

Cochrane Corner

Antidepressants are effective for dysthymia but what is dysthymia?

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Dysthymia was defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - third edition as a depressive disorder of chronic nature but of less severity than major depression. Depressive symptoms should be more or less continuous for at least two years. This newly created category replaced many depressive illnesses. The twelve month prevalence for dysthymia as shown in the MaGPIe study from Wellington general practice is 0.8%

overall with 1.1 % in women and 0.4% in men. The life-time prevalence is between 3% and 6% and there is epidemiological evidence of high co-morbidity: more than 75% of people with dysthymia have other disorders, particularly major depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse. The reviewers mention that dysthymia may be no more than depression that is less than major depression severity and that many patients have it for many years.

	Success	Harms	Evidence	Comment
Tricyclic antidepressants	Effective NNT=4.3	Frequent adverse effects NNH=4.6	Cochrane Library ¹	No studies with active placebos
SSRIs	Effective NNT=4.7	Harms not significant	Cochrane Library ¹	No studies with active placebos
MAO inhibitors	Effective NNT=2.9	Harms not significant	Cochrane library ¹	Included trials with moclobemide but no studies with active placebos

NNT = numbers needed to treat for one remission

NNH = numbers needed to treat to get one harmful reaction in this case a drug side effect

References

1. MS, Moncrieff J. Drugs versus placebo for dysthymia (Cochrane Review). In: The Cochrane Library, Issue 3, 2004. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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.