

String of PEARLS

Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations

about alcohol misuse

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/uoa), funded by the New Zealand Guidelines Group (www.nzgg.org.nz) and published in NZ Doctor (www.nzdoctor.co.nz).

- Social norms interventions reduce alcohol misuse in students
- Increased police patrols may prevent alcohol-impaired driving
- Brief interventions are effective in reducing hazardous or harmful drinking in men
- Brief interventions may benefit heavy alcohol users admitted to hospital
- Insufficient evidence for baclofen in alcohol withdrawal
- Naltrexone effective for treatment of alcohol dependence
- Acamprosate effective in supporting alcohol abstinence

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



Antibiotics with steroids are better than placebo for otitis externa; the evidence is unclear for either alone

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THE PROBLEM: Otitis externa is common in primary care. In adults it is usually confined to the external auditory canal, but if there is a history of childhood otitis media the discharge can mean the diagnosis of chronic suppurative otitis media would be more suitable. In my experience, a common cause in adults is the use of cotton buds. I quote the old preventive chestnut: “don’t put anything in your ear smaller than your elbow.” In many of the studies in this review they generally suctioned the ears to establish the diagnosis. The authors make the comment that most otitis externa in primary care gets better with topical drops without suction.

CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE: Antibiotics with steroids are definitely more effective than placebo and acetic acid and there is insufficient evidence to use steroids alone.

Treatments for otitis externa

	Success	Evidence	Harms
Antibiotics with steroid versus placebo	Effective; NNT = 2	Cochrane review ¹	No major ototoxicity
Antibiotic with steroid versus acetic acid	AB/steroid better than acetic acid	Cochrane review ¹	No major ototoxicity
Steroids vs placebo alone	Not enough evidence	Cochrane review ¹	

NNT = numbers needed to treat. An NNT of 2 means the medication is very effective.

Reference

- Macfadyen CA, Acuin JM, Gamble CL. Topical antibiotics without steroids for chronically discharging ears with underlying eardrum perforations. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2005, Issue 4. Art. No.: CD004618. DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD004618.pub2.

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