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Serum Lactate as a Prognosis of Living Outcomes

Varathip Thongdech[1], Nuthakun Posri[1], Peeraya Buakhao[1], Phongthara Vichitvejpaisal[2]

[1] *Division of Nursing Specialty, Golden Jubilee Medical Center, Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand*

[2] *Department of Anesthesiology, Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University, Bangkok 10700, Thailand*

Abstract

This article explores the significance of serum lactate as a predictor of living outcomes in critically ill patients. Serum lactate, traditionally associated with tissue hypoperfusion, has emerged as a valuable prognostic marker beyond its hypoxic implications. The article discusses the production and metabolism of lactate, highlighting its reflection of tissue hypoperfusion and cellular dysfunction. It emphasizes the importance of serum lactate measurements, as a powerful prognostic indicator in critically ill patients, as elevated levels have been consistently correlated with higher mortality rates and increased morbidity. This can aid healthcare professionals in making informed decisions regarding patient management and optimizing treatment strategies to improve patient outcomes. Furthermore, serum lactate can guide therapeutic decisions, assess illness severity, and aid in risk stratification. While acknowledging the limitations and confounding factors in interpreting lactate levels, the article encourages further research and integration of serum lactate measurements to optimize patient outcomes in critical care settings.

Keywords: critically ill patients, prognostic indicator, serum lactate, tissue hypoperfusion

Key points:

- Serum lactate serves as a valuable prognostic marker in critically ill patients beyond its association with tissue hypoperfusion and cellular dysfunction.
- Serum lactate measurements aid in assessing illness severity, guiding therapeutic decisions, and risk stratification.
- Interpretation of serum lactate levels requires consideration of confounding factors and integration with other clinical parameters.

Introduction

In the field of medicine, prognostic markers play a crucial role in predicting the outcomes of patients with various medical conditions. One such marker that has gained significant attention is serum lactate. Serum lactate refers to the concentration of lactate, a byproduct of anaerobic

Correspondence to: Phongthara Vichitvejpaisal, E-mail: phongthara@gmail.com

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metabolism, in the blood. Traditionally, lactate has been associated with tissue hypoxia and is considered a marker of inadequate oxygen supply to tissues.[1] However, recent research has unveiled its potential as a prognostic indicator beyond its association with hypoxia. Elevated levels of serum lactate have been found in critically ill patients across different medical settings, including emergency departments, intensive care units, and surgical wards. Several studies have indicated that increased serum lactate levels are associated with worse outcomes, including higher mortality rates and increased morbidity.[2,3]

Moreover, serum lactate has been recognized as a reflection of systemic disturbances and cellular dysfunction in critically ill patients, making it a valuable tool for assessing the severity of illness. While previous research has established an association between elevated serum lactate levels and poor prognosis[4], the specific mechanisms underlying this relationship remain poorly understood. By examining the available literature and current evidence, this article aims to elucidate the role of serum lactate as a prognostic marker and its potential applications in clinical practice. The exploration of serum lactate as a predictor of living outcomes holds immense value in critical care medicine. Understanding the prognostic implications of serum lactate could assist healthcare professionals in making timely and informed decisions regarding patient management, including risk stratification, treatment planning, and resource allocation. Furthermore, identifying the mechanisms through which serum lactate affects patient outcomes may pave the way for the development of targeted interventions aimed at improving survival rates and reducing morbidity in critically ill individuals.

Understanding serum lactate

Lactate is a metabolic by product that is generated during anaerobic metabolism, primarily in the cytoplasm of cells.[5] Under normal conditions, the body produces lactate as a result of glycolysis, the process by which glucose is broken down to produce energy. This occurs in various tissues, including skeletal muscle, the brain, and red blood cells. The lactate that is produced is then transported via the bloodstream to the liver, where it undergoes gluconeogenesis, a process in which lactate is converted back into glucose. In healthy individuals, lactate production and clearance are in a state of equilibrium, resulting in relatively stable blood lactate levels. However, during certain circumstances, such as intense exercise or in the presence of underlying medical conditions[6], lactate production may exceed its clearance, leading to an accumulation of lactate in the bloodstream.

