



Psychological and educational interventions may prevent depression in children and adolescents

Clinical question

How effective are psychological and educational interventions in preventing the onset of depression in children and adolescents (aged 5–19 years)?

Bottom line

Compared with no intervention, psychological depression prevention programmes were effective in preventing depression, with a number of studies showing a decrease in episodes of depressive illness over a year (NNT=11).* The studies comparing intervention with no intervention showed efficacy at follow-up of 3 to 9 months (and most studies in this group continued follow-up for at least 6 months) and at 12 months, at least for targeted programmes. The effect sizes were small. There was no evidence of efficacy in the few studies that compared intervention with placebo or attention controls.

*NNT = number needed to treat to benefit 1 individual

Caveat

Allocation concealment was unclear in most studies, and there was heterogeneity in the findings. There was also a lack of categorisation of the psychotherapies included, although most of the interventions were based on cognitive behavioural therapy strategies. There were few educational programmes in the review, and there was no evidence of efficacy in the few studies that compared intervention with placebo or attention controls.

Context

Depression is common in young people, has a marked negative impact and is associated with self-harm and suicide. Preventing its onset would be an important advance in public health.

Cochrane Systematic Review

Merry SN et al. Psychological and educational interventions for preventing depression in children and adolescents. Cochrane Reviews, 2011, Issue 12. Article No. CD003380. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD003380.pub3. This review contains 53 studies involving 14,406 participants.

PEARLS No. 344, January 2012, 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