



Magnesium sulphate effective for eclampsia

Clinical question

How effective is magnesium sulphate for eclampsia?

Bottom line

Compared to phenytoin, magnesium sulphate significantly reduced the risk of recurrence of seizures, decreased pneumonia, ventilation and admission to an intensive care unit, probably reduced the risk of maternal death, and improved outcomes for the baby (fewer admissions to a special care baby unit [SCBU], fewer deaths, and fewer babies spending more than seven days in a SCBU). Magnesium sulphate also appeared to be safer for the baby. The use of phenytoin should be abandoned.

Caveat

Recruitment to trials in this review was primarily from hospitals in low- and middle-income countries, which is where 99% of maternal deaths occur. None of the trials were conducted at primary care level, and none included evaluation of care during transfer to a higher level of care.

Context

Eclampsia is rare: in high-income countries it affects 2 to 3 in every 10,000 pregnant women, and in low- and middle-income countries 16 to 69 in every 10,000. However, 15% of maternal deaths are associated with eclampsia.

Cochrane Systematic Review

Duley L et al. Magnesium sulphate versus phenytoin for eclampsia. Cochrane Reviews, 2010, Issue 10. Article No. CD000128. DOI: 10.1002/14651858. CD000128.pub2.

This review contains 7 studies involving 972 participants.

PEARLS No. 298, January 2011, written by Brian R McAvoy.

PEARLS are succinct summaries of Cochrane Systematic Reviews for primary care practitioners – developed by the Cochrane Primary Care Field, New Zealand Branch of the Australasian Cochrane Centre at the Department of General Practice and Primary Health Care, University of Auckland and funded by the New Zealand Guidelines Group. New Zealanders can access the Cochrane Library free via www.nzgg.org.nz

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.nzdoctor.co.nz; www.nzgg.org.nz; www.cochraneprimarycare.org