Elevated serum lactate levels have been traditionally associated with tissue hypoperfusion[1], which occurs when there is inadequate oxygen delivery to tissues. When oxygen supply to tissues is compromised, cells shift to anaerobic metabolism, resulting in increased lactate production. This process serves as an adaptive response to generate energy in the absence of sufficient oxygen. In critically ill patients, elevated serum lactate levels can be indicative of various conditions that disrupt tissue perfusion, such as hypovolemia, sepsis, cardiogenic shock, or respiratory failure. However, it is important to note that serum lactate levels can also be influenced by factors unrelated to tissue hypoperfusion, such as liver dysfunction or medication use.[7] Therefore, it is crucial to

consider the clinical context and other diagnostic parameters when interpreting serum lactate measurements.

Furthermore, elevated serum lactate levels have been linked to cellular dysfunction in critically ill patients. Lactate accumulation can disrupt cellular pH balance and impair cellular processes, leading to organ dysfunction. The precise mechanisms through which lactate contributes to cellular dysfunction are still under investigation, but potential mechanisms include altered intracellular signaling, impaired oxygen utilization, and mitochondrial dysfunction. These cellular disturbances can contribute to the overall severity of the patient's condition and influence their prognosis. The measurement of serum lactate has gained significant importance in the management of critically ill patients. It serves as a valuable tool for assessing the severity of illness and guiding clinical decision-making. Elevated serum lactate levels have been associated with worse outcomes, including increased mortality rates, longer hospital stays, and higher rates of complications. In critically ill patients, serial measurements of serum lactate can provide valuable information regarding the response to treatment and the progression of the underlying condition. A reduction in lactate levels over time may indicate improved tissue perfusion and response to therapy. Conversely, persistently elevated or increasing lactate levels may suggest ongoing tissue hypoperfusion or treatment failure, prompting the need for reassessment and intervention. Moreover, serum lactate measurements can aid in risk stratification and prognostication. Several scoring systems, such as the Sequential Organ Failure Assessment (SOFA) score[8] and the Acute Physiology and Chronic Health Evaluation (APACHE) score[9], incorporate serum lactate levels as a component to assess the severity of illness and predict outcomes in critically ill patients.

Serum lactate as a prognostic indicator

Numerous studies consistently demonstrate that elevated serum lactate levels are associated with increased mortality rates in critically ill patients. Higher lactate levels predict adverse outcomes across various medical conditions, including sepsis, trauma, cardiac arrest, and respiratory failure. For instance, in sepsis, elevated lactate levels strongly predict mortality. Patients with sepsis and high lactate levels have a significantly higher risk of death compared to those with normal lactate levels. Similarly, trauma patients with elevated lactate levels upon admission to the emergency department experience increased mortality and worse clinical outcomes.[3]

In the context of cardiac arrest, higher serum lactate levels measured upon admission to the hospital or during resuscitation efforts are associated with increased mortality and worse neurological outcomes. In patients with respiratory failure, elevated lactate levels independently predict mortality.[4] Studies have also demonstrated the prognostic value of serum lactate in specific populations, such as patients with acute kidney injury, liver failure, or those undergoing major surgeries. Elevated lactate levels in these populations correlate with higher mortality rates and increased morbidity. Importantly, serum lactate levels are not only predictive of mortality but also associated with other adverse outcomes. These include longer

hospital stays, increased complication rates, and higher resource utilization.

Role of serum lactate in diagnosing of shock

Elevated lactate levels in conditions like sepsis or septic shock indicate a severe infection and systemic inflammatory response. In sepsis, high lactate levels signify extensive tissue damage, compromised organ function, and an increased risk of mortality. Serum lactate levels play a crucial role in diagnosing and differentiating types of shock, determining the underlying causes and guiding appropriate treatment strategies.[10-12] Distributive shock, like septic shock, causes elevated lactate levels due to the systemic inflammatory response and cellular dysfunction. Hypovolemic shock, resulting from reduced blood volume, also leads to elevated lactate levels due to tissue hypoperfusion. Cardiogenic shock, caused by heart failure, impairs tissue perfusion and elevates lactate levels. Lactate measurements differentiate between these types of shock. In septic shock, elevated lactate levels accompany signs of infection, while in hypovolemic shock, lactate elevation is associated with signs of fluid loss or hemorrhage.

