

Cochrane Corner

Urinary tract infections in elderly women

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Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are very common in the elderly. It is the most frequent bacterial infection recorded in the elderly, followed by pneumonia and skin/soft tissue infections. Bacteriuria is present in less than 5% of women and less than 0.1% of men in the young to middle-age age range, compared with at least 20% of women and 10% of men over the age of 65. In this Cochrane review the methodological quality of all trials was low. However,

the rate of persistent bacteria at long-term and the clinical cure rate showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups. Patients preferred single dose treatment, however this was based on one trial comparing different antibiotics. The antibiotics used in this review that are available in New Zealand were ciprofloxacin, norfloxacin, trimethoprim and sulphamethizol. The definition of elderly was women over the age of 60 years.

Bottom line: There is a theoretical risk of recurrence in giving single dose antibiotics to women over the age of 60 years. With treatment for three to 14 days this is less likely. The research does not show an increase in side effects with longer treatment but common sense should prevail and perhaps use shorter courses than 14 days. Three day minimum may be acceptable to both clinician and patient.

Table 1. UTI in elderly women

	Success	Evidence	Comment
Persistent bacteriuria	At 2 weeks post treatment persistent bacteriuria was better in the longer treatment group 3-14 days than in the single dose	Cochrane review	There was no increase in adverse events in the longer duration groups
Preference for single dose treatment	RR 0.73, 95% CI (0.66 to 0.88) NNT of 5	Cochrane review	Based on only one study

NNT = numbers needed to treat for one remission

References

1. Lutters M, Vogt N. Antibiotic duration for treating uncomplicated, symptomatic lower urinary tract infections in elderly women. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2002, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD001535. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD001535.

Members of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners can have access to the full reviews by contacting Cherylyn Pearson at the College in Wellington. For the access codes to the Cochrane library contact cpearson@rnzcgp.org.nz at the College.