A Text a Day May Keep Fatty Liver Disease Away

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Text messaging support programs aimed at encouraging weight loss and liver health can help significantly promote the health of patients diagnosed with non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), according to new findings presented at Digestive Disease Week 2017, AJMC reports.

Because the FDA has not yet approved any drug for the treatment of NAFLD, the findings are of particular interest to hepatitis researchers aiming to reduce the burden of fatty liver disease in the United States. Currently, the only way to control the progression of the obesity-related liver disease is through lifestyle changes aimed at shedding extra pounds and reducing risk factors for metabolic syndrome, such as serum alanine aminotransferase (ALT) levels.

In this latest study, researchers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham set out to see whether a text messaging intervention could help boost adherence to these suggestions. The trial randomly assigned 21 NAFLD patients to either receive traditional care (consisting of counseling on diet and exercise at clinic visits) or to receive regular text messages on their phones about nutrition, exercise and stress management in addition to their usual care.

According to study authors, the outcomes seen in the seemingly straightforward intervention were encouraging. People in the text message group lost an average of 11.2 pounds, while the control group showed no significant weight loss. Additionally, the intervention group's ALT levels and serum triglycerides both dropped, whereas there was no significant change among those in the control group.

Researchers also found that the patients who received the text intervention reported high levels of satisfaction with the program and said they would recommend it to others. However, further studies with larger sample sizes, longer trial periods and diverse patient populations will be necessary to determine how well the program really works.

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