String of **PEARLS**

**Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations**

**PEARLS** are succinct summaries of Cochrane Systematic Reviews for primary care practitioners—developed by Prof. Brian McAvoy for the Cochrane Primary Care Field (www.cochraneprimarycare.org), New Zealand Branch of the Australasian Cochrane Centre at the Department of General Practice and Primary Health Care, University of Auckland (www.auckland.ac.nz/ua), funded by the New Zealand Guidelines Group (www.nzgg.org.nz) and published in NZ Doctor (www.nzdoctor.co.nz).

- Interventions to promote walking effective in short-term
- Stretching does not prevent or reduce delayed-onset muscle soreness
- School-based physical activity programmes have positive effects
- Exercise beneficial in fibromyalgia syndrome
- Aerobic physical activity improves cognitive function in older people
- Exercise improves balance in older people
- Exercise and diet effective in preventing type 2 diabetes

**DISCLAIMER:** PEARLS are for educational use only and are not meant to guide clinical activity, nor are they a clinical guideline.

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**Antidepressants are effective for depressed patients in primary care**

**Bruce Arroll** MBChB, PhD, FRNZCGP, Professor of General Practice and Primary Health Care, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland; Email: b.arroll@auckland.ac.nz

**THE PROBLEM:** Are antidepressant medications effective for treating depression in primary care?

**THE SITUATION:** Depression is very common in primary care, with a 12-month prevalence of 18.1% (including dys-thymia 0.8%). There is considerable overlap with anxiety and substance use (MaGPIe; 2003). Depression is also common in the community, with a 12-month prevalence of 7.1% (Oakley-Browne; 2006).

**CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE:** Both tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) and Selective Serotonin Receptor Inhibitors (SSRIs) are effective for depression treated in primary care. The numbers needed to treat (NNT) for TCAs ranged from 7 to 16 (median NNT 9) and for SSRIs from 7 to 8 (median NNT 7). The placebo rate ranges from 26% to 63% so most of the benefit seen clinically is through the placebo effect. A minority of patients get a chemical benefit from their medication.

**Depression in primary care**

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<th>Success</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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<td>Antidepressants for depression in primary care</td>
<td>Effective for depression</td>
<td>Cochrane review¹</td>
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<tr>
<td>NNT for TCAs = 9 and for SSRIs = 7</td>
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NNT = numbers needed to treat for one person to get an improvement
NNH = numbers needed to treat for one person to get an adverse effect

**References**


"All people residing in New Zealand have access to the Cochrane Library via the Ministry website www.moh.govt.nz/cochranelibrary"