Serum lactate-guided therapeutic decision-making

Traditionally, resuscitation efforts in critically ill patients have focused on hemodynamic parameters such as blood pressure and urine output. However, lactate-guided therapeutic decision-making provides valuable information for optimizing patient care in critically ill individuals. By incorporating serial lactate measurements into treatment algorithms, healthcare professionals can tailor interventions such as fluid resuscitation and vasopressor support, guide treatment decisions, and ultimately improve patient outcomes in critical care settings.[13,14] In cases of hypoperfusion and elevated lactate levels, the initial step to improve tissue perfusion is often fluid resuscitation. Serial lactate measurements assist clinicians in evaluating the response to fluid administration. A decrease in lactate levels indicates improved tissue perfusion and suggests an adequate response to fluid resuscitation. Conversely, persistent or increasing lactate levels may indicate ongoing hypoperfusion and necessitate further fluid resuscitation or reevaluation of the underlying condition.[1]

In the management of critically ill patients, vasopressor support is commonly employed to maintain blood pressure and enhance tissue perfusion. Serum lactate levels serve as a guide for initiating, titrating, or discontinuing vasopressor medications. If lactate levels remain elevated despite adequate fluid resuscitation, it may indicate persistent tissue hypoperfusion and the need for vasopressor support. On the other hand, a decrease in lactate levels may signify improved tissue perfusion and enable a reduction or discontinuation of vasopressor therapy. Overall, lactate monitoring plays a critical role in optimizing patient care and guiding treatment decisions for critically ill individuals. Serial lactate measurements provide real-time information about the patient's response to interventions, enabling timely adjustments to treatment strategies. This close monitoring allows healthcare professionals to assess the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions and guide resuscitation efforts, facilitating prompt adjustments when needed.[14,15]

Lactate monitoring assists in risk stratification and prognostication. Persistently elevated or

unresponsive lactate levels despite treatment may indicate a higher risk of mortality or poor outcomes. This valuable information helps clinicians engage in discussions with patients and families, make informed clinical decisions, and allocate resources appropriately.[15] Furthermore, lactate monitoring identifies patients who may benefit from more aggressive interventions, such as early goal-directed therapy or specialized treatments for specific conditions like sepsis. By monitoring lactate levels and adjusting treatment strategies accordingly, healthcare professionals can optimize patient care, improve outcomes, and potentially reduce mortality rates. Overall, lactate monitoring is an essential tool in providing the best possible care to critically ill patients.

Serum lactate as a risk stratification tool

Numerous studies have emphasized the usefulness of serum lactate as a risk stratification tool in critically ill patients, aiding in triage and resource allocation. Elevated lactate levels consistently correlate with higher mortality rates and adverse outcomes, making it a valuable marker for risk assessment. In emergency departments, elevated lactate levels effectively identify patients at a higher risk of mortality and poor outcomes. Lactate measurements have proven useful in identifying critically ill patients who require urgent interventions or higher levels of care. In trauma settings, lactate levels help prioritize patients at a higher risk of morbidity and mortality.[3] Serum lactate levels provide valuable predictive information for both short-term and long-term outcomes in critically ill patients. Elevated lactate levels are associated with increased mortality rates and higher complication rates in the short term. They offer insights into the severity of the underlying condition and the patient's response to treatment.

In the long term, elevated lactate levels are linked to an increased risk of long-term morbidity, including organ dysfunction and disability. Persistent or rising lactate levels indicate ongoing cellular dysfunction and an elevated risk of complications, underscoring the need for continued monitoring and intervention.[12] However, while serum lactate is a valuable risk stratification tool, it should be integrated with other clinical factors for comprehensive risk assessment. Lactate levels should be interpreted in conjunction with the patient's clinical presentation, underlying condition, and other diagnostic parameters.

Integrating lactate measurements with additional clinical factors such as vital signs, laboratory results, imaging findings, and disease-specific scoring systems enhances the accuracy of risk assessment. This comprehensive approach provides a more thorough understanding of the patient's condition and enables healthcare professionals to make well-informed decisions regarding patient management and resource allocation. Furthermore, considering lactate levels over time and assessing trends provides valuable insights into the patient's clinical trajectory and treatment response. Serial lactate measurements help identify patients who are not adequately responding to interventions or those who may require escalated care.

