Clinical study on nutrition support in patients with severe acute pancreatitis

Gang Zhao, Chun-You Wang, Fang Wang, Jiong-Xin Xiong

INTRODUCTION
Severe acute pancreatitis (SAP) is characterized by a diffuse inflammatory process of the pancreas with variable involvement of adjacent tissues and dysfunction of remote organs[1-3]. The metabolic alterations of SAP are involved in a classical stress state, as proposed for sepsis, including hyperdynamic changes, hypermetabolism and hypercatabolism. Thus, artificial nutritional support should be a suitable treatment[4-6]. The clinical nutritional management of pancreatitis has changed from total parenteral nutrition (TPN) to enteral nutrition (EN). However, it remains to be clarified whether EN is the best approach or not[5-8]. The purpose of this observation was to evaluate different nutrition therapies for SAP.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Patients
A total of 96 patients with SAP admitted to the Pancreatic Surgery Center of Union Hospital (Wuhan, China) between February 2000 and October 2002 were recruited to the randomized study. The severity of pancreatitis was defined according to the Atlanta classification system for acute pancreatitis. Criteria for this observation were the acute physiology and chronic health evaluation II (APACHE II) score higher than 8, and no indication for operation temporarily[9,10]. These patients consisted of 58 males and 38 females with a mean age of 47.8 years (range 24-68 years). After 48 hours of common management including active liquid resuscitation and organ function protection[11,12], the patients were divided randomly into control and treatment groups. No significant differences of male:female ratio (15.6:16.7) and average age (48.2 and 46.7) were found between the two groups.

Study protocol
The 41 patients in control group were commenced on TPN via central venous infusion. In the treatment group, PN and EN were carried out by three stages for 55 patients. At first, the patients of treatment group only received glutamine-supplemented PN. When the paralysis was relieved, EN and PN were applied at the same time. EN was administrated via a nasojugal feeding tube under endoscopy or X-ray. Following the study period, the volume and speed of enteral feeding were adjusted depending on the individual tolerance. Deficiency of energy was compensated through glutamine-supplemented PN. At last, the enteral feeding reached approximately 2 000 ml in 5-7 d, and PN was ceased.

Nutrition formulas
Conventional TPN was based on an amino acid solution providing 0.25 g nitrogen/(kg·d) with lipid emulsion and glucose. Half of the non-protein calories were provided by lipid. The total calorie was 30 kcal/(kg·d) and the calorie to nitrogen ratio was 120:1 in each patient. Electrolytes, trace elements and vitamins were added to maintain requirements[13]. PN in treatment group was based on the same elements as TPN but with supplement of 0.22 g glutamine/kg. EN formula was Peptide-2000 (Nutricia, Holland) semi-elementary diet.

RESULTS
Body weight and prealbumin concentration were increased in treatment group, compared to those in the control group, but albumin concentration did not change significantly. Acute physiology and chronic health evaluation II (APACHE II) score decreased after 7 d of treatment, whereas the scores of the control group decreased on the 11th day. Concentrations of tumor necrosis factor-α (TNF-α), interleukine-6 (IL-6) and serum C reactive protein (CRP) dropped earlier in the treatment group (on the 4th day) than that in the control group (on the 7th day). No difference was observed in pancreatic lesions between the control and treatment groups. Concentration of endotoxin and lactulose/manicol (L:M) ratio of urine did not change in treatment group, but those in the control group were elevated markedly. Compared with the treatment group, CD4 CD8 T cells ratio and immunoglobulin G (IgG) concentration in the control group decreased significantly.

CONCLUSION: Compared to TPN, the combined therapy of EN and PN could improve the nutrition status and moderate the acute phase response obviously. Moreover, the integrity of enteric mucosa and immune function were protected more effectively in treatment group than in the control one. On the other hand, EN did not simulate the excretion of pancreas and avoid exaggerating the inflammation of pancreas. Thus, appropriate application of PN and EN appears to be more effective for patients with SAP.

Zhaogang, Wang CY, Wang F, Xiong JX. Clinical study on nutrition support in patients with severe acute pancreatitis. World J Gastroenterol 2003; 9(9): 2105-2108
http://www.wjgnet.com/1007-9327/9/2105.asp
(2.9 g nitrogen and 500 kcal non-protein calorie/500 ml), with supplement of glutamine tablets to increase the intake of glutamine\(^{14,15}\).

**Experimental protocols**

Body weight, albumin and prealbumin concentrations were determined to evaluate the nutrition status once a week. APACHE II scores, serum C reactive protein (CRP), tumor necrosis factor-\(\alpha\) (TNF-\(\alpha\)) and interleukine-6 (IL-6) were quantified every three days to assess the acute phase response. Pancreatic and peripancreatic necrosis were detected by contrast-enhanced CT scan once a week. These results of CT scan were scored with a modified Balthazar scoring system. Permeability of gastrointestinal mucosa was evaluated by concentration of endotoxin and lactulose/manicol (L:M) ratio of urine. CD4:CD8 ratio of T cell and concentration of immunoglobulin G (IgG) were quantified to assess immunological function.

**Statistical analysis**

All data were expressed as the mean ± standard deviation. Student’s \(t\) test was used to analyze the difference. A value of \(P<0.05\) was considered statistically significant.

**RESULTS**

**Nutrition status**

Compared to the control group, body weight and plasma prealbumin concentration were increased in the treatment group after two weeks of treatment (\(P<0.05\)), whereas plasma albumin concentration did not change (Table 1).

| Table 1 | Changes of body weight, plasma albumin and prealbumin concentrations in two groups |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | **Weight (kg)** | **Albumin (g/L)** | **Prealbumin (g/L)** |
| Control | 66.5±13.3        | 38.7±5.2          | 12.6±3.2           |
| Treatment | 65.7±13.1        | 38.8±3.9          | 12.7±5.2           |

\(^{a}P<0.05\) vs control.

Table 2 Changes of APACHE II scores and concentration of TNF-\(\alpha\), IL-6 and CRP in two groups

| Table 2 | Changes of APACHE II scores and concentration of TNF-\(\alpha\), IL-6 and CRP in two groups |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | **APACHE II** | **TNF-\(\alpha\)(pg/ml)** | **IL-6(pg/ml)** | **CRP(mg/L)** |
| Control | 8.2±0.7        | 63.5±15.2           | 43.3±11.4       | 77.3±13.5     |
| Treatment | 8.3±0.6        | 68.4±13.5          | 46.7±12.4       | 75.4±14.5     |
| Control | 7.9±0.6\(^a\) | 55.6±16.3          | 39.8±9.2        | 67.3±18.6     |
| Treatment | 7.1±0.8        | 47.4±11.6          | 31.4±8.5\(^a\)  | 54.8±11.2     |

\(^{a}P<0.05\) vs control.

Table 3 Changes of serum amylase, urine amylase and CT scores in two groups

| Table 3 | Changes of serum amylase, urine amylase and CT scores in two groups |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | **Serum amylase (IU)** | **Urine amylase (IU)** | **CT score** |
| Control | 672±83              | 1327±324            | 2.5±0.8     |
| Treatment | 640±79             | 1521±284           | 2.3±0.7     |
| Control | 689±96              | 2227±357            | 3.8±1.1     |
| Treatment | 821±87             | 2312±312           | 3.7±0.9     |

Table 4 Changes of endotoxin concentration and L:M ratio of urine in two groups

| Table 4 | Changes of endotoxin concentration and L:M ratio of urine in two groups |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | **Endotoxin (pg/ml)** | **L:M** |
| Control | —                  | 0.047±0.019       |
| Treatment | —                | 0.052±0.021      |
| Control | 5.9±1.1            | 0.097±0.023      |
| Treatment | 2.4±0.7\(^a\) | 0.143±0.046      |

\(^{a}P<0.05\) vs control.

Table 5 Changes of CD4:CD8 ratio and IgG concentration in two groups

| Table 5 | Changes of CD4:CD8 ratio and IgG concentration in two groups |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | **CD4:CD8** | **IgG (mg/L)** |
| Control | 1.82±0.02  | 12.3±1.7    |
| Treatment | 1.85±0.04 | 11.8±1.1    |
| Control | 1.54±0.05  | 9.8±0.9     |
| Treatment | 1.72±0.06\(^a\) | 11.4±0.7 |

\(^{a}P<0.05\) vs control.
Acute phase responses

APACHE II scores decreased earlier in the treatment group (on the 4th day) than those in the control group (on the 7th day). Moreover, the concentration of serum CRP, TNF-α and IL-6 in treatment group decreased earlier too (Table 2).

Pancreas lesions

The concentrations of serum and urine amylase in both groups decreased on the 7th day, and there were no significant differences between these two groups. Similar changes were observed in the CT scores (Table 3).

Enteric mucosal permeability

Few endotoxins were detected in the treatment group on the 7th day, and the urine L:M ratio remained unchanged. Endotoxin concentration and urine L:M ratio in control group elevated gradually and were much higher than those in the treatment one (P<0.05) (Table 4).

Immune function

CD4:CD8 T cell ratio and serum IgG concentration did not change in the treatment group. In control group, CD4:CD8 T cell ratio and serum IgG concentration decreased continuously and were markedly lower than those in the treatment group (P<0.05) (Table 5).

DISCUSSION

Infected pancreatic necrosis is the most severe complication in patients with SAP. Its occurrence is associated with systemic inflammatory response syndrome (SIRS), sepsis, and multiple organ failure (MOF). Failure of intestinal barrier function is probably responsible for the occurrence of these phenomena[16-19]. Experimental models have shown that infection of necrotic pancreas is caused by translocated intestinal bacteria. Bacterial endotoxins and antigens invade the portal circulation and generate cytokines, causing multiple organ failure syndrome (MODS). Enteral feeding has been proved to be beneficial in burn patients and major trauma victims. Theoretically, EN should help preserve intestinal barrier function in patients with SAP[20-23].

It is worth considering which factors contribute to the failure of gut barrier function in acute pancreatitis. Some of these factors are consequences of the disturbance of peristalsis caused by paralysis and disturbance of perfusion caused by hypotension. The most important factor is the deficiency of oxygen and substrate supply for enteric mucosae. Atrophy and apoptosis of intestinal mucosae occur after several days of PN, and the permeability of intestinal wall increases[24-26]. The increased permeability of intestinal wall allows macromolecules, bacteria, endotoxins, and antigens to enter into the portal circulation and adjacent tissues. This invasion elicits an inflammatory response by stimulating the macrophages and neutrophil granulocytes and by inflammatory cytokines (IL-1, 2, and 6 and TNF). These inflammatory mediators may be responsible for the development of SIRS and MODS[27-29]. Our study indicated that inflammatory mediators (CRP, IL-6 and TNF-α) in the treatment group decreased earlier (on the 4th day) than those in the control group (on the 7th day). Similarly, APACHE II scores in the treatment group declined earlier (on the 7th day) than those in the control group (on the 11th day). These results suggest that the combined therapy of EN and PN could avoid the excess production of inflammatory mediators, and then alleviate SIRS and acute phase response.

Glutamine is an amino acid rich in the plasma and intracellular free amino acid pool. It is essential for a wide variety of physiologic processes, in particular, the growth and function of enteric mucosae and immune cells including lymphocytes and macrophages[30-32]. In SAP, glutamine is in condition of excess utilization and endogenous glutamine production may not adequate. In our present study, glutamine was added into the elements of PN and EN. The results showed that endotoxins concentration and urine L:M ratio in the treatment group did not have any change, but elevated markedly in the control group. It was indicated that intestinal epithelial cells and immune cells received nutrients especially glutamine from the gut and reins in the treatment group. Furthermore, intestinal motility adjusted the secretion of enteral hormones and enhanced blood flow. Therefore, the combined therapy of PN and EN can prevent mucosa from atrophy and apoptosis effectively. Meanwhile, the results of CD4:CD8 ratio of T cells and serum IgG concentration indicated that the immune function in the treatment group was protected effectively. The combined therapy of PN and EN protected mucosal barrier and immune function, which could prevent the translocation of bacteria effectively.

Several investigations have emphasized that early EN should be beneficial to patients with SAP. However, too early EN or intragastric nutrition would increase the exocrine of pancreas, which aggravates pancreatitis. Our criteria for the enteral feeding are to alleviate the acute phase response, stabilize the organ function and extrude the local necrosis tissue and exudates. Nutritional tube must be placed in the superior segment of jejunum, so enteric feeding will not increase the amount of pancreatic secretions[33, 34]. Because the gut failed to function in patients with SAP and the nutritional tube couldn’t peristalsize, the tube should be pushed with endoscopy or under X-ray to the superior segment of the jejunum[35]. In this study, CT scores and the concentration of amylase indicated that EN did not simulate the excretion of pancreas, and thus could avoid exaggerating the inflammation of pancreas.

In summary, the results of our study provide evidences that combined therapy of EN and PN can significantly modulate acute phase response and improve the mucosal barrier and immune defense. Thus, appropriate application of PN and EN appears to be more effective for patients with SAP.

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Edited by Su Q and Wang XL