

# PEARLS

## Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations



Le traitement local correspond à notre pratique. A la différence d'autres endroits, le nettoyage des oreilles reste une activité standard du médecin de famille en Suisse.

Bruno Kissling

### Topical treatments are effective for acute otitis externa

PEARLS No. 240, March 2010, written by Brian R McAvoy

**Clinical question:** How effective are interventions for acute otitis externa?

**Bottom line:** Topical treatments alone were effective in treating acute otitis externa. Topical treatments in the review included antiseptic, antibiotic, steroid, antibiotic/steroid, antiseptic/steroid, antiseptic/antibiotic/steroid, antibiotic/steroid/antifungal and antiseptic/astringent treatments. There was little to choose between these treatments in terms of effectiveness. Additional oral antibiotics were not required.

However, when treatment needed to be extended beyond 1 week, acetic acid drops appeared to be less effective than antibiotic/steroid drops. In addition, symptoms persisted for 2 days longer in those treated with acetic acid. More research is needed to determine the effectiveness of steroid-only drops. Patients treated with antibiotic/steroid drops can expect their symptoms to last for approximately 6 days after treatment has begun.

**Caveat:** The findings of the review may not be wholly relevant to primary care as most of the trials were conducted in a hospital setting and over half involved ear cleaning (generally not available in primary care) as part of the treatment. No trials evaluated the effectiveness of ear cleaning. Given that most topical treatments are equally effective, it would appear that in most cases the preferred choice of topical treatment may be determined by other factors, such as risk of ototoxicity, risk of contact sensitivity, risk of developing resistance, availability, cost and dosing schedule. Factors such as speed of healing and pain relief are yet to be determined for many topical treatments and may also influence this decision.

**Context:** Acute otitis externa is an inflammatory condition of the ear canal, with or without infection. Symptoms include ear discomfort, itchiness, discharge and impaired hearing. The condition is also known as "swimmer's ear" and can usually be treated successfully with a course of ear drops.

**Cochrane Systematic Review:** Kaushik V et al. Interventions for acute otitis externa. Cochrane Reviews 2010, Issue 1. Article No. CD004740. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004740.pub2.

*This review contains 19 trials involving 3382 participants.*



La confirmation scientifique d'une observation faite par les médecins de famille.

Bruno Kissling

### Antidepressants are effective for depression in physically ill people

PEARLS No. 257, May 2010, written by Brian R McAvoy

**Clinical question:** How effective are antidepressants for depression in patients with a physical illness?

**Bottom line:** Antidepressants were more effective than placebo in treating depression in physically ill patients. The superiority of antidepressants over placebo was apparent within 4–5 weeks (NNT\* 6) and persisted after 18 weeks (NNT 7). Subgroup analysis showed both tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) and selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) were superior to placebo in treating depression in physically ill patients. Antidepressants were associated with increased rates of dry mouth (particularly TCAs) and sexual dysfunction (particularly SSRIs) compared with placebo. There was no evidence of a difference in drop-out between TCAs and SSRIs. Subgroup analysis suggested TCAs, which are often considered inappropriate for physically ill patients are as effective and as acceptable to patients as SSRIs. There are no grounds to recommend a specific antidepressant on the basis of this review, which included studies evaluating a total of 22 different drugs.

\* NNT = number needed to treat to benefit 1 individual

**Caveat:** At 6–8 weeks, there were more drop-outs among patients treated with an antidepressant than among patients treated with placebo (NNH\*\*19), but no difference was observed at the other time-points assessed. Due to potential biases, such as selective publication, small sample sizes and the variable methodological quality of trials, it is likely the effect sizes obtained in this review overestimate the efficacy of antidepressants.

\*\* NNH = number needed to treat to cause harm in 1 individual

**Context:** Antidepressants are effective in the treatment of depression in physically healthy populations, but there is less clarity regarding their use in physically ill patients.

**Cochrane Systematic Review:** Rayner L et al. Antidepressants for depression in physically ill people. Cochrane Reviews 2010, Issue 3. Article No. CD0057503. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD0057503.pub2.

*This review contains 51 studies involving 3603 participants.*

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### PEARLS

PEARLS are succinct summaries of Cochrane Systematic Reviews for primary care practitioners. They are developed by the Cochrane Primary Care Field and funded by the New Zealand Guidelines Group.

PEARLS provide guidance on whether a treatment is effective or ineffective. PEARLS are prepared as an educational resource and do not replace clinician judgement in the management of individual cases.

View PEARLS online at: [www.cochranepriarycare.org](http://www.cochranepriarycare.org).