



Insufficient evidence for most effective analgesics following vaginal birth

Clinical question

Which are the most effective analgesics for pain relief from uterine cramping/involution following vaginal birth?

Bottom line

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) including aspirin were better than placebo in relieving pain following vaginal birth. NSAIDs were better than paracetamol, and paracetamol was not better than placebo, though numbers of participants for these comparisons were small. Data for opioids compared with NSAIDs and opioids compared with placebo were conflicting, with some measures showing similar effect and others indicating NSAIDs were better than opioids and opioids were not better than placebo. There was insufficient evidence to make any recommendations for clinical practice.

Caveat

Only 9 of the included studies (with 750 women) reporting 24 comparisons of analgesia with other analgesia or placebo had data that could be included in the meta-analyses. The majority of analyses in this review included only 1 study with small numbers of participants. The average year of the included studies was 1981.

Context

Women may experience cramping pain and discomfort following the birth of their baby as the uterus contracts and returns to its pre-pregnancy size. These after-birth pains are caused by involutory contractions and usually last for 2 to 3 days after childbirth. They are more evident for women who have previously had a baby. Breastfeeding stimulates the uterus to contract and increases the severity of after-birth pains.

Cochrane Systematic Review

Deussen AR, Ashwood P, Martis R. Analgesia for relief of pain due to uterine cramping/involution after birth. *Cochrane Reviews*, 2011, Issue 5. Article No. CD004908. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004908.pub2.

This review contains 18 studies involving 1498 participants.

PEARLS No. 324, August 2011, written by Brian R McAvooy.

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



THE COCHRANE
COLLABORATION®



New Zealand
GUIDELINES GROUP
Te Rōpū Rarangi Tohutohu
Promoting Effective Health and Disability Services