most cases, even in the presence of moderate contamination, provided the patient is stable.[43]

14. PRIMARY REPAIR OF COLON INJURIES

Primary repair involves suturing the injured colon without resection or diversion and is applicable when:

- The injury is <50% of circumference
- No ischemia or devascularization
- Hemodynamic stability
- No generalized peritonitis

14.1 Surgical Steps for Primary Suturing

Preparation and Cleaning

- Lavage of abdominal cavity with warm saline.
- Control of contamination with sponges and suction.
- Resection of devitalized tissue if needed.

Suturing Technique

- Use absorbable or non-absorbable monofilament sutures.
- Two-layer closure (inner full-thickness, outer seromuscular) or single-layer technique.
- Avoid excessive tension on repair.

Studies show primary repair has similar outcomes to diversion, even in selected high-risk patients.[44]

15. STAPLED ANASTOMOSIS IN COLON TRAUMA

Stapled anastomosis is increasingly used in elective and emergency settings, offering reduced operative time and consistent outcomes.

15.1 Procedure Mechanism

- After resection of the injured segment, a circular stapler is used to create an end-to-end or side-to-side anastomosis.
- Linear staplers may also be used for colocolic anastomosis.

15.2 Indications for Stapler Use

Stapled anastomosis is ideal when:

- Adequate bowel perfusion is confirmed
- Minimal or controlled contamination
- Patient is stable
- Edges are viable and tension-free

Studies show equivalent or lower leak rates compared to hand-sewn techniques, though cost and availability may limit use in low-resource settings.[45]

16. POSTOPERATIVE SURGICAL COMPLICATIONS

Despite advancements, colon trauma carries a high risk of complications, particularly when diagnosis or repair is delayed.

16.1 Wound Infection

16.1.1 Incidence

- Up to 40–50% in high-risk or contaminated cases.[46]

16.1.2 Clinical Features

- Local erythema, swelling, purulent drainage, fever.

16.1.3 Treatment

- Wound drainage, antibiotics, delayed closure if needed.

16.1.4 Prevention

- Antibiotics (broad-spectrum, initiated preoperatively).
- Aseptic technique and adequate lavage.

16.2 Wound Dehiscence

16.2.1 Symptoms

- Wound separation, serosanguinous discharge, visible bowel loops.

16.2.2 Emergency Management:

- Return to OR for exploration and closure.

16.2.3 Prevention:

- Avoid tension, ensure good nutrition, manage infection aggressively.

17. INTRA-ABDOMINAL ABSCESS

17.1 Pathophysiology

- Due to fecal contamination or leak from repair site.
- Can form in paracolic gutters, pelvis, or subphrenic spaces.

17.2 Incidence:

- 10–20% in trauma laparotomy series.[47]

17.3 Clinical Features

- Fever, localized pain, leukocytosis, ileus.

17.4 Treatment

- CT-guided percutaneous drainage preferred.
- Surgical drainage for large or multiloculated collections.
- Broad-spectrum antibiotics.

18. ANASTOMOTIC LEAK

18.1 Types of Leaks

- Early (≤5 days): Often due to technical failure.
- Late (>5 days): Related to infection, poor healing, ischemia.

18.2 Pathophysiology

- Breakdown of suture line or staple line.
- Increased intraluminal pressure or poor blood supply.

18.3 Diagnosis

- Fever, tachycardia, peritonitis, leukocytosis.
- CT with contrast: extraluminal gas, leak of contrast.

18.4 Management

- Early re-exploration and repair or diversion.
- Drainage and supportive care in selected cases.

Anastomotic leak is associated with a 30–50% mortality rate when diagnosis is delayed.[48]

19. CONCLUSION

Traumatic colon injuries, though relatively rare, pose significant clinical challenges. Prompt recognition, classification, and tailored surgical management are essential to reduce complications and mortality. Advances in imaging and surgical techniques — including the use of staplers and more aggressive primary repair strategies — have improved outcomes. However, high-risk patients and contaminated wounds still require individualized approaches, often with diversion. Continued research and adherence to trauma surgery guidelines will help optimize management in both resource-rich and resource-limited settings.

20. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the writing or publication of this review.

FUNDING

This study received no external funding and was conducted as part of an academic independent review project.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

This is a narrative literature review, and therefore does not involve primary data collection. All data discussed are publicly available from cited references.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As this study is based solely on published literature, no ethical approval or informed consent was required. The review adheres to international standards of academic integrity and publication ethics.

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