

Lamotrigine for people with borderline personality disorder: a RCT

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Plain English summary

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People with borderline personality disorder (BPD) experience high levels of emotional distress and rapid and upsetting changes in mood. No medications are currently available for people with this condition. 'Mood stabilisers' are known to reduce mood swings in people with bipolar affective disorder and the results of small-scale studies suggest that they may also help people with BPD.

We conducted a clinical trial of the mood stabiliser lamotrigine for people with BPD who were using mental health services. We compared the effects of lamotrigine with those of a placebo (a dummy pill that did not contain any active drug) so that neither the researchers nor the participants knew what treatment they had been given until after we had completed an initial analysis of the results of the study. We assessed mental health, social functioning, quality of life, side effects and use of services in the year after people entered the study.

A total of 276 participants took part and 195 were followed up 1 year later. Fewer than half the participants (39%) were taking trial medication regularly at 1 year. We found no difference in mental health or any of the other outcomes we measured between those who were prescribed lamotrigine and those prescribed the placebo. We checked to see if the results were affected by whether or not people were taking their medication regularly and found no difference between those taking lamotrigine and those taking the placebo. On the basis of the results of this study, we have not shown any benefits of lamotrigine for treating people with BPD. Further research is needed to find out how best to help improve the mental health of people with this condition.

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