



## Whipple's disease diagnosed during biological treatment for joint disease

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### Objectives

Increased susceptibility to infections is among the main safety concerns raised by biological agents. We describe five cases of Whipple's disease diagnosed during treatment with biological agents.

### Methods

We retrospectively identified five cases of Whipple's disease diagnosed between 2003 and 2009 in patients treated with TNF $\alpha$  antagonists in five French hospitals.

### Results

Five patients (four male; mean age: 50.4 years; range: 38-67) underwent biological therapy according to prior diagnoses of rheumatoid arthritis (n = 2), ankylosing spondylitis (n = 2), or spondyloarthropathy (n = 1). Biological therapy failed to control the disease, which responded to appropriate antibiotics for Whipple's disease. Retrospectively, clinical symptoms before biological therapy were consistent with Whipple's disease. All five patients had favorable outcomes (mean follow-up, 29 months [13-71]).

### Conclusions

Biological therapy probably worsened preexisting Whipple's disease, triggering the visceral disorders. Whipple's disease must be ruled out in patients with joint disease, as patients with this spontaneously fatal condition should not receive immunosuppressive agents.

Résumé en anglais

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