

Evidence Update

Mental Health Series

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Does folate treat depression?

Folate may help when combined with antidepressants, but larger trials are needed.

Inclusion criteria

Studies:

Randomized controlled trials.

Participants:

People with a diagnosed depressive disorder, including major depressive disorder, bipolar affective disorder, and dysthymic disorder.

Intervention:

Folate compared with placebo; folate compared with antidepressant medication; folate plus antidepressant compared with antidepressant alone.

Outcomes:

Resolution of depressive symptoms (primary); drop-out rate; quality of life; clinical impression; hospital admission; social and occupational functioning; adverse events; death from any cause, suicide or undetermined injury.

Results

- Three trials with a total of 247 participants were included. None had adequate allocation concealment.
- People taking folate plus antidepressant showed greater improvement in depressive symptoms than those taking placebo when assessed using the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HDRS) (weighted mean difference -2.65, 95% confidence interval -4.93 to -0.38; 124 participants, 2 trials).
- There were no trials assessing other outcomes.

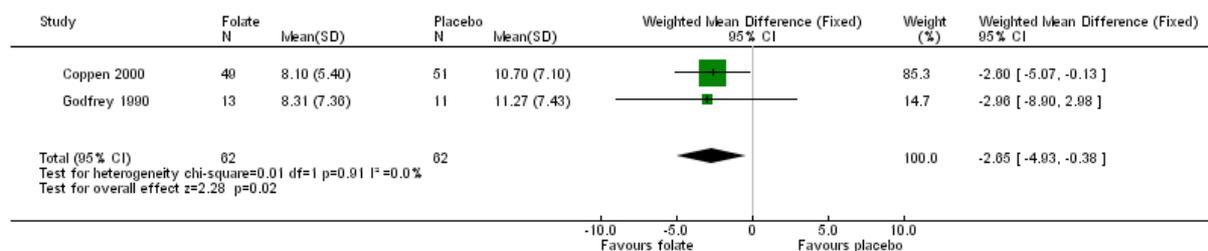


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Adapted from Taylor MJ, Carney S, Geddes J, Goodwin G. Folate for depressive disorders. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2003, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD003390. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD003390.

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Folate plus antidepressants versus antidepressants only: depressive symptoms measured by Hamilton Scale



Authors' conclusions

Implications for practice:

Adding folate to conventional antidepressant treatment may help improve symptoms of depression. There is insufficient evidence to support replacing antidepressant therapy with folate.

Implications for research:

Well-designed trials are needed to examine the size of the response to folate when taken with antidepressants. The trials should report comprehensively on outcomes including death, quality of life, and treatment acceptability.