Van Veen, NH; Lockwood, DN; van Brakel, WH; Ramirez, J Jr; Richardus, JH; (2009) Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum. The Cochrane database of systematic reviews (3). CD006949. ISSN 1469-493X DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD006949.pub2

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Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum (Review)

Van Veen NHJ, Lockwood DNJ, van Brakel WH, Ramirez Jr J, Richardus JH


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Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

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Editorial group: Cochrane Skin Group.

Publication status and date: Edited (no change to conclusions), published in Issue 10, 2012.

Review content assessed as up-to-date: 11 March 2009.


Abstract

Background

Erythema nodosum leprosum (ENL) is a serious immunological complication of leprosy, causing inflammation of skin, nerves, other organs, and general malaise. Many different therapies exist for ENL, but it is unclear if they work or which therapy is optimal.

Objectives

To assess the effects of interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum.

Search methods

We searched the Cochrane Skin Group Specialised Register, the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL) in The Cochrane Library (Issue 1, 2009), MEDLINE (from 2003), EMBASE (from 2005), LILACS and AMED (from inception), CINAHL (from 1981), and databases of ongoing trials, all in March 2009. We checked reference lists of articles and contacted the American Leprosy Missions in Brazil to locate studies.

Selection criteria

Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of interventions for ENL in people with leprosy.

Data collection and analysis

Two authors performed study selection, assessed trial quality, and extracted data.

Main results

We included 13 studies with a total of 445 participants. The quality of the trials was generally poor and no results could be pooled due to the treatments being so heterogeneous. Treatment with thalidomide showed a significant remission of skin lesions compared to acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin) (RR 2.43; 95% CI 1.28 to 4.59) (1 trial, 92 participants). Clofazimine treatment was superior to prednisolone (more treatment successes; RR 3.67; 95% CI 1.36 to 9.91) (1 trial, 24 participants), and thalidomide (fewer recurrences; RR 0.08; 95% CI 0.01 to 0.56) (1 trial, 72 participants). We did not find any significant benefit for intravenous betamethasone compared to dextrose (1 trial, 10 participants), pentoxifylline compared to thalidomide (1 trial, 44 participants), indomethacin compared to prednisolone, aspirin or chloroquine treatments (2 trials, 80 participants), or levamisole compared to placebo (1 trial, 12 participants). Mild to moderate adverse events were significantly lower in participants taking 100 mg thalidomide compared to 300 mg thalidomide.
daily (RR 0.46; 95% CI 0.23 to 0.93). Significantly more minor adverse events were reported in participants taking clofazimine compared with prednisolone (RR 1.92; 95% CI 1.10 to 3.35). None of the studies assessed quality of life or economic outcomes.

Authors’ conclusions

There is some evidence of benefit for thalidomide and clofazimine, but generally we did not find clear evidence of benefit for interventions in the management of ENL. However, this does not mean they do not work, because the studies were small and poorly reported. Larger studies using clearly defined participants, outcome measures, and internationally recognised scales are urgently required.

**Plain Language Summary**

**Interventions to treat erythema nodosum leprosum, a complication of leprosy**

Leprosy remains a public health issue in poorer parts of the world. In 2007 there were approximately 255,000 new cases reported worldwide. Leprosy (or Hansen’s disease) is a chronic infectious disease. The skin and peripheral nerves of people with leprosy contain leprosy bacteria. Leprosy can be cured with a combination of antibiotics. The immune system plays an important role in leprosy and determines if and how the disease will develop. The response of the immune system to the antigens of the leprosy bacteria may cause periods of inflammation in the skin and nerves, called reactions. Reactions are the main cause of acute nerve damage and disability in leprosy and occur in about one third of people with leprosy. One type of reaction is erythema nodosum leprosum (ENL), a serious and often chronic complication of leprosy caused by the immune system. People with ENL have red, painful swellings in the skin and often feel ill due to fever and general malaise. There are several treatments for ENL, including the oral drugs prednisolone, thalidomide, and clofazimine. We undertook a systematic review on this topic as it was not clear which treatments were most beneficial.

Our review included 13 randomised controlled trials involving 445 participants. These trials assessed: betamethasone (1 trial), thalidomide (5 trials), pentoxifylline (1 trial), clofazimine (3 trials), indomethacin (2 trials), and levamisole (1 trial). Generally, the quality of the studies was poor and many were too small to identify important clinical differences even if they existed. Three small trials showed benefit for thalidomide and clofazimine treatment in terms of fewer further reactions, more treatment successes, and less relapses of ENL.

Adverse events were reported in most of the trials, but it was often not possible to compare the occurrence of any adverse events between the experimental group and control group. Most adverse events reported were not too serious, and only a few participants could not complete treatment due to serious adverse events or for other reasons.

Whether the interventions improved the quality of life of participants, was not evaluated in any of the trials.

Although we did not find clear benefits in these series of small, poorly-performed studies, this does not mean that these drugs do not work in the treatment of ENL, only that scientific evidence is insufficient. Future studies should be better designed and use clear definitions and outcomes, including long-term outcomes and quality of life measures.

**Background**

**Description of the condition**

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium (M.) leprae*. Leprosy bacteria are spread as droplets from the nose of infected and untreated individuals (Barron 1974; Pedley 1976; Job 2008), but the importance of other routes of transmission is unclear. When the immune system fails to respond effectively, the disease will develop. Often, the first sign of leprosy is a patch on the skin, but damage to peripheral nerves may occur as well (ILEP 2001). Leprosy develops in various clinical forms, dependent upon the response of the immune system. The internationally accepted Ridley-Jopling classification for leprosy recognises five different groups across a spectrum: tuberculoid (TT), borderline tuberculoid (BT), borderline (BB), borderline lepromatous (BL), and lepromatous (LL) (Ridley 1966). Across this spectrum, people with tuberculoid leprosy have a strong immune
response, only a few skin patches, and a low bacterial load, while people with lepromatous leprosy have no or very weak cell-mediated immunity for *M. leprae*, have many skin patches, and a high bacterial load. Most people have one of the borderline forms of leprosy: borderline tuberculoid (BT), mid-borderline (BB), or borderline lepromatous (BL). These forms are less easy to distinguish and less stable, meaning that one can shift from one form to another (Hastings 1988). An additional classification has been developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and is based on the number of skin lesions only. People with five or less skin lesions are classified as having paucibacillary (PB) leprosy, while people with six or more skin lesions are classified as having multibacillary (MB) leprosy. This classification is often used in practice to decide what type of multiple-drug therapy (MDT) should be given to a person with leprosy (WHO 2000; Lockwood 2007).

Leprosy infection can be treated effectively with a combination of antibiotics. Multiple-drug therapy (MDT) with the antibiotics rifampicin, dapsone, and clofazimine was introduced in the 1980s and is provided free by the World Health Organization (ILEP 2001; WHO 2006). Those with PB leprosy receive treatment (dapsone and rifampicin) for six months and those with MB leprosy are treated with dapsone, rifampicin, and clofazimine for 12 months (WHO 2003). Since the introduction of MDT, the number of people affected by leprosy has decreased substantially. At the beginning of 2008 the prevalence was about 213,000 worldwide. This is the registered number of people on MDT treatment. The number of people newly reported in 2007 was approximately 255,000 (WHO 2008).

The body’s immune response to the leprosy bacillus may also cause so-called ‘reactions’. There are two types of potentially nerve damaging reactions: type 1 reaction or reversal reaction, and type 2 reaction or erythema nodosum leprosum (ENL). Type 1, or reversal reaction, presents as acute inflammation in skin lesions and nerves. Erythema nodosum leprosum presents as new, red, painful and tender swellings in the skin, usually on the legs and arms, and sometimes on the trunk; it varies in severity. When the reaction is mild, only the skin is affected and there may be low-grade fever. When the reaction is severe, the swellings are multiple and may ulcerate, there may be high fever and other organs may be inflamed, such as the nerves, eyes, joints, testes, and lymph nodes. If neuritis is present, it is often less severe than neuritis resulting from type 1 reaction (ILEP 2002; Kahawita 2008). Most people with ENL have acute multiple episodes of ENL or chronic ENL over several years. Few people experience a single acute episode of ENL (Nery 1998; Saunderson 2000; Pocaterra 2006). Single acute ENL reaction can be defined as one ENL episode with no recurrence of ENL whilst receiving prednisolone, no increase in severity requiring an increased steroid dose, and no recurrence after the prednisolone has stopped. Acute multiple ENL reaction is defined as more than one ENL episode with the same characteristics as acute single ENL. Chronic ENL is defined as an episode lasting for more than six months. This could include single and multiple episodes. Distinguishing and recognising these different types of ENL will be useful in individual management and treatment of ENL (Pocaterra 2006).

Erythema nodosum leprosum only occurs in people with borderline lepromatous (BL) and lepromatous (LL) leprosy. These people have high bacterial loads which increase the risk of ENL. The percentage of people diagnosed with ENL differs between countries and studies. Countries in Asia and Brazil report high rates of ENL. A study from India found an overall ENL prevalence of 24% (Pocaterra 2006) and a study from Brazil reported an ENL rate of 31% among people on MB MDT treatment (Nery 1998). Studies that look at BL and LL subgroups rather than the whole MB leprosy group will give better estimations of ENL rates, because only these subgroups are at risk of developing ENL (Walker 2007). An Indian study found that almost 50% of people with LL and 9% of people with BL had ENL (Pocaterra 2006), and in a study from Ethiopia 12% of those with LL and 4% of those with BL developed ENL (Saunderson 2000). Erythema nodosum leprosum may occur before the start of treatment, but usually develops within the first three years after starting multiple-drug therapy (MDT). After completion of treatment, people may still have episodes of ENL for several years, because they have persisting mycobacterial antigens despite successful antibacterial treatment (ILEP 2002; Naafs 2003a).

**Causes and risk factors**

Erythema nodosum leprosum is an immune-mediated complication of leprosy. It is caused partly by deposition of *M. leprae* antigen and antibody complexes. These complexes circulate in the blood and may precipitate in tissue, particularly on the wall of small blood vessels, causing acute inflammation (vasculitis) and release of tissue-damaging enzymes in any organ or tissue invaded by the leprosy bacillus. In addition, the immune system activates cells (macrophages and T cells) that attack and kill the bacteria (Lockwood 1996; Naafs 2003b; Kahawita 2008). Risk factors for developing ENL are lepromatous classification, high bacterial loads, and being aged under 40 years (Manandhar 1999; Saunderson 2000; Kumar 2004).

**Impact**

People who have ENL usually feel ill (general malaise, fever) and many organs may be affected. Erythema nodosum leprosum is often a recurrent or chronic condition and requires treatment for a long period. Having repeated episodes of ill health, especially in people who are in an economically active period in their lives may cause a further burden. It may affect male fertility due to inflammation of the testis. Women are affected by having fewer treatment options in their childbearing years due to the side-effects of drugs such as thalidomide (Nery 1998; Saunderson 2000; Pocaterra 2006). Leprosy has a far more negative image than many
other diseases. Having visible signs of leprosy or side-effects from
treatment triggers discrimination and stigmatisation (Heijnders
2004; Rafferty 2005). The psychological impact of a chronic and
stigmatising condition may be profound.

