

# Cochrane Corner

## Low dose tricyclic antidepressants for depression

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For many years psychiatrists have criticised GPs for giving low dose tricyclic antidepressants suggesting that patients would only get better on 150mg/day. The two reviews below have challenged this myth for

both psychiatric patients and general practice patients. The two general practice studies were not statistically significant alone but when combined in meta-analysis the results were significant. These

findings may encourage GPs to keep on prescribing at low doses to avoid the side effects at the higher level. They may also change the management of depression by psychiatrists.

*Table 1. Low dose tricyclic antidepressants for depression*

	Short term success	Long term success	Evidence	Advantages
Furukawa et al. <sup>1</sup> Tricyclic antidepressants =100 mg per day	Improved mood at four weeks NNT =two to three  For in patients and outpatients  Some evidence that =50 mg/day may be effective	Beneficial at three to 12 months	Cochrane review	Effective  Fewer side effects than higher dose
Macgillivray et al. <sup>2</sup> Tricyclic antidepressants =75mg per day	Effective in primary care patients	No information	Systematic review <sup>2</sup>	Effective

NNT = numbers needed to treat for one remission

### References

1. Furukawa T, McGuire H, Barbui C. Low dosage tricyclic antidepressants for depression (Cochrane Review). In: The Cochrane Library, Issue 1, 2004. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
2. Macgillivray S, Arroll B, Crombie I, Sullivan F, Reid I, Ogston S, The Treatment of Depressive Disorders in Primary Care with Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors and Tricyclic Antidepressants: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. Report to the office of Scottish Scientist August 2002.

*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.*