GEMS OF NEW ZEALAND
Primary Health Care Research

Which anticonvulstant drug is effective for which types of neuropathic pain?
Anticonvulstant drugs are used for treating neuropathic pain. This paper reviewed all the evidence for the efficacy of different anticonvulstants for specific conditions. It includes a table which summarises which drugs have been assessed for which conditions and whether the evidence supports their use or not. Gaps in the evidence are striking.

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Use of antidepressants for depression in primary care
Previous reviews have looked at the use of antidepressant treatment in secondary care settings, but there has been doubt about the effectiveness of antidepressants in primary care. This Cochrane review included 14 studies conducted in adults (not the elderly) in primary care settings, in which tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) were compared against placebo controls in the treatment of depression. The results showed that both types of antidepressants were effective for depression. There appeared to be more adverse effects with TCAs than with SSRIs, although the rates of withdrawal from the study medication due to adverse effects were very similar between the two classes of drugs.

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Stopping smoking early in pregnancy may prevent pre-term births
A cohort study of 2500 women found that current smokers had higher rates of spontaneous pre-term birth and small for gestational age infants than stopped smokers. Women who stopped smoking before 15 weeks’ gestation had the same rates of spontaneous preterm birth and small-for-dates babies as non-smokers, indicating that these severe adverse effects of smoking may be reversible if smoking is stopped early in pregnancy.

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Acclimatisation by aeroplane
It is generally accepted that the performance of athletes participating in aerobic endurance events is adversely affected by altitude, whereas athletes involved in speed and anaerobic events are either unaffected or perform even better at altitude than at sea level. Athletes travelling overseas in long-haul flights are effectively spending up to 13 hours at elevated altitude, because aircraft cabins are pressurised to maximum effective altitudes of 2440 metres. This study showed that oxygen saturation declined significantly in athletes during long-haul commercial flights, in response to reduced cabin pressure. Athletes often need to compete at altitudes similar to the effective altitudes experienced in airliner cabins. The exact timing and impact of these changes on performance is still unclear but has implications for altitude acclimatisation planning by athletes.

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