Limitations and considerations

Interpreting serum lactate levels in clinical practice requires careful consideration of several limitations and confounding factors. These factors can significantly influence lactate values and should be taken into account during the inter-

pretation process to avoid misinterpretation and ensure accurate clinical decision-making. One important limitation to consider is that elevated lactate levels are not specific to tissue hypoperfusion. While tissue hypoxia is a common cause of elevated lactate, other factors such as liver dysfunction, certain medications (e.g., metformin), and specific medical conditions (e.g., malignancy) can also contribute to lactate elevation.[12,17] It is crucial to differentiate between hypoperfusion-related lactate elevation and other causes by conducting a comprehensive assessment of the patient's clinical context and considering additional diagnostic information.

Another consideration is the variability in lactate clearance among individuals. Lactate clearance depends on various factors, including liver function, renal clearance, and the rate of lactate production. Variations in these factors can impact lactate kinetics, making it challenging to directly compare lactate levels among different patients. Thus, it is important to interpret lactate values in the context of the patient's individual characteristics and medical history.[4,18] In addition, the timing and technique of sample collection can influence lactate measurements. Delayed or improper handling of blood samples can lead to artifactual lactate elevation, introducing inaccuracies in the results. To minimize pre-analytical variability, it is essential to adhere to standardized protocols for sample collection and processing.

Comorbidities and patient-specific factors can significantly affect lactate values and should be considered during interpretation. Medical conditions such as liver disease, renal dysfunction, or malignancy can impact lactate metabolism and clearance, leading to altered lactate levels. Understanding a patient's underlying medical conditions and their potential influence on lactate levels is crucial for accurate interpretation. Moreover, individual patient factors, including age, medication use, and baseline lactate levels, contribute to inter-individual variability in lactate values. Establishing an individual's baseline lactate level, accounting for factors such as age-related variations, can help interpret lactate trends and identify significant changes more effectively. It is important to note that serum lactate levels should not be relied upon as the sole prognostic indicator or the sole basis for therapeutic decision-making.

Lactate measurements are most informative when used as part of a comprehensive approach to prognostication, integrating multiple clinical parameters. These parameters include vital signs, laboratory findings, imaging results, disease-specific scoring systems, and other relevant clinical information. Incorporating lactate measurements into a multidimensional assessment provides a more accurate risk stratification and prognostication.[19] Ultimately, clinical judgment and expertise play a vital role in interpreting lactate levels within the context of the individual patient. The integration of lactate measurements with the patient's clinical presentation, response to therapy, and overall trajectory enhances the clinical decision-making process and optimizes patient care. Therefore, a collaborative approach that considers all relevant factors is crucial for the accurate interpretation and application of serum lactate levels in clinical practice.

Future research and integration into clinical practice

The significance of serum lactate as a prognostic and risk stratification tool highlights the need for further research and integration into

clinical practice. Continued investigation into the mechanisms underlying lactate's association with outcomes can enhance our understanding of its role and potential applications. Furthermore, integrating serum lactate measurements with other clinical factors and incorporating them into comprehensive risk assessment tools can optimize patient outcomes in critical care settings. Future studies should focus on refining lactate-guided therapeutic approaches, exploring lactate kinetics, and investigating the value of lactate normalization as a treatment target. Additionally, advancements in lactate measurement technology and standardized protocols for sample collection and analysis are essential for ensuring accuracy and consistency.

Conclusion

Serum lactate is a valuable predictor of living outcomes in critically ill patients, associated with increased mortality rates and worse clinical outcomes. It reflects tissue hypoperfusion, cellular dysfunction, and illness severity. Monitoring lactate levels provides insights into patient prognosis and informs treatment decisions. Lactate measurements guide therapeutic interventions, such as fluid resuscitation and vasopressor support, allowing individualized care. They also aid in risk stratification, patient triaging, and resource allocation. Incorporating lactate measurements into clinical decision-making optimizes patient outcomes and enhances care quality. However, interpreting serum lactate levels requires considering limitations and confounding factors. Factors like liver dysfunction, medications, sample collection, and patient-specific characteristics can affect lactate values.

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