

LIVER

Abstinence to improve survival from alcoholic cirrhosis—a waiting game

“Drinking alcohol raises the risk of alcoholic liver disease and abstinence improves hepatic function; however, whether abstinence increases survival in patients with alcoholic cirrhosis is controversial,” explains Professor Lai Wei, corresponding author of a systematic review and meta-analysis published in *Hepatology Research*. Wei and colleagues have now reported that abstinence improves survival in patients with alcoholic cirrhosis compared with those who continue drinking, but a prolonged abstinent period of abstinence is required.

The researchers included seven cohort studies comprising 1,235 patients with alcoholic cirrhosis. Survival distribution was compared between those who became abstinent and those who continued drinking. The cumulative survival rate was measured at 6-monthly intervals up to 5 years.

Alcohol abstinence improved survival in patients compared with those who

continued drinking, but this effect only became statistically significant after 1.5 years of abstinence. “This effect of alcoholic abstinence on survival has great statistical uncertainty,”

Wei comments. “Interpretation of the results was affected by liver function, amount of alcohol consumption, duration of alcohol abstinence, race, age, gender, smoking, obesity and diabetes, among others,” he adds. Future research in this area will need to control for these factors more carefully.

“We are now planning to conduct prospective clinical studies about the long-term clinical course and prognosis of alcoholic liver disease,” says Wei.

Katherine Smith

Original article Wei, L. *et al.* Effect of abstinence from alcohol on survival of patients with alcoholic cirrhosis: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Hepatol. Res.* doi:10.1111/hepr.12131