**Description of the intervention**

Most therapies for ENL aim to control acute inflammation, reliev-
ing the pain and preventing further nerve damage or new episodes.
Several treatments are available for ENL.

**How the intervention might work**

The conventional treatment for mild ENL is rest and anti-inflam-
matory medication to control the acute inflammatory skin lesions
and fever. Aspirin is the most commonly used anti-inflammatory
drug, but indomethacin, chloroquine, and colchicine have been
tested as well. These different anti-inflammatory drugs have not
been formally compared in mild ENL and there is no data to
suggest that they are superior to aspirin (ILEP 1996; Lockwood
1996).

For severe ENL, prednisolone and clofazimine are most commonly
used. Prednisolone usually acts rapidly by controlling the acute
inflammation and relieving the pain, fever, and other signs. The
starting dose should be the lowest possible to control ENL and be
gradually reduced. The schedule for reducing prednisolone de-
pends on the course of the disease. Erythema nodosum leprosum
is often recurrent or chronic and requires high-dose and prolonged
courses of prednisolone for the disease to be controlled. This in-
creases the risk of adverse events, such as hypertension or diabetes,
and steroid dependency (ILEP 1996; Lockwood 1996).

Clofazimine is considered a useful anti-inflammatory drug when
corticosteroids are contraindicated or need to be reduced (WHO).
However, treatment with clofazimine usually takes four to six
weeks to become active and the dose of clofazimine needed to con-
trol ENL is higher than the dose used in MDT (ILEP 1996).
Dis-
advantages of continuous high doses of clofazimine are gastroin-
testinal symptoms (e.g. diarrhoea) and dark discolouration of the
skin. These skin changes usually develop within a few weeks after
starting clofazimine treatment and may take two or more years to
disappear (ILEP 1996; Lockwood 1996).

Another drug used to treat ENL is thalidomide. The effective-
ness of thalidomide in ENL is primarily due to its action on the
proinflammatory cytokine TNF-α (tumour necrosis factor-α) but
other mechanisms may contribute to its anti-inflammatory effect
(Walker 2007). The seventh WHO Expert Committee on Leprosy
considered thalidomide as an effective treatment of severe ENL,
and recommended restriction of thalidomide treatment to male or
postmenopausal female patients only. Thalidomide should only be
given to women of childbearing age when comprehensive contra-
ceptive precautions can be taken, because its use may cause serious
birth defects when taken in early pregnancy (WHO 1998).

Other therapies have been tested, such as ciclosporin, pentox-
ifylline, oral zinc, and *Mycobacterium w* vaccination (Uyemura
1986; Zaheer 1993; Mahajan 1994; Nery 2000). New therapies
for other immune-mediated conditions seem promising. Exam-
pleares TNF-α antibody treatment, intravenous immunoglobu-
lin, and tenidap (Lockwood 1996). TNF-α antibody treatment
(infliximab) has been reported to be successful in the treatment
of a single case of recurrent ENL (Faber 2006). However, the
person relapsed and eventually required treatment with thalidomide
(Faber, personal communication). It is plausible that these the-
rapies may be effective for controlling ENL, but evidence from ran-
donised controlled trials is very limited.

**Why it is important to do this review**

Erythema nodosum leprosum is a serious immunological compli-
cation of leprosy. The complex mechanisms underlying ENL are
not yet fully understood, which makes treatment difficult. Corti-
costeroids, clofazimine, and thalidomide are the drugs of choice
for ENL, but all have drawbacks and the optimal regimen has not
been established. Alternative therapies have been tested, but it is
unclear if they are beneficial, or which one is preferable. The role
of newer treatments, such as TNF-α antibody treatment, intra-
venous immunoglobulin, and tenidap, is not known.

**OBJECTIVES**

To assess the effects of any therapy or treatment used in the man-
agement of ENL.

**METHODS**

**Criteria for considering studies for this review**

**Types of studies**

All randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of any design.

**Types of participants**

Anyone affected by leprosy with ENL, confirmed by appropri-
ate clinical features. The definition of ENL is: ‘an inflammatory
condition, in which people develop crops of tender erythematous
subcutaneous skin lesions’. There may be accompanying neuritis,
iritis (inflammation of the iris), arthritis, orchitis (inflammation...
of the testis), dactylitis (inflammation of the fingers and toes), lymphadenopathy, oedema, and fever. The skin signs are obligatory; the nerve and general signs optional (Smith 2002; Van Brakel 2005).

**Types of interventions**
Any therapy for ENL, including:

1. **Systemic corticosteroids**
   - Oral therapies: prednisolone
   - Intravenous therapies: betamethasone, methylprednisolone

2. **Systemic non-steroidal immunomodulatory therapies**
   - Immune modulators: thalidomide, ciclosporin, pentoxifylline
   - Anti-inflammatory therapies: clofazimine, aspirin, chloroquine, colchicine, indomethacin

3. **Diverse therapies**
   - Oral zinc
   - *Mycobacterium w* vaccine

The comparators were no treatment, placebo, usual care (e.g. systemic corticosteroid with or without pentoxifylline), or another listed therapy. We included trials which compared different dosages of the same therapy or different routes of administration (e.g. intravenous versus oral systemic corticosteroids).

**Types of outcome measures**

**Primary outcomes**

(a) **The proportion of participants achieving remission of skin lesions**
Remission was defined as the absence of new tender erythematous subcutaneous skin lesions at completion of the ENL therapy, as assessed by a clinician.

**Secondary outcomes**

(a) **The proportion of participants achieving remission of inflammations at other sites**
Remission was defined as the disappearance of inflammation associated with ENL at sites other than the skin (e.g. iritis, arthritis) at completion of the ENL therapy, as assessed by a clinician.

(b) **Investigator-assessed change in ENL severity**
The change in ENL severity, compared to baseline, using a grading scale as used in each of the studies.

(c) **Time to next clinical episode of ENL**
Time to next clinical episode of ENL was defined as the time between the last dose of ENL treatment and appearance of new signs of ENL reaction.

(d) **Changes in quality of life**
As assessed using a recognised instrument (generic, dermatology specific, disease specific, or patient-generated index).

**Timing of outcome assessment**

We considered data that had been recorded for four weeks or less from the start of treatment to reflect short-term benefit and these were analysed separately from data that were recorded for more than four weeks from the start of treatment, which we considered to reflect the minimum time period to capture any longer-term benefit.

The short-term assessment (one to four weeks) was considered the primary endpoint, because the definite treatment effects should be visible within the first few weeks. The medium-term assessment (between four weeks and six months) was used as a secondary endpoint. Assessments of more than six months after the start of treatment were considered long-term outcomes.

**Adverse outcomes**

We were looking at a wide range of interventions and could not pre-specify which were the most important/common adverse events. Therefore we have documented the incidence and severity of all recorded local and systemic adverse events, at any time point, in all the included studies.

**Economic data**

Data relating to costs were not reported and we could not address cost implications in the discussion due to lack of data.

**Search methods for identification of studies**

We searched the Cochrane Skin Group Specialised Register on 11th March 2009 using the following search terms: (leprosy and type and 2) or lepromatous or lepra* or (erythema and nodosum) or ’ENL’ or (leprosy and borderline) or leprosum.
We searched the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials in The Cochrane Library (Issue 1, 2009) using the search strategy in Appendix 1. We searched MEDLINE (from 2003) on 11th March 2009 using the search strategy in Appendix 2. We searched EMBASE (from 2005) on 11th March 2009 using the search strategy in Appendix 3. The UK Cochrane Centre (UKCC) has an ongoing project to systematically search MEDLINE and EMBASE for reports of trials which are then included in the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials. Searching has currently been completed in MEDLINE to 2003 and in EMBASE to 2005. Further searching has been undertaken for this review by the Cochrane Skin Group to cover the years that have not been searched by the UKCC. We searched AMED (Allied and Complementary Medicine, from 1985) on 11th March 2009 using the search strategy in Appendix 4. We searched LILACS (Latin American and Caribbean Health Science Information database, from 1982) on 11th March 2009 using the search strategy in Appendix 5. We searched CINAHL (from 1980) on 17th March 2009 using the search strategy in Appendix 6.

**Ongoing Trials**

We searched for ongoing trials in the following ongoing trials registers on 17th March 2009 using the search terms 'leprosy', 'erythema nodosum leprosum' and 'type 2 reaction':
- The metaRegister of Controlled Trials [www.controlled-trials.com](http://www.controlled-trials.com)
- The U.S. National Institutes of Health Ongoing Trials Register [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov)
- The Australian and New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry [www.anzctr.org.au](http://www.anzctr.org.au)
- The World Health Organization International Clinical Trials Registry Platform [www.who.int/trialsearch](http://www.who.int/trialsearch)
- The Ongoing Skin Trials register [www.nottingham.ac.uk/ongoingskintrials](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ongoingskintrials)

**Searching other resources**

**Grey literature**

We checked the conference proceeding from the International Leprosy Congress (2008) for RCTs and where appropriate the trial authors were contacted for further information.

**Reference lists**

We checked the references of the included studies, but did not identify any further trials.

**Correspondence**

Where possible we corresponded with trial authors of studies less than 15 years old about unpublished and ongoing trials. We contacted a technical consultant at the American Leprosy Missions in Brazil for reports of trials from Brazil.

**Adverse effects**

We did not do a separate search for adverse events, but we searched within the included studies.

**Language restrictions**

There were no language restrictions when we searched for publications. We sought translations of papers in languages other than English. Taixiang Wu interpreted a paper in Chinese, and Brenda Gomes and Marcos Virmond interpreted papers in Portuguese.

**Data collection and analysis**

**Selection of studies**

Two authors (NvV, JHR) checked the titles and abstracts identified from the searches. If it was clear that the study did not refer to a randomised controlled trial on erythema nodosum leprosum, it was excluded. If it was unclear, then the full text of the study was obtained for independent assessment by two authors (NvV, JHR). The authors decided which trials fitted the inclusion criteria. Any disagreement was resolved by discussion between the authors. It was not necessary to refer to a third author. We recorded excluded studies and reasons for exclusion in the Characteristics of excluded studies table.

**Data extraction and management**

One author (NvV) entered data onto a data extraction form and a second author (JHR) checked the data. The authors (NvV, JHR) discussed discrepancies between themselves. Missing data were obtained from trial authors where possible. One author (NvV) entered data into RevMan. The authors were not blinded to the names of trial authors, journals, or institutions. For the participants' and investigators' global assessments of improvement, the authors translated reported changes in ENL severity into the proportion of participants with improvement greater than minimal. By improvement greater than minimal we meant anything greater than the first category of improvement on a Likert scale, or greater than 50% improvement from baseline on a continuous scale. For the purpose of calculating clinical efficacy, we regarded categories relating to greater than minimal improvement as a treatment success.
All other outcomes were expressed as the actual or percentage change from baseline.

