

Antidepressants are effective for neuropathic pain

Clinical question	Are antidepressants effective for neuropathic pain?
Bottom line	<p>Both tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) and venlafaxine provide relief of neuropathic pain (NNT*= 3.6 and 3.1 respectively). This effect is independent of any effect on depression. There is very limited evidence that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) may be effective but numbers of participants were insufficient to calculate robust NNTs.</p> <p><i>*NNT= number needed to treat to benefit one individual.</i></p>
Caveat	<p>The NNH* for major adverse effects, defined as an event leading to withdrawal from a study, was 28 for amitriptyline and 16.2 for venlafaxine. The NNH for minor adverse effects such as drowsiness, dizziness, dry mouth and constipation was 6 for amitriptyline and 9.6 for venlafaxine.</p> <p><i>*NNH = number needed to treat to cause harm in one individual.</i></p>
Context	<p>Neuropathic pain can be very disabling, severe and intractable, causing distress and suffering for individuals, including dysaesthesia and paraesthesia. For many years antidepressants have been used to manage neuropathic pain, and are often the treatment of first choice. It is not clear, however, which antidepressant is most effective, what role the newer antidepressants, such as SSRIs and venlafaxine, can play in treating neuropathic pain and what adverse effects are experienced by patients.</p>
Cochrane Systematic Review	<p>Saarto T and Wiffen PJ. Antidepressants for neuropathic pain. Cochrane Reviews 2007, Issue 4. Art No: CD0005454.DOI: 10.1002/14651858. CD0005454.pub 2. The review contains 61 trials involving 3,293 participants</p>
Pearls No. 43 February 2008, written by Brian R McAvoy	

PEARLS are succinct summaries of Cochrane Systematic Reviews for primary care practitioners. They are 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.cochraneprimarycare.org