

Co-trimoxazole to reduce mortality, transplant, or unplanned hospitalisation in people with moderate to very severe idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis: the EME-TIPAC RCT

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Plain English summary

The EME-TIPAC RCT

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Plain English summary

Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis is an incurable, lung-scarring disease that causes people to feel progressively more breathless over time and to cough. It is a usually fatal disease. On average, people survive for 3–4 years after diagnosis.

Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis may be made worse by lung infections. A previous study suggested that an antibiotic called co-trimoxazole (SEPTRIN®; Essential Generics Ltd, Egham, UK; Chemidex Generics Ltd, Egham, UK) may improve survival by reducing the frequency and severity of lung infections. Although co-trimoxazole has been used for many years, we needed to undertake a larger study before we could recommend this form of treatment.

This study tested whether or not co-trimoxazole reduces the chances of dying or being admitted to hospital among people with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. We enrolled 342 people to take part in the study from nearly 40 hospitals throughout the UK. Patients took either co-trimoxazole or a dummy tablet for up to 3.5 years. As well as counting the number of deaths and admissions to hospital, we measured lung function using breathing tests and patient-completed questionnaires.

Our results suggest that co-trimoxazole did not reduce the chances of dying or being admitted to hospital (for any reason or because of chest infections and/or worsening of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis). However, we did find that the people taking co-trimoxazole coughed less than those who were not taking co-trimoxazole and their cough was less troublesome. Co-trimoxazole did not improve breathlessness score or breathing test results.

Our results do not suggest that people with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis should take daily co-trimoxazole to prevent progression of their condition. They should, however, take antibiotics prescribed by their doctor for chest infections or for other reasons. We need to undertake other studies to specifically look at cough symptoms before we can be sure whether or not co-trimoxazole is useful at improving this symptom. Other studies using other antibiotics may be useful.

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This report

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