New 'wonder pill' offers hope for asthmatics

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Warding off [asthma](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/topic/Asthma) may soon be as simple as popping a pill, suggests a recent study.   
  
The first new asthma pill for nearly 20 years has the power to significantly reduce the severity of the condition, the University of Leicester research found.   
  
"This new drug could be a game changer for future treatment of asthma," said lead researcher Chris Brightling.

Fevipiprant (QAW039) significantly decreased the symptoms of asthma, improved lung function, reduced inflammation and repaired the lining of airways.   
  
The drug is currently being evaluated in late stage clinical trials for efficacy in patients with severe asthma, according to ClinTrials.gov.   
  
A total of 61 people took part in the research. One group was given 225mg of the drug twice a day for 12 weeks and the other participants were assigned to a placebo group. Fevipiprant and the placebo were added to the medications the participants were already taking.   
  
The study was designed primarily to examine the effects on inflammation in the airway by measuring the sputum eosinophil count.   
  
The sputum eosinophil is an inflammation measurement of a white blood cell that increases in asthma and is used to assess the severity of this condition.   
  
People who do not have asthma have a percentage of less than one and those with moderate-to-severe asthma typically have a reading of about five percent.   
  
The rate in people with moderate-to-severe asthma taking the medication was reduced from an average of 5.4 percent to 1.1 percent over 12 weeks, according to the study.   
  
Brightling noted: "A unique feature of this study was how it included measurements of symptoms, lung function using breathing tests, sampling of the airway wall and CT scans of the chest to give a complete picture of how the new drug works. Most treatments might improve some of these features of disease, but with Fevipiprant improvements were seen with all of the types of tests."   
  
He added, "We already know that using treatments to target eosinophilic airway inflammation can substantially reduce asthma attacks. This new treatment, Fevipiprant, could likewise help to stop preventable asthma attacks, reduce hospital admissions and improve day-to-day symptoms- making it a 'game changer' for future treatment."   
  
Gaye Stokes from Grantham in Lincolnshire has had severe asthma for 16 years. She took part in the trial and was part of the Fevipiprant group.   
  
The 54-year-old said: "I knew straight away that 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, really well. For me, it felt like a complete wonder drug and I can't wait for it to be available because I really think it could make a huge difference to me."   
  
After the 12 week trial and Gaye stopped receiving the drug, she said her health started to "go downhill again very quickly."   
  
Future treatment of human disease will increasingly move from a 'one size fits all' approach to one of tailoring the treatment to the individual patient.   
  
The study is published in the Lancet Respiratory Medicine journal.