

Faith in God associated with improved survival after liver transplantation

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Italian researchers report that liver transplant candidates who have a strong religious connection have better post-transplant survival. This study also finds that religiosity—regardless of cause of death—prolongs the life span of individuals who underwent liver transplantation. Full findings are now available online and in the October issue of *Liver Transplantation*, a journal published by Wiley-Blackwell on behalf of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD).

Much of the medical profession today is focused on the delivery of services, rather than whole patient care which not only takes into account physical well-being, but psychological, social, and spiritual aspects as well. Although there is a lack of interest in religion by the medical community, the authors point out that 90% of the world's population today is involved in some form of religion or spiritual pursuit. Prior studies have demonstrated that religiosity allows individuals to better cope with illness, and may even influence [disease progression](#).

Furthermore, a report by McCullough et al. that included a meta-analysis of 42 studies (surveying roughly 126,000 people) found active religious involvement increased the odds of being alive at follow-up by 26%.

"Our study tested the hypothesis that religiosity—seeking God's help, having faith in God, trusting in God, trying to discern God's will even in the disease—improves survival of patients with end-stage liver disease who underwent [liver transplantation](#)," explains Franco Bonaguidi, D.Psych., and lead author of the study. The study team selected 179 patients who received a liver transplant between January 2004 and

December 2007, and who also completed the [religiosity](#) questionnaire. Participants (129 males and 50 females) had a media age of 52 years and were followed for 4 years (median = 21 months) post-transplantation. Indications for liver transplant included: viral hepatitis (68%), [alcoholic liver disease](#) (17%), and autoimmune hepatitis (7%).

Results indicate that the Search for God factor (hazard ratio = 2.95) and length of stay in the intensive care unit (1.05) were independently associated with survival. Furthermore, it was the personal relationship between the patient and God, regardless of religious creed (Christian, Muslim, or other) rather than formal church attendance that positively affected survival. As one participant described, "I recovered my life by the will of Someone up there...I had great faith in Him. This closeness made me feel strong and calm."

Dr. Bonaguidi concluded, "We found that an active search for God—the patient's faith in a higher power rather than a generic destiny—had a positive impact on patient survival." The authors caution that this study focuses on a severely ill patient population, therefore the conclusions may not be applicable to individuals with different illnesses or degrees of disease severity.

More information: "Religiosity Associated with Prolonged Survival in Liver Transplant Recipients." Franco Bonaguidi, Claudio Michelassi, Franco Filipponi, Daniele Rovai. *Liver Transplantation*; Published Online: June 18, 2010 ([DOI: 10.1002/lt.22122](https://doi.org/10.1002/lt.22122)); Print Issue Date: October 2010.

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