**Assessment of risk of bias in included studies**

The quality assessment included an evaluation of the following components for each included study, since there is some evidence that these are associated with biased estimates of treatment effect (Juni 2001):

(a) the method of generation of the randomisation sequence;
(b) the method of allocation concealment - it was considered 'adequate' if the assignment could not be foreseen;
(c) who was blinded/not blinded (participants, clinicians, outcome assessors);
(d) how many participants were lost to follow-up in each arm (split into post-randomisation exclusion and later losses if possible) and whether participants were analysed in the groups to which they were originally randomised (intention-to-treat principle).

In addition, assessment was made of the following:
(e) degree of certainty that participants have ENL;
(f) baseline comparison for age, sex, duration, and severity of ENL;
(g) whether outcome measures were described adequately.

The information is recorded in the risk of bias table under Characteristics of included studies.

**Measures of treatment effect**

**Dichotomous data**

We expressed the results as risk ratio (RR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for dichotomous outcomes.

**Continuous data**

We expressed the results as differences in means (MD) and 95% CI for continuous outcomes. We did not use a standardised mean difference (SMD) since no continuous outcome measures could be combined.

**Time-to-event data**

We had no time-to-event data to summarise the log hazard ratio and 95% CI.

**Unit of analysis issues**

**Cross-over trials**

We analysed cross-over trials using data from the first phase only, but could not pool with parallel design studies due to lack of comparable studies or differences in timing of outcome assessment.

**Studies with multiple treatment groups**

Where there were multiple intervention groups within a trial, we made pairwise comparisons of similar ENL interventions or ENL active components versus no treatment, placebo, or another ENL intervention.

**Other**

We did not find any internally controlled trials. We excluded non-randomised controlled studies from the analyses but these were commented on in the Discussion section.

**Dealing with missing data**

We were not able to conduct an intention-to-treat analysis when participant drop-out led to missing data due to lack of information from trial authors. We contacted trial authors of studies less than 15 years old to provide missing statistics such as standard deviations, but they failed to respond or provide us with the missing data.

**Assessment of heterogeneity**

We did not assess statistical heterogeneity using the $I^2$ statistic, because there were no studies to be pooled.

**Assessment of reporting biases**

We did not perform funnel plots, because there were fewer than ten poolable studies.

**Data synthesis**

We did not perform a meta-analysis to calculate a weighted treatment effect across trials, using a random-effects model, because there were no studies with a similar type of ENL intervention or a similar active component. Instead, we summarised the data for each trial.

**Subgroup analysis and investigation of heterogeneity**

We did not perform further subgroup analysis due to lack of data on different subgroups. The groups were different severity of ENL (mild or severe) and different duration of ENL (single acute, multiple acute, or chronic).

**Sensitivity analysis**

We did not perform sensitivity analyses examining the effects of excluding study subgroups, e.g. those studies with low methodological quality, since no meta-analyses were performed.
Other
Where there was uncertainty, we contacted the trial authors for clarification. A consumer was part of the review team to ensure the relevance and readability of the final review.

R E S U L T S

Description of studies
See: Characteristics of included studies; Characteristics of excluded studies; Characteristics of ongoing studies.
See: Characteristics of included studies; Characteristics of excluded studies.

Results of the search
We found 269 citations to potentially relevant trials from the electronic searches. Eight potentially eligible studies were found from references of included trials and reviews. Correspondence with authors and other persons and searching of grey literature revealed one potentially relevant trial. We identified 48 possible studies, of which 13 were RCTs. The search of the Ongoing Trial Registers revealed one ongoing trial.

Included studies
We included 13 trials with 445 participants in this review and these are described in the Characteristics of included studies table. Ten studies were published between 1969 and 1985 and three studies between 2002 and 2007. The follow-up period varied from 7 days to 60 weeks in 13 trials and was unclear in 1 trial (Karat 1969).

Design
Three trials had a cross-over design (Pearson 1969; Helmy 1971; Waters 1971) and 10 trials had a parallel group design, of which 1 trial had 4 parallel groups (Karat 1969).

Sample sizes
The studies involved sample sizes between 9 and 92 participants. Two studies randomised and evaluated ENL reactions of participants (Iyer 1971; Sheskin 1969).

Setting
Twelve studies were done in single centres in Brazil, India, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Venezuela. One study was conducted in multiple centres in India, Mali, Somalia, and Spain (Iyer 1971).

Interventions
The included studies examined several interventions.
Systemic corticosteroids:
• infusion of betamethasone in 5% dextrose versus infusion of 5% dextrose (Girdhar 2002; parallel group).

Systemic non-steroidal immunomodulatory therapies:
• thalidomide versus placebo (Pearson 1969; Waters 1971: cross-over; Sheskin 1969: parallel group);
• thalidomide versus acetylsalicylic acid (Iyer 1971; parallel group);
• 100 mg thalidomide regimen versus 300 mg thalidomide regimen (Villahermosa 2005; parallel group);
• pentoxifylline versus thalidomide (Sales 2007; parallel group);
• clofazimine versus placebo (Helmy 1971; cross-over);
• clofazimine versus thalidomide (Iyer 1976; parallel group);
• clofazimine versus prednisolone (Karat 1970; parallel group);
• indomethacin versus prednisolone (Ing 1969; parallel group);
• indomethacin versus chloroquine versus prednisolone versus aspirin (Karat 1969; parallel group);
• levamisole versus placebo (Arora 1985; parallel group).

Diverse therapies:
• no trials assessing any other therapies were found.

Cointerventions were reported in 11 trials. These included iron for those with anaemia, anti-leprosy treatments (dapsone or MDT), analgesics (e.g. paracetamol, stibophen), steroids, and diuretics for treating oedema.

Outcomes
The primary outcome of remission of skin lesions, measured as the absence of new tender erythematous subcutaneous skin lesions at completion of the ENL therapy, was not explicitly reported in any of the trials. Two trials defined treatment success or improvement including the absence of new ENL lesions (Sheskin 1969; Karat 1970). Three studies reported the resolution of existing skin lesions (Ing 1969; Villahermosa 2005; Sales 2007), and one study reported the number of participants with no further reaction after the first treatment regimen (Iyer 1971).
The secondary outcome of remission of inflammation at other sites was not explicitly reported in any of the trials. Seven trials used different grading scales or scores to assess ENL severity (Karat 1969; Pearson 1969; Helmy 1971; Waters 1971; Arora 1985; Girdhar 2002; Villahermosa 2005). The secondary outcome of time to next clinical episode was not reported in any of the trials, but four trials mentioned recurrence rates of reactions (Karat 1969; Karat 1970; Iyer 1976; Villahermosa 2005). None of the studies measured changes in quality of life.

Six trials recorded data only for four weeks or less from the start of treatment, reflecting short-term benefit (Ing 1969; Sheskin 1969; Helmy 1971; Iyer 1971; Waters 1971; Sales 2007). Three trials had the outcome assessment at medium-term, ranging from four weeks to six months from the start of treatment (Pearson 1969; Karat 1970; Arora 1985). One trial assessed long-term benefit, more than six months after treatment (Girdhar 2002). One trial assessed both short-term and medium-term (Villahermosa 2005), and one trial both medium-term and long-term (Iyer 1976). The timing of outcome assessment was unclear in one trial (Karat 1969). Adverse effects were not reported in three trials (Arora 1985; Helmy 1971; Iyer 1976). There was great diversity (or heterogeneity) between interventions and methods used to measure outcomes in the trials. None of the studies used similar interventions and comparisons which could be pooled.

### Excluded studies

We excluded 35 studies and their details can be found in the Characteristics of excluded studies table. Of these 35 studies, 21 were not RCTs, 2 were excluded as they did randomisation by alternation, 10 did not have ENL as inclusion criterion but included participants with lepromatous leprosy in general, 1 was a duplicate study, and 1 was excluded because it described only intake results and was not completed.

### Ongoing studies

We found one ongoing randomised, single-blind trial examining montelukast in ENL reaction, compared to prednisolone. Enrollment started in December 2006 and took 18 months. Outcome assessment was scheduled 24 weeks after starting treatment.

### Risk of bias in included studies

The Collaboration’s recommended tool for assessing risk of bias was used (Higgins 2008), the methodological quality of the trials was generally poor. Since no meta-analyses were performed, sensitivity analysis based on methodological quality was not performed. Three trials had a cross-over design (Pearson 1969; Helmy 1971; Waters 1971). The main concerns associated with cross-over trials are: (i) whether the cross-over design is suitable; (ii) whether there is a carry-over effect; (iii) whether only first period data are available; (iv) incorrect analysis; and (v) comparability of results with those from parallel-group trials. None of the trials had a wash-out period between the two interventions, which might have caused a possible carry-over effect, especially in the trial assessing clofazimine that can persist in the body for a long time. We analysed these trials using data from the first phase only if these were available to overcome these concerns.

Two trials evaluated reactions of participants (Sheskin 1969; Iyer 1971). Participants received up to four treatment regimens for each reaction during the trials. This may have led to an overestimate of the effect because the within-patient variance between outcomes of the same person may be smaller than the between-patient variance of outcomes between individuals. We used only data of the first randomised treatment if these were available to overcome this concern.

### Allocation

None of the trials were clear on how randomisation lists were generated. In two of the trials, the trial authors have clearly reported that concealment of allocation was adequate; both studies had the medication pre-prepared by a drug company (Iyer 1971; Villahermosa 2005).

### Blinding

Blinding of outcome assessment was attempted for most of the trials. However, the method as to how this was done was generally unclear and poorly described. None of the studies clearly described who (the participants, clinicians, and outcome assessors) was blinded. One trial was an open trial (Iyer 1976): this was a trial with clofazimine, which is known to give skin discoloration.

### Incomplete outcome data

Information about incomplete outcome data was generally not reported and participant loss to follow-up ranged between 0% and 33%. Seven trials did not report information on incomplete outcome data, but if accepting no mention in the text and no signs of attrition in tables, as a 100% follow-up, all of these trials had a follow-up rate of 100% (Karat 1969; Sheskin 1969; Karat 1970; Iyer 1971; Waters 1971; Iyer 1976; Arora 1985). Two trials with missing outcome data performed intention-to-treat analysis (Pearson 1969; Sales 2007). Two trials (Ing 1969; Girdhar 2002) had participant losses (1/30 participants and 1/10 participants respectively), but it was not clear as to whether intention-to-treat analysis was done. Two trials (Helmy 1971; Villahermosa 2005) with incomplete outcome data (5/15 participants and 1/22 participants respectively) did not perform an intention-to-treat analysis.
Selective reporting
Six trials did not perform a statistical analysis, but only described the results (Ing 1969; Pearson 1969; Helmy 1971; Iyer 1971; Waters 1971; Iyer 1976). One study (Ing 1969) reported in the summary that “indomethacin is effective in treating only mild and moderate cases of ENL”. The summary of one study (Waters 1971) concluded that “nine of the ten participants showed a very significant reduction in steroid requirement”. Another study (Pearson 1969) summarised that “thalidomide was superior to a placebo”. None of these studies provided sufficient evidence (e.g. significant test values) to support these claims.

