New WONDER pill can 'significantly reduce severity of asthma'

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THE first new asthma treatment for 20 years has the power to significantly reduce the severity of the condition, scientists say.

Tests showed the twice-a-day wonder pill improved lung function, reduced inflammation and repaired the lining of airways.

Experts say the pill could be available on the NHS “within two to three years”.

Fevipiprant is now being evaluated in late stage clinical trials for people with severe forms of the respiratory condition.

It is hoped the breakthrough could signal the end of inhalers, which are used by millions of sufferers to alleviate symptoms.

Professor Chris Brightling, senior research fellow at the University of Leicester who led the study, said: “Most treatments might improve some features of disease, but with Fevipiprant improvements were seen with all of the types of tests.

"It could help to stop preventable asthma attacks, reduce hospital admissions and improve day-to-day symptoms making it a game changer for future treatment.”

Fresh optimism comes after tests on 61 sufferers, split into groups receiving a 225mg dose of the drug twice a day for 12 weeks and the rest receiving a placebo.

Fevipiprant and the placebo were added to medications participants were already taking.

Tests examined the effects on inflammation in the airway by measuring sputum eosinophil, white blood cell that increases in asthma.

Those who do not suffer from the condition have a percentage of less than one and those with moderate-to-severe asthma typically have a reading of about five per cent.

The rate in those with moderate-to-severe asthma on Fevipiprant was reduced from an average of 5.4 per cent to 1.1 per cent over three months, research published in The Lancet showed.

Three people die every day because of asthma attacks with two thirds of deaths preventable.

Experiments showed Fevipiprant significantly decreased the symptoms of asthma, improved lung function, reduced inflammation and repaired the lining of airways.

Asthma sufferer and trial participant Gaye Stokes, 54, from Grantham, Lincs., said: “I knew straight away I had been given the drug. I felt like a completely different person.

"I had more get up and go, I was less wheezy and for the first time in years I felt really well. It felt like a wonder drug and i really think it could make a huge difference to me.”

After the 12-week trial she stopped receiving the drug and noted her health started to “go downhill again very quickly”.

Asthma is a long-term condition affecting the airways. When a sufferer comes into contact with something that irritates their sensitive airways it causes wheezing and coughing and makes breathing more difficult.

Dr Samantha Walker, of Asthma UK, said: “This research shows massive promise and should be greeted with cautious optimism.

“The possibility of taking a pill instead of using an inhaler will be a very welcome one among the 5.4m people in the UK with asthma, particularly as this study focused on people who develop the condition in later life, some of whom we know can struggle with the dexterity required to use an inhaler.

"More research is needed and we’re a long way off seeing a pill for asthma being made available over the pharmacy counter, but it’s an exciting development and one which, in the long term, could offer a real alternative to current treatments.”