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In search of a window of opportunity in axial spondyloarthritis: treatment outcomes across different symptom durations

This Swiss registry study examined whether starting a first tumour necrosis factor inhibitor (TNFi) earlier improves short-term outcomes in axial spondyloarthritis. It included 1,161 patients with back pain lasting ≤ 1 , 1–5, or >5 years. Patients initiating treatment within one year of back pain start had higher disease activity and more signs of inflammation at baseline. After accounting for patient differences, all groups achieved similar disease control and improvement after one year and remained on treatment for similar periods. TNFi treatment within a year was therefore not more effective regarding short-term outcomes than treatment started after five years.

For rheumatologists, symptom duration alone should not determine expected response or justify treatment before the diagnosis is secure. Patients with longstanding symptoms can be reassured that they may still benefit from TNFi. However, the findings do not justify delaying appropriate treatment. The study was observational and assessed only short-term outcomes, so whether earlier treatment prevents long-term spinal damage or helps preserve quality of life remains uncertain.

Link to the publication: In search of a window of opportunity in axial spondyloarthritis: treatment outcomes across different symptom durations at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ero.2026.03.021>