Other potential sources of bias

Certainty of diagnosis
Five studies specified erythema nodosum leprosum (ENL) in their inclusion criteria (Sheskin 1969; Karat 1970; Iyer 1971; Villahermosa 2005; Sales 2007). Most other studies did not define ENL, but did mention it under the inclusion criteria.

Baseline comparison for age, sex, duration and severity of ENL
Five studies did not provide data for baseline comparison (Karat 1969; Pearson 1969; Helmy 1971; Iyer 1971; Girdhar 2002). Five studies reported some baseline data, but it was unclear whether groups were similar at baseline (Ing 1969; Sheskin 1969; Waters 1971; Iyer 1976; Arora 1985). Two studies reported only two (age and sex) (Sales 2007) or three (age, sex, and duration of ENL) (Villahermosa 2005) of the characteristics being similar in both groups. In one study, all baseline characteristics (age, sex, duration, and severity of ENL) were similar in both groups (Karat 1970).

Explicit outcome measures
Six studies did not clearly describe outcome measures (Karat 1969; Pearson 1969; Helmy 1971; Iyer 1971; Iyer 1976; Arora 1985). The other studies did explicitly mention outcome measures, such as change in ENL severity, improvement, and treatment success.

Effects of interventions
Please see table of Characteristics of included studies. Subgroup analysis was not performed as there were no appropriate studies to pool. Of the 13 studies included, none compared the same interventions or had comparable outcomes. We did not find any trials assessing therapies as listed under diverse therapies.

Timing of outcome assessment
Results have been grouped according to the timing of outcome assessment: short-term (one to four weeks), medium-term (between four weeks and six months), and long-term (more than six months).

Economic data
None of the trials reported economic outcome data.

Primary outcome measure

(a) The proportion of participants achieving remission of skin lesions
None of the studies reported the absence of new skin lesions at the end of therapy. Two studies had outcome measures that were considered to reflect our primary outcome measure. Karat 1970 reported treatment success, including absence of new ENL lesions, and Sheskin 1969 reported improvement, including absence of new ENL lesions, but did not provide separate data of the first randomised treatment regimen for comparison. Five studies reporting differing definitions of remission of skin lesions. One study reported the number of participants with no further reaction after the first treatment regimen, implying absence of new ENL skin lesions (Iyer 1971). Three studies reported the resolution of existing skin lesions (Ing 1969; Villahermosa 2005; Sales 2007).

Systemic corticosteroids
Remission of skin lesions was not reported for any systemic corticosteroid intervention.

Systemic non-steroidal immunomodulatory therapies

Short-term:
Significantly more participants who received thalidomide treatment had no further reaction after seven days, requiring a second treatment regimen, compared to those receiving acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin) treatment (RR 2.43; 95% CI 1.28 to 4.59; n=92; Analysis 1.1) (Iyer 1971). No significant difference in resolution of existing inflamed ENL nodules was found between the 100 mg thalidomide regimen and the 300 mg thalidomide regimen after seven days (RR 1.33; 95% CI 0.64 to 2.79; n=22; Analysis 2.1) (Villahermosa 2005). No significant difference in the resolution of existing inflamed ENL skin nodules was observed between pentoxifylline and thalidomide after 30 days of treatment (RR 1.05;
95% CI 0.74 to 1.49; n=25; Analysis 3.1) (Sales 2007). No significant difference in remission of existing ENL lesions was found between indomethacin and prednisolone after four weeks (RR 2.33; 95% CI 0.76 to 7.13; n=30; Analysis 6.1) (Ing 1969).

Medium-term:
One participant, who had received the 300 mg thalidomide regimen, had a successful taper, defined as a complete response after seven days and lack of new acutely inflamed lesions during the six-week taper and for at least two months after stopping thalidomide (Villahermosa 2005). Significantly more treatment successes were observed in the clofazimine group compared to the prednisolone group at the end of 12 weeks of treatment (RR 3.67; 95% CI 1.36 to 9.91; n=24; Analysis 4.1) (Karat 1970).

Secondary outcome measures

(a) The proportion of participants achieving remission of inflammation at other sites
Remission of inflammations at other sites was not reported in any of the studies. In Iyer 1971, the data was reported inadequately as there was no separate data from the first randomised treatment regimen.

(b) Investigator-assessed change in ENL severity
One study used a global assessment score to assess for changes in ENL symptoms (anorexia, arthralgias, chills, malaise, neuritis, orchitis, and fever) (Villahermosa 2005). One study used a grading scale (0 to 3) to assess changes in ENL severity, with higher grades indicating more severe ENL (Arora 1985). One study (Pearson 1969) used an ENL severity score, but did not provide individual participant data or means and standard deviations for comparison. Two studies assessed change in ENL severity using different scoring methods, but provided only sum scores of the weekly scores over the four-week trial period (Helmy 1971; Waters 1971). One study assessed the frequency and severity of ENL, but did not provide data or significant test values for comparison (Girdhar 2002). One study reported control of reaction, but it was unclear how control was defined (Karat 1969). It was unclear whether any of the scales used had been formally validated.

Systemic corticosteroids
Change in ENL severity was not reported for any systemic corticosteroid interventions.

Systemic non-steroidal immunomodulatory therapies

Short-term:
No significant difference in improvement (becoming asymptomatic) was found between the 100 mg thalidomide regimen and the 300 mg thalidomide regimen after seven days of treatment (RR 1.67; 95% CI 0.85 to 3.26; n=22; Analysis 2.2) (Villahermosa 2005).

Medium-term:
No significant difference in improvement (change from grade 3 to grade 1 or 0) was observed between levamisole and placebo after three months (RR 0.95; 95% CI 0.36 to 2.49; n=12; Analysis 9.1) (Arora 1985). No significant difference in control of reaction was found between indomethacin and chloroquine (RR 0.95; 95% CI 0.52 to 1.74; n=23; Analysis 7.1), prednisolone (RR 0.65; 95% CI 0.41 to 1.02; n=24; Analysis 6.2) or aspirin (RR 0.89; 95% CI 0.51 to 1.55; n=25; Analysis 8.1) respectively. The duration of the trial and timing of outcome assessment was unclear; the paper stated both a trial period of 90 days and of 12 months (Karat 1969).

(c) Time to next clinical episode of ENL
Time to next clinical episode of ENL was not reported in any of the studies. Four studies reported differing definitions of time to next clinical episode of ENL. One study reported recurrence of new lesions by week seven in participants who had achieved remission of existing ENL skin lesions at the end of the first week (Villahermosa 2005). One study reported relapse of ENL within 52 weeks after treatment (Iyer 1976). Two studies reported recurrence of ENL by the end of the trial period in participants whose initial reaction was controlled in this same period (Karat 1969; Karat 1970).

Systemic corticosteroids
Time to next clinical episode of ENL was not reported for any systemic corticosteroid interventions.

Systemic non-steroidal immunomodulatory therapies

Medium-term:
No significant difference in recurrence of new lesions after seven weeks was observed between the 100 mg thalidomide regimen and the 300 mg thalidomide regimen (RR 3.75; 95% CI 0.62 to
Long-term:  
Results showed significantly less participants with relapse of ENL in the clofazimine group compared to the thalidomide group within 52 weeks after treatment (RR 0.08; 95% CI 0.01 to 0.56; n=72; Analysis 5.1) (Iyer 1976). No significant difference in recurrence of ENL was observed between indomethacin and chloroquine (RR 1.14; 95% CI 0.44 to 2.94; n=15; Analysis 7.2), prednisolone (RR 0.83; 95% CI 0.40 to 1.72; n=20; Analysis 6.3) or aspirin (RR 0.82; 95% CI 0.38 to 1.74; n=17; Analysis 8.2) respectively at the end of the trial period (90 days or 12 months) (Karat 1969).

(d) Changes in quality of life  
None of the trials reported changes in quality of life.

Adverse events  
Three trials did not report on adverse events (Helmy 1971; Iyer 1976; Arora 1985). The other trials did provide information about adverse events, but often the number of participants with any adverse events in both groups was unclear.

Systemic corticosteroids  
Minor adverse events not requiring withdrawal from treatment (swelling of the face, ’buffalo hump’, striae distensae, and acne) were more often reported in participants who received intravenous dextrose alone and oral steroids per their need to control ENL (control group) compared to those who received intravenous betamethasone in 5% dextrose, but the number of participants with adverse events in each group was not given (Girdhar 2002).

Systemic non-steroidal immunomodulatory therapies  
Withdrawals from thalidomide treatment were caused by intestinal obstruction (1/12 participants) (Pearson 1969), and worsening of ENL symptoms (3/22 participants) (Villahermosa 2005). Minor adverse events not requiring withdrawal from thalidomide treatment (e.g. mild dermatitis, constipation, nausea, drowsiness, headache, insomnia, dizziness, dryness) were reported, but data for comparison was often unclear or lacking (Pearson 1969; Sheskin 1969; Iyer 1971; Waters 1971; Sales 2007). Significantly less participants in the 100 mg thalidomide regimen group reported any mild to moderate adverse events compared to those in the 300 mg thalidomide regimen group during the seven-week regimen (RR 0.46; 95% CI 0.23 to 0.93; n=22; Analysis 2.4) (Villahermosa 2005). Withdrawals from pentoxifylline were due to gastrointestinal intolerance to the drug (1/24 participants) and fever and continuing lesion inflammation (3/24 participants). Adverse events not requiring withdrawal from pentoxifylline treatment (e.g. gastrointestinal complaints, nausea) were reported in 2/24 participants (Sales 2007). Significantly more participants who received clofazimine had minor adverse events compared to those who received prednisolone (RR 1.92; 95% CI 1.10 to 3.35; n=24; Analysis 4.3). In the clofazimine group all participants had red/black pigmentation. No withdrawals from either clofazimine or prednisolone treatment were reported (Karat 1970). Withdrawal from indomethacin treatment was due to deterioration of ENL (1/16 participants). Minor adverse events (e.g. nausea, dizziness, insomnia) were more frequently reported in participants who received indomethacin (9 events) compared to those who received prednisolone (1 event) (Ing 1969). No significant differences in minor adverse events (e.g. abdominal pain, nausea, headache) were observed between indomethacin and chloroquine (RR 1.09; 95% CI 0.57 to 2.10; n=23; Analysis 7.3), prednisolone (RR 0.92; 95% CI 0.52 to 1.63; n=24; Analysis 6.4) and aspirin (RR 2.23; 95% CI 0.87 to 5.71; n=25; Analysis 8.3) respectively (Karat 1969).

DISCUSSION

Summary of main results
There are no good controlled trial data on the optimum treatment for controlling the acute phase of ENL. Our review included 13 randomised controlled trials involving 445 participants, and assessed the effects of betamethasone, thalidomide, pentoxifylline, clofazimine, indomethacin, and levamisole in the management of ENL. One trial showed thalidomide treatment to be superior to acetylsalicylic acid treatment (less new reactions requiring further treatment) (Iyer 1971) in the short-term control of ENL. Two trials showed significant longer-term benefits of clofazimine treatment compared to thalidomide (fewer recurrences) or prednisolone (more treatment successes) respectively (Karat 1970; Iyer 1976). Mild to moderate adverse events were significantly higher in participants taking a 300 mg versus 100 mg dose of thalidomide (Villahermosa 2005) and in participants taking clofazimine compared with prednisolone (Karat 1970). The results should be considered with caution, due to methodological shortcomings. Data extraction of the study of Iyer 1971 was limited to the results of the first randomised treatment regimen to avoid having more than one outcome per participant in the analysis. In the study of Iyer 1976 participants continued on a maintenance dose of either 100 mg clofazimine or 50 mg thalidomide daily during the year after therapy. The study found significantly less recurrences of ENL in the group who received clo-
fazimine therapy and this effect may be due to the persistence of clofazimine in the body over a longer period of time. Karat 1970 tapered the dose of prednisolone (starting at 30 mg daily and tapered off to 5 mg daily), while the dose of clofazimine (300 mg daily) remained the same during the 12-week treatment.

**Overall completeness and applicability of evidence**

The studies identified were not sufficient to address all of the objectives of the review. Two studies had outcome measures that were considered to reflect our primary outcome measure (Sheskin 1969; Karat 1970). Three studies assessed the disappearance of existing ENL skin lesions rather than the absence of new ENL skin lesions at the end of the therapy (Ing 1969; Villahermosa 2005; Sales 2007), and one study reported no further reactions after the first treatment regimen (Iyer 1971). None of the studies reported adequately on the secondary outcome measure: remission of inflammation at other sites upon completion of the ENL therapy, as assessed by a clinician. Seven studies assessed changes in ENL severity using a self-defined definition, scale, or score (Karat 1969; Pearson 1969; Helmy 1971; Waters 1971; Arora 1985; Girdhar 2002; Villahermosa 2005). None of the studies reported on the secondary outcome or time to next clinical episode, but four studies recorded recurrences of ENL in participants whose initial reaction was controlled (Karat 1969; Karat 1970; Iyer 1976; Villahermosa 2005). Adverse events were reported in all but three studies (Helmy 1971; Iyer 1976; Arora 1985). None of the studies assessed the effect of the intervention on quality of life of participants. The studies did not provide separate data for different subgroups, such as disease severity (mild or severe) or duration (single acute, multiple acute, or chronic), while this could have given useful information on effectiveness of treatment for different types of ENL. The results of the studies do not allow any robust conclusion regarding the general applicability of any of the interventions tested.

**Quality of the evidence**

The quality of trials was generally poor, especially in studies published more than 20 years ago, due to the lack of clear reporting of methods, data, and the allocation process. Most of the studies were too small (10 to 92 participants) to identify important differences even if they existed. Three studies had a cross-over design which is associated with increased risk of bias (Pearson 1969; Helmy 1971; Waters 1971). We therefore considered only the first phase treatment. Two studies used more than one outcome of individual participants in the analysis (Sheskin 1969; Iyer 1971). This may have led to an over-estimate of the effect because the within-patient variance between outcomes of the same person may be smaller than the between-patient variance of outcomes between individuals. We used only data of the first randomised treatment to overcome this concern and these were only available for the trial of Iyer 1971. Most of the trials reported comedication, which may have diluted the effect of the intervention tested in the studies. Most of the studies were not clear as to how allocation sequences were generated or how allocation was concealed. Blinding, especially of the outcome assessor, was not described at all or unclear. Trials assessing clofazimine were unblinded the moment skin discoloration appeared. This might have biased the outcome assessments. Six studies reported incomplete outcome data, but only two of those performed an intention-to-treat analysis. Baseline data were poorly reported and absent in five studies. Adverse effects were often reported inadequately, limiting comparisons between experimental and control groups.

**Potential biases in the review process**

The search process was elaborate and to our knowledge no other randomised controlled trials were available for this review. It is possible that not all relevant studies have been included in this review, and that we failed to find some unpublished trials. We contacted several people, but did not identify any new trials. The quality of reporting was generally poor and this may have led to misunderstandings during the critical appraisal of the studies. We contacted authors of studies less than 15 years old, but had poor response to requests for additional information. We were unable to assess for publication bias as there were not enough studies to perform a funnel plot. Most studies were small and showed no significant effect and we considered publication bias in this case not very likely. Some studies, assessing interventions for people with lepromatous leprosy and containing potentially useful data, had to be excluded because no separate results for people with ENL were reported.

**Agreements and disagreements with other studies or reviews**

A few systematic reviews on interventions for ENL have been found, but these focused on thalidomide and included non-randomised studies (Penna 2005; Walker 2007). These reviews concluded that although beneficial effects of thalidomide treatment were found, the evidence is limited due to methodological differences between studies and the use of thalidomide is restricted because of possible serious adverse effects such as teratogenicity, neuropathy, and thromboembolisms.

**AUTHORS’ CONCLUSIONS**
Implications for practice

There is some evidence of benefit for thalidomide and clofazimine, but generally we found insufficient evidence to make any firm recommendations on the use of any of the interventions tested for management of ENL and included in this review. This does not mean they do not work, because the studies were generally of poor quality and small-sized.

Treatment with thalidomide showed a significant benefit compared to acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin). Clofazimine treatment was superior to prednisolone and thalidomide. Current guidelines for the management of ENL are given by bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP), but these guidelines are not supported by evidence from randomised controlled trials and are developed from practice.

Most of the studies reported adverse effects of treatment. Mild to moderate adverse events were significantly higher in participants taking a 300 mg versus 100 mg dose of thalidomide and in participants taking clofazimine compared with prednisolone. In only a few instances was withdrawal from treatment required, but it was not always clear whether this was due to treatment or for another reason. Adverse effects of commonly used drugs, such as prednisolone, clofazimine, and thalidomide are well-documented and should be kept in mind when prescribing drugs for ENL.

Implications for research

The 13 trials included in this review were generally of poor methodological quality and have mostly been of short duration. A wide range of interventions were assessed, one trial evaluated betamethasone, five trials thalidomide, one trial pentoxifylline, three trials clofazimine, two trials indomethacin, and one trial levamisole.

It was often unclear what the duration and severity of ENL was before the starting of treatment. Future studies should have clearer case definitions for ENL and we recommend that different durations of ENL (single acute episode, multiple acute episode, or chronic) and different severity of ENL (mild or severe) be distinguished, as such subgroups may need different management of ENL.

Erythema nodosum leprosum is a complicated disease known for its unpredictability, its variable severity and duration, and its often chronic and recurrent nature. Although most agents may work similarly for controlling the acute symptoms of ENL, prevention of recurrences is far more difficult.

There is a need for good quality studies which follow the current standards for design and reporting of randomised controlled trials, and for large multi-centre studies to ensure that enough participants are enrolled.

None of the studies investigated whether the interventions improved quality of life of participants and only a few examined the long-term effects of interventions. There is a need for clearly defined outcome measures, both in the short-term and longer-term. We would recommend that future studies include outcomes such as absence of new tender erythematous subcutaneous skin lesions at completion of the ENL therapy, disappearance of inflammation associated with ENL at sites other than the skin (such as iritis and arthritis) at completion of the ENL therapy, as well as time to next clinical episode of ENL after completion of treatment, and quality of life measures.

It is recommended that internationally recognised and validated severity scales be developed so that results from different countries can be compared.

A trial comparing directly prednisolone and thalidomide has never been done, and is urgently needed.

Future studies should aim to assess the efficacy, safety, and optimal regimens of prednisolone and thalidomide for severe ENL and clofazimine for mild ENL as well as other potentially beneficial therapies.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank:

Finola Delamere for advice, performing the searches, and inserting the search results into the review, Taixiang Wu who interpreted a paper in Chinese, Brenda Gomes and Marcos Virmond who interpreted papers in Portuguese, and Linda Lehman and Ben Naafs for their support in searching or clarifying original research.

The editorial base of the Cochrane Skin Group would like to thank Indira Karawita, Alireza Firooz, and Steve Walker who were the External Content Referees, Jack Tweed the Consumer Referee, Sue Jessop the Key Editor, Jo Leonardi-Bee the Statistical Editor, and Philippa Middleton the Methodology Editor on this review.
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Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum (Review)

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Karat 1971b [published data only]

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Lockwood 2007

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Manandhar 1999
Naafs 2003a

Naafs 2003b

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Nery 2000

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Ridley 1966

Saunderson 2000

Smith 2002

Uyemura 1986

Van Brakel 2005

Walker 2007

WHO 1998

WHO 2000

WHO 2003

WHO 2006

WHO 2008

Zaheer 1993
### Characteristics of included studies  
*ordered by study ID*

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<th>Study</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Arora 1985     | Design: parallel group                       | Setting: single centre, hospital, India                                      | Experimental group (n=5): levamisole capsules (150 mg daily) on 3 consecutive days repeating every fortnight for 3 months  
Control group (n=7): placebo capsules (dose unknown, daily) on 3 consecutive days repeating every fortnight for 3 months  
Other therapy: iron for anaemic participants | Improvement, defined as complete recovery from reaction, after 3 months | -                              |

#### Risk of bias

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<th>Bias</th>
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<th>Support for judgement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate sequence generation?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
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<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Unclear, though states 'coding of drugs was done by other person and decoding at end of study'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blinding?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Unclear who were blinded, though states trial was double-blind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete outcome data addressed?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No mention of attrition in text or tables, suggesting 100% follow-up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free of selective reporting?</td>
<td>Low risk</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Free of other bias?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Not clear as to whether groups were similar at baseline; outcome measures not well-described</td>
</tr>
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## Girdhar 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Design: parallel group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Participants | Setting: single centre, leprosy centre, India  
Incl: lepromatous leprosy with recurrent ENL and on steroids for > 6 months  
Excl: not stated  
M/F: not stated  
Age: not stated  
Duration: not stated  
Severity: not stated  
Randomised: 10 participants  
Evaluable: 9 participants (1 lost to follow-up)  
Unit of analysis: individual |
| Interventions | Experimental group (n=4): infusion of betamethasone in 5% dextrose daily for 3 days every 4 weeks for 6 months  
Control group (n=5): infusion of 5% dextrose daily for 3 days every 4 weeks for 6 months  
Other therapy: MDT with 100 mg clofazimine daily for all participants; oral steroids as per need to control ENL for participants in control group |
| Outcomes | Change in severity and frequency of ENL 6 months after end of treatment  
Steroid requirement  
Side-effects |
| Notes | - |

### Risk of bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bias</th>
<th>Authors’ judgement</th>
<th>Support for judgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate sequence generation?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Blinding?  
All outcomes | Unclear risk | No information provided |
| Incomplete outcome data addressed?  
All outcomes | Unclear risk | No information provided |
| Free of selective reporting? | Low risk | |
| Free of other bias? | Unclear risk | No information about baseline characteristics of both groups |
### Helmy 1971

**Methods**
- Design: cross-over

**Participants**
- Setting: single centre, leprosy centre, Malaysia
- Incl: not stated, though included were lepromatous or indefinite leprosy with moderately severe ENL
- Excl: not stated
- M/F: 10/5
- Age: 17 to 67
- Duration: 6 months to 2 years
- Severity: moderately severe ENL
- Randomised: 15 participants
- Evaluable: 10 participants (5 lost to follow-up)
- Unit of analysis: individual

**Interventions**
- Group A (n=3): clofazimine capsules (100 mg 3 times daily) in weeks 1 to 4, followed by placebo capsules (dose unknown, 3 times daily) in weeks 5 to 8
- Group B (n=7): placebo capsules (100 mg 3 times daily) in weeks 1 to 4, followed by clofazimine capsules (dose unknown, 3 times daily) in weeks 5 to 8
- Other therapy: dapsone (100 mg 2 times daily); stibophen if needed; paracetamol issued twice weekly to be taken freely

**Outcomes**
- Severity score of ENL

**Notes**
- The trial consisted of a first control period (2 weeks), first trial period (4 weeks), second trial period (4 weeks), second control period (4 weeks)

### Risk of bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate sequence generation?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
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<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Unclear, though states “key of drug allocation was kept in sealed envelope and opened only after analysis of the results”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blinding?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Participant &amp; clinician: no, outcome assessor: unclear. Trial was designed to be double-blind, but it ceased when discolouration due to clofazimine appeared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete outcome data addressed?</td>
<td>High risk</td>
<td>5 participants lost to follow-up and excluded from analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of selective reporting?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No statistical analysis performed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of other bias?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information about baseline characteristics of both groups; outcome measures not well-described</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Methods

Design: parallel group

### Participants

Setting: single centre, Singapore  
Incl: lepromatous leprosy and ENL (mild, moderate, or severe)  
Excl: not stated  
M/F: not stated  
Age: not stated  
Severity: 15 mild, 9 moderate, 6 severe  
Randomised: 30 participants  
Evaluable: 30 participants, though one participant did not complete 4-week treatment  
Unit of analysis: individual

### Interventions

Experimental group (n=16): indomethacin (25 mg 3 times daily) for 1 month  
Control group (n=14): prednisolone (5 mg 3 times daily) for 1 month  
Other therapy: anti-leprosy drugs were given during 4-week trial period, but no additional analgesics

### Outcomes

Improve after 4 weeks (e.g. mean change in pain relief, subsidence of lesions)

Side-effects

### Notes

- 

### Risk of bias

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<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blinding?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
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<tr>
<td>All outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete outcome data addressed?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Not clear as to whether participant who did not complete treatment was included in analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>All outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free of selective reporting?</td>
<td>High risk</td>
<td>No statistical evidence, though states “indomethacin is effective in treating only mild and moderate cases of ENL”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of other bias?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Not clear as to whether groups were similar at baseline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Methods

**Design:** parallel group  

**Participants**  
- **Setting:** multicentre, 4 centres, India, Mali, Somalia, Spain  
- **Incl:** clearly demonstrable dermatological signs of acute lepra reactions i.e. erythema nodosum-like lesions or erythema multiforme-like lesions  
- **Excl:** severe or life-threatening lepra reactions  
- **M/F:** 92 M  
- **Age:** 15 to 55+  
- **Duration:** not stated  
- **Severity:** not stated  
- **Randomised:** 214 ENL reactions (of 92 participants)  
- **Evaluable:** 214 ENL reactions  
- **Unit of analysis:** reaction

### Interventions

**Experimental group (n=116):** thalidomide tablets (100 mg 4 times daily if \( \geq 50 \) kg, or 100 mg 1 to 3 times daily if < 50 kg) for 7 days  

**Control group (n=98):** acetylsalicyclic acid tablets (400 mg 4 times daily if \( \geq 50 \) kg, or 400 mg 1 to 3 times daily if < 50 kg) for 7 days  

**Other therapy:** upon admission all drug therapy had to be ceased

### Outcomes

- **No further reactions**  
- **Changes in temperature, skin lesions, blood pressure, pulse rate, and blood cell count after 7 days**  
- **Side-effects**

### Notes

Each reaction was treated with a 7-day regimen. A new regimen was allocated to a participant if there was no improvement or if new acute reactions occurred. The statistical design provided for treatment of 4 reactions in each participant, 2 with acetylsalicyclic acid, and 2 with thalidomide, the order being random

### Risk of bias

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<tr>
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<td>No information provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
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<td>Confidential master sheet of drug allocation kept by WHO, bottles with tablets labelled by drug manufacturer according to master sheet</td>
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<td>Blinding?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unclear who were blinded, though states trial was double-blind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete outcome data addressed?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No mention of attrition in text or tables, suggesting 100% follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of selective reporting?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No statistical analysis performed</td>
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### Iyer 1971 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Free of other bias?</th>
<th>Unclear risk</th>
<th>No information about baseline characteristics of both groups; outcome measures not well-described</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Iyer 1976

**Methods**

Design: parallel group

**Participants**

Setting: single centre, India  
Incl: male, lepromatous leprosy and prone to recurrent reactive episodes  
Excl: not stated  
M/F: 72 M  
Age: 15 to 54  
Duration: < 6 months to > 4 years  
Severity: moderate, severe  
Randomised: unclear, states “72 participants available for analysis”  
Evaluable: 72 participants  
Unit of analysis: individual

**Interventions**

Experimental group (n=36): clofazimine (100 mg 3 times daily) for 8 weeks, clofazimine (100 mg once a day) for 52 weeks  
Control group (n=36): thalidomide (100 mg 3 times daily) for 8 weeks, thalidomide (25 to 50 mg once a day) for 52 weeks  
Other therapy: dapsone (10 mg/kg/week) during 52 weeks maintenance therapy

**Outcomes**

Time-to-control reaction  
Maintenance of anti-reaction effect after therapy

**Notes**

First 8 weeks (part A) was acute treatment to control reaction as quickly and effectively as possible. Part B (52 weeks) was dosage aimed at maintaining effect

### Risk of bias

<table>
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<tbody>
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<td>No information provided</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blinding? All outcomes</td>
<td>High risk</td>
<td>No, open trial, blinding impossible due to skin discolouration from clofazimine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete outcome data addressed? All outcomes</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No mention of attrition in text or tables, suggesting 100% follow-up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free of selective reporting?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No statistical analysis performed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Iyer 1976  (Continued)

| Free of other bias? | Unclear risk | Not clear as to whether groups were similar at baseline; outcome measures not well-described |

Karat 1969

**Methods**
- Design: parallel group

**Participants**
- Setting: single centre, leprosy centre, India
- Incl: lepromatous leprosy with ENL, > 12 years
- Excl: history or radiological evidence of peptic ulcer, diabetes, TB, hypertension, severe intercurrent infection, acute peripheral nerve paralysis, medical conditions requiring use of other anti-leprosy drugs
- M/F: not stated
- Age: not stated
- Duration: not stated
- Severity: 28 mild, 22 severe
- Randomised: 50 participants
- Evaluable: 50 participants
- Unit of analysis: individual

**Interventions**
- Group 1 (n=11): indomethacin orally (50 mg 3 times daily) in week 1 to 2, (25 mg 3 times daily) in week 3, (25 mg once a day) maintenance
- Group 2 (n=12): chloroquine orally (250 mg 3 times daily) in week 1 to 2, (250 mg 2 times daily) in week 3, (250 mg once a day) maintenance
- Group 3 (n=13): prednisolone orally (5 mg 3 times daily) in week 1 to 2, (5 mg 2 times daily) in week 3, (5 mg once a day) maintenance
- Group 4 (n=14): aspirin orally (1 g 3 times daily) in week 1 to 2, (1 g 2 times daily) in week 3, (500 mg 2 times daily) maintenance
- Other therapy: anti-leprosy drugs were stopped on admission; sedation with phenobarbitone or chlorpromazine if needed; diuretics only when oedema was progressive and uncontrolled by one of the given drugs

**Outcomes**
- Control of reaction
- Recurrence of reaction
- Side-effects

**Notes**
- Duration of trial period unclear, paper states both trial period of 90 days and 12 months

**Risk of bias**

<table>
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<th>Authors' judgement</th>
<th>Support for judgement</th>
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<td>Unclear, though states “statistically randomised grouping”</td>
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<td>Blinding?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Unclear who were blinded, though states trial was double-blind</td>
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**Risk of bias**
### Karat 1969 (Continued)

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<tr>
<td>Incomplete outcome data addressed? All outcomes</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No mention of attrition in text or tables, suggesting 100% follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of selective reporting?</td>
<td>Low risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of other bias?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information about baseline characteristics of both groups; outcome measures not well-described</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Karat 1970

#### Methods

| Design: parallel group |

#### Participants

Setting: single centre, leprosy centre, India
Incl: history of $\geq 3$ severe reactions and with severe current reaction which could not be controlled by antimony, aspirin, or chloroquine
Excl: peptic ulcer, intercurrent acute infections, TB, or malignant lesions
M/F: not stated
Age: not stated
Duration: 4 to 150 months
Severity: severe
Randomised: 24 participants
Evaluable: 24 participants
Unit of analysis: individual

#### Interventions

Experimental group (n=12): clofazimine (100 mg 3 times daily) for 12 weeks
Control group (n=12): prednisolone (10 mg 3 times daily) week 1, (10 mg 2 times daily) week 2, (5 mg 3 times daily) week 3, (10 mg 2 times daily) week 4, (5 mg once daily) weeks 5 to 12
Other therapy: none

#### Outcomes

Treatment success at end of 12 weeks, defined as body temp $< 37.2 ^\circ C$, no new ENL lesions, no pain in peripheral nerve, no progression of neurological deficit, and iritis quiescent in 2 weeks from starting treatment
Recurrence of reaction during trial
Side-effects

#### Risk of bias

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<td>Unclear, though states “list of random allocations”</td>
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<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
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### Karat 1970  (Continued)

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<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blinding? All outcomes</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Participant &amp; clinician: yes, outcome assessor: unclear</td>
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<td>No information provided</td>
</tr>
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<td>Blinding? All outcomes</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Participant &amp; clinician: yes, outcome assessor: unclear</td>
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### Pearson 1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Design: cross-over</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Setting: single centre, leprosy centre, Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incl: moderately severe ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excl: not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M/F: 11/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age: not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration: 10 months to 3.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Severity: unclear, though title states was moderately severe ENL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Randomised: 12 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluable: 12 participants (1 from group B withdrawn from study after 9 weeks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unit of analysis: individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions</td>
<td>Group A (n=not stated): thalidomide tablets (100 mg 3 times daily) for 6 weeks, followed by placebo (dose and frequency unknown) for 6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group B (n=not stated): placebo tablets (dose and frequency not stated) for 6 weeks, followed by thalidomide tablets (100 mg 3 times daily) for 6 weeks</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Other therapy: prednisolone, stibophen, and paracetamol in addition to placebo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Change in ENL score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steroid requirement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Side-effects</td>
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### Risk of bias

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<tr>
<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blinding? All outcomes</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Participant &amp; clinician: yes, outcome assessor: unclear</td>
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### Pearson 1969 (Continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Incomplete outcome data addressed?</th>
<th>Low risk</th>
<th>Intention-to-treat analysis performed; average scores for first 3 weeks of thalidomide have been inserted for weeks 10 to 12</th>
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<td>High risk</td>
<td>No statistical evidence, though states “thalidomide was superior to a placebo”</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information about baseline characteristics of both groups; outcome measures not well-described</td>
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### Sales 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Design: parallel group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Participants | Setting: single centre, leprosy centre, Brazil  
Incl: MB leprosy, males between 18 to 60 years old, females over 49 (postmenopausal), clinical and histopathological ENL  
Excl: Acute neuritis requiring CS, hepatic, renal, mental diseases, diabetes, and/or immune-deficiencies related to HIV  
M/F: 38/6  
Age: 18 to 69  
Duration: not stated  
Severity: not stated  
Randomised: 44 participants  
Evaluable: 44 participants (8 lost to follow-up)  
Unit of analysis: individual |
| Interventions | Group A (n=24): pentoxifylline (1.2 g daily) for 30 days  
Group B (n=20): thalidomide (300 mg daily) for 30 days  
Other therapy: participants with no improvement after 15 days treatment or with severe adverse effects were removed from study and put on recommended regimen of thalidomide or corticosteroids |
| Outcomes | Improvement at end of 30 days treatment, defined as complete elimination of type 2 reactional skin lesion inflammation, normal body temperature, and/or regression of systemic symptoms  
Side-effects |
| Notes | - |

### Risk of bias

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<tr>
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<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
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### Sales 2007 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blinding? All outcomes</th>
<th>Unclear risk</th>
<th>Unclear who were blinded, though states trial was double-blinded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete outcome data addressed? All outcomes</td>
<td>Low risk</td>
<td>Intention-to-treat analysis performed; participants removed from trial were categorised as treatment non-responders</td>
</tr>
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<td>Low risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free of other bias?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Unclear if all relevant baseline characteristics were similar</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Sheskin 1969

**Methods**
- Design: parallel group

**Participants**
- Setting: single centre, hospital/ambulatory, Venezuela
- Incl: lepromatous leprosy with clearly demonstrable dermatologic, neurologic, or other manifestations of ENL reaction
- Excl: not stated
- M/F: 37/15
- Age: 17 to 58
- Duration: 3 months to 9 years
- Severity: not stated
- Randomised: 173 ENL reactions (of 52 participants)
- Evaluable: 173 ENL reactions
- Unit of analysis: reaction

**Interventions**
- Experimental group (n=85): thalidomide tablets (100 mg 4 times daily if > 50 kg, or 6 mg/kg/day if ≤ 50 kg) for 7 days
- Control group (n=88): placebo tablets (100 mg 4 times daily if > 50 kg, or 6 mg/kg/day if ≤ 50 kg) for 7 days
- Other therapy: if on sulfone therapy at admission, sulfone therapy was continued; if receiving steroids or adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH) for prolonged periods at admission, same dosage was continued

**Outcomes**
- Total improvement, defined as all dermatologic manifestations in advanced state of remission, no new elements, disappearance of characteristic lepra reaction symptoms after 7 days
- Side-effects

**Notes**
- Each reaction was treated with a 7-day regimen. A new regimen was allocated to a participant if there was no improvement. Up to 4 consecutive treatment regimens were given to each participants

**Risk of bias**

<table>
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<th>Support for judgement</th>
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### Sheskin 1969 (Continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Allocation concealment?</th>
<th>Unclear risk</th>
<th>Unclear, though states &quot;code unknown to investigators and kept elsewhere&quot;</th>
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<tr>
<td>Blinding?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Unclear who were blinded, though states trial was double-blind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete outcome data addressed?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No mention of attrition in text or tables, suggesting 100% follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of selective reporting?</td>
<td>Low risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of other bias?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Not clear as to whether groups were similar at baseline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Villahermosa 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Design: parallel group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Participants | Setting: single centre, leprosy centre, Philippines  
Incl: lepromatous leprosy, ≥ 18 years, acute histologically confirmed episode of ENL consisting of ≥ 10 skin nodules, with or without systemic symptoms; women only included if evidence of non-childbearing potential  
Excl: incapacitating ENL (bed ridden), severe neuritis, thalidomide ingestion within 30 days or corticosteroid ingestion within 2 weeks of enrollment  
M/F: 22 M  
Age: 18 to 46  
Duration: 0 to 3 years  
Severity: not stated  
Randomised: 22 participants  
Evaluable: 19 (3 lost to follow-up)  
Unit of analysis: individual |
| Interventions | Group A (n=12): thalidomide capsules, 100 mg daily (2x 50 mg, 4x dummy capsules) in week 1, 50 mg daily (1x 50 mg, 3x dummy capsules) in week 2 to 3, 4x dummy capsules daily in weeks 4 to 7  
Group B (n=10): thalidomide capsules, 300 mg daily (6x 50 mg, 0x dummy capsules) in week 1, 200 mg daily (4x 50 mg, 0x dummy capsules) in week 2 to 3, 100 mg daily (2x 50 mg, 2x dummy capsules) in week 4 to 5, 50 mg daily (1x 50 mg, 3x dummy capsules) in week 6 to 7  
Other therapy: acetaminophen for participants with fever during first 72 hours of study |
| Outcomes | Resolution of inflamed ENL nodules during initial 7-day treatment  
Global assessment  
Re-emergence of skin lesions during taper  
Week 7 lesion counts  
Recurrence of lesions after taper  
Safety and adverse events |
Week 1 treatment was acute treatment. Participants with complete or partial responses at week 1 were tapered from thalidomide during weeks 2 to 7.

### Risk of bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bias</th>
<th>Authors' judgement</th>
<th>Support for judgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate sequence generation?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
<td>Low risk</td>
<td>Adequate, coded blister packs by pharmaceutical company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blinding?</td>
<td>Un unclear risk</td>
<td>Participant: yes, clinician &amp; outcome assessor: unclear; though states was double-blind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete outcome data addressed?</td>
<td>High risk</td>
<td>Three participants withdrawn from trial and excluded from analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of selective reporting?</td>
<td>Low risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of other bias?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Unclear if all relevant baseline characteristics were similar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Waters 1971

**Methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design: cross-over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Participants**

| Setting: single centre, leprosy centre, Malaysia |
| Incl: not stated, but included were participants with lepromatous leprosy and histologically confirmed moderately severe or severe chronic ENL |
| Excl: not stated |
| M/F: 10 M |
| Age: 19 to 56 |
| Duration: 9 months to 3.5 years |
| Severity: moderately severe or severe chronic ENL |
| Randomised: 9 participants for first 16-week trial, 8 participants for second 24-week trial |
| Evaluable: 9 participants for first 16-week trial, 8 participants for second 24-week trial |
| Unit of analysis: individual |

**Interventions**

| 16-week trial (n=9) and 24-week trial (n=8): |
| Group A (n=5 or n=3): thalidomide tablets (100 mg 3 times daily) for 4 or 6 weeks, followed by placebo tablets (dose unknown, 3 times daily) for 4 or 6 weeks |
| Group B (n=4 or n=5): placebo tablets (dose unknown, 3 times daily) for 4 or 6 weeks, followed by thalidomide tablets (100 mg 3 times daily) for 4 or 6 weeks |
| Other therapy: 100 mg dapsone twice weekly, prednisolone or corticotrophin daily, mild analgesics if needed |
**Waters 1971 (Continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Steroid requirement during trial period&lt;br&gt;ENL score (temperature, severity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>First trial lasted 16 weeks (4 weeks control, 4 weeks A, 4 weeks B, 4 weeks control). The second trial started 11 weeks after completion of first trial. The trial lasted 24 weeks (6 weeks control, 6 weeks A, 6 weeks B, 6 weeks control) and included 8 participants of which 7 participated in the first trial.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Risk of bias**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bias</th>
<th>Authors' judgement</th>
<th>Support for judgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate sequence generation?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No information provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation concealment?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Unclear, though states “the code of drug allocation was not revealed to anyone until after the trial was completed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blinding? All outcomes</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Participant &amp; clinician: yes, outcome assessor: unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete outcome data addressed?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>No mention of attrition in text or tables, suggesting 100% follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of selective reporting?</td>
<td>High risk</td>
<td>No statistical evidence, though states “nine of the ten participants showed a very significant reduction in steroid requirement”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free of other bias?</td>
<td>Unclear risk</td>
<td>Not clear as to whether groups were similar at baseline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Characteristics of excluded studies [ordered by study ID]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Reason for exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous 1976</td>
<td>Treatment of lepromatous leprosy, not of ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arruda 1986</td>
<td>Treatment of lepromatous leprosy, not of ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browne 1981</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawlah 2002</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de Almeida Neto 1981</td>
<td>No separate results for ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de Carsalade 2003</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garbino 2006</td>
<td>No specific treatment of ENL, but treatment of ulnar neuropathy in participants with type 1 and type 2 reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings 1970</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huang 1987</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imkamp 1968</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imkamp 1973</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamet 1992</td>
<td>Treatment of lepromatous leprosy, not of ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kar 1988</td>
<td>Randomisation by alternation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1971a</td>
<td>Treatment of lepromatous leprosy, not of ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1971b</td>
<td>Propylaxis treatment, not treatment of ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levy 1973</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manungo 1982a</td>
<td>Treatment of lepromatous leprosy, not of ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manungo 1982b</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreira 1998</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partida-Sanchez 1998</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penna 2005</td>
<td>Only methodology and intake results were described, trial not completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pettit 1967</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plock 1976</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramu 1979</td>
<td>Randomisation by alternation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodriguez 1974</td>
<td>Treatment of lepromatous and borderline leprosy, not of ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharma 1982</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharma 1986</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheskin 1969a</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheskin 1971</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheskin 1983</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunderkotter 2005</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vides 1999</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaheer 1993</td>
<td>Treatment of multibacillary (MB) leprosy, not of ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang 2008</td>
<td>No RCT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Characteristics of ongoing studies** *(ordered by study ID)*

**Salim 2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trial name or title</th>
<th>Montelukast in ENL Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
<td>design: parallel groups randomized controlled trial single blind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Participants** | • MB leprosy  
• ENL reaction  
• age 15 to 65  
• weight > 35kg  
• patient willing to participate, including agreeing to investigations and admission  
• adequate past records  
• no steroid received in past 4 weeks |
| **Interventions** | 1) prednisolone alone  
2) prednisolone plus montelukast  
3) montelukast alone  
Prednisolone starting at 40 mg daily tapered over 12 weeks. Montelukast 10 mg for 16 weeks |
| **Outcomes** | • absence of new nerve function impairment  
• decrease in ENL score  
• incidence of adverse effects  
Timing of outcome assessment at 24 weeks |
| **Starting date** | December 2006 |
| **Contact information** | Abdul H Salim, MBBS: dfsalim@citechco.net |
| **Notes** | 34Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum (Review) |

*Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum (Review)*  
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## DATA AND ANALYSES

### Comparison 1. Thalidomide versus aspirin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome or subgroup title</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>Statistical method</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Remission of skin lesions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Comparison 2. 100 mg thalidomide versus 300 mg thalidomide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome or subgroup title</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>Statistical method</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Remission of skin lesions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Time to next clinical ENL episode</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Adverse effects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Comparison 3. Pentoxifylline versus thalidomide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome or subgroup title</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>Statistical method</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Remission of skin lesions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Comparison 4. Clofazimine versus prednisolone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome or subgroup title</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>Statistical method</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Remission of skin lesions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Time to next clinical ENL episode</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Adverse effects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Comparison 5. Clofazimine versus thalidomide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome or subgroup title</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>Statistical method</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Time to next clinical ENL episode</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Comparison 6. Indomethacin versus prednisolone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome or subgroup title</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>Statistical method</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Remission of skin lesions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Time to next clinical ENL episode</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Adverse effects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Comparison 7. Indomethacin versus chloroquine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome or subgroup title</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>Statistical method</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Time to next clinical ENL episode</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Adverse effects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Comparison 8. Indomethacin versus aspirin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome or subgroup title</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>Statistical method</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Time to next clinical ENL episode</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Adverse effects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Comparison 9. Levamisole versus placebo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome or subgroup title</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>Statistical method</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in ENL severity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Ratio (M-H, Random, 95% CI)</td>
<td>Subtotals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(proportion improved)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Analysis 1.1. Comparison 1 Thalidomide versus aspirin, Outcome 1 Remission of skin lesions.

**Review:** Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum  
**Comparison:** 1 Thalidomide versus aspirin  
**Outcome:** 1 Remission of skin lesions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>thalidomide</th>
<th>aspirin</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iyer 1971</td>
<td>n/N: 26/50</td>
<td>n/N: 9/42</td>
<td>2.43 [1.28, 4.59]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subtotal (95% CI)**  
Total events: 26 (thalidomide), 9 (aspirin)  
Heterogeneity: not applicable  
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0.01</th>
<th>0.1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favours aspirin</td>
<td>Favours thalidomide</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Analysis 2.1. Comparison 2 100 mg thalidomide versus 300 mg thalidomide, Outcome 1 Remission of skin lesions.

**Review:** Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum  
**Comparison:** 2 100 mg thalidomide versus 300 mg thalidomide  
**Outcome:** 1 Remission of skin lesions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>100 mg thalidomide</th>
<th>300 mg thalidomide</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villahermosa 2005</td>
<td>8/12</td>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>1.33 [0.64, 2.79]</td>
<td>1.33 [0.64, 2.79]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 8 (100 mg thalidomide), 5 (300 mg thalidomide)  
Heterogeneity: not applicable  
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)

### Analysis 2.2. Comparison 2 100 mg thalidomide versus 300 mg thalidomide, Outcome 2 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved).

**Review:** Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum  
**Comparison:** 2 100 mg thalidomide versus 300 mg thalidomide  
**Outcome:** 2 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>100 mg thalidomide</th>
<th>300 mg thalidomide</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villahermosa 2005</td>
<td>10/12</td>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>1.67 [0.85, 3.26]</td>
<td>1.67 [0.85, 3.26]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 10 (100 mg thalidomide), 5 (300 mg thalidomide)  
Heterogeneity: not applicable  
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)
### Analysis 2.3. Comparison 2 100 mg thalidomide versus 300 mg thalidomide, Outcome 3 Time to next clinical ENL episode.

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum  
Comparison: 2 100 mg thalidomide versus 300 mg thalidomide  
Outcome: 3 Time to next clinical ENL episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>100 mg thalidomide</th>
<th>300 mg thalidomide</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Villahermosa 2005</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>3.75 [0.62, 22.64]</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td><strong>0.0 [0.0, 0.0]</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 6 (100 mg thalidomide), 1 (300 mg thalidomide)  
Heterogeneity: not applicable  
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)

### Analysis 2.4. Comparison 2 100 mg thalidomide versus 300 mg thalidomide, Outcome 4 Adverse effects.

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum  
Comparison: 2 100 mg thalidomide versus 300 mg thalidomide  
Outcome: 4 Adverse effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>100 mg thalidomide</th>
<th>300 mg thalidomide</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Villahermosa 2005</td>
<td>5/12</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>0.46 [0.23, 0.93]</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td><strong>0.0 [0.0, 0.0]</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 5 (100 mg thalidomide), 9 (300 mg thalidomide)  
Heterogeneity: not applicable  
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)
Analysis 3.1. Comparison 3 Pentoxifylline versus thalidomide, Outcome 1 Remission of skin lesions.

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

Comparison: 3 Pentoxifylline versus thalidomide

Outcome: 1 Remission of skin lesions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>pentoxifylline</th>
<th>thalidomide</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales 2007</td>
<td>12/14</td>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>1.05 [ 0.74, 1.49 ]</td>
<td>1.05 [ 0.74, 1.49 ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 [ 0.0, 0.0 ]</td>
<td>0.0 [ 0.0, 0.0 ]</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 12 (pentoxifylline), 9 (thalidomide)
Heterogeneity: not applicable
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)

Analysis 4.1. Comparison 4 Clofazimine versus prednisolone, Outcome 1 Remission of skin lesions.

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

Comparison: 4 Clofazimine versus prednisolone

Outcome: 1 Remission of skin lesions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>clofazimine</th>
<th>prednisolone</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
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<td>n/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 [ 0.0, 0.0 ]</td>
<td>0.0 [ 0.0, 0.0 ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 11 (clofazimine), 3 (prednisolone)
Heterogeneity: not applicable
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)
Analysis 4.2. Comparison 4 Clofazimine versus prednisolone, Outcome 2 Time to next clinical ENL episode.

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

Comparison: 4 Clofazimine versus prednisolone

Outcome: 2 Time to next clinical ENL episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>clofazimine</th>
<th>prednisolone</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
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<td>M-H,Random,95% CI</td>
<td></td>
<td>M-H,Random,95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1970</td>
<td>1/11</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>0.14 [ 0.02, 1.04 ]</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subtotal (95% CI) 0 0 0.0 [ 0.0, 0.0 ]

Total events: 1 (clofazimine), 2 (prednisolone)

Heterogeneity: not applicable

Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)

Analysis 4.3. Comparison 4 Clofazimine versus prednisolone, Outcome 3 Adverse effects.

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

Comparison: 4 Clofazimine versus prednisolone

Outcome: 3 Adverse effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>clofazimine</th>
<th>prednisolone</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td></td>
<td>M-H,Random,95% CI</td>
<td></td>
<td>M-H,Random,95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1970</td>
<td>12/12</td>
<td>6/12</td>
<td>1.92 [ 1.10, 3.35 ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subtotal (95% CI) 0 0 0.0 [ 0.0, 0.0 ]

Total events: 12 (clofazimine), 6 (prednisolone)

Heterogeneity: not applicable

Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)
### Analysis 5.1. Comparison 5 Clofazimine versus thalidomide, Outcome 1 Time to next clinical ENL episode.

**Review:** Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum  
**Comparison:** 5 Clofazimine versus thalidomide  
**Outcome:** 1 Time to next clinical ENL episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>clofazimine</th>
<th>thalidomide</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iyer 1976</td>
<td>1/36</td>
<td>13/36</td>
<td>0.08 [ 0.01, 0.56 ]</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subtotal (95% CI):** 0 0 0.0 [ 0.0, 0.0 ]

Total events: 1 (clofazimine), 13 (thalidomide)  
Heterogeneity: not applicable  
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)

### Analysis 6.1. Comparison 6 Indomethacin versus prednisolone, Outcome 1 Remission of skin lesions.

**Review:** Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum  
**Comparison:** 6 Indomethacin versus prednisolone  
**Outcome:** 1 Remission of skin lesions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>indomethacin</th>
<th>prednisolone</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ing 1969</td>
<td>8/16</td>
<td>3/14</td>
<td>2.33 [ 0.76, 7.13 ]</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subtotal (95% CI):** 0 0 0.0 [ 0.0, 0.0 ]

Total events: 8 (indomethacin), 3 (prednisolone)  
Heterogeneity: not applicable  
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)
### Analysis 6.2. Comparison 6 Indomethacin versus prednisolone, Outcome 2 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved).

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

Comparison: 6 Indomethacin versus prednisolone

Outcome: 2 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>Indomethacin</th>
<th>Prednisolone</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M. Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M. Random, 95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1969</td>
<td>7/11</td>
<td>13/13</td>
<td>0.65 [0.41, 1.02]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td><strong>0.0 [0.0, 0.0]</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 7 (indomethacin), 13 (prednisolone)

Heterogeneity: not applicable

Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)

### Analysis 6.3. Comparison 6 Indomethacin versus prednisolone, Outcome 3 Time to next clinical ENL episode.

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

Comparison: 6 Indomethacin versus prednisolone

Outcome: 3 Time to next clinical ENL episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>Indomethacin</th>
<th>Prednisolone</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M. Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M. Random, 95% CI</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1969</td>
<td>4/7</td>
<td>9/13</td>
<td>0.83 [0.40, 1.72]</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Subtotal (95% CI)</strong></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td><strong>0.0 [0.0, 0.0]</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 4 (indomethacin), 9 (prednisolone)

Heterogeneity: not applicable

Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)
Analysis 6.4. Comparison 6 Indomethacin versus prednisolone, Outcome 4 Adverse effects.

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

Comparison: 6 Indomethacin versus prednisolone

Outcome: 4 Adverse effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>Indomethacin</th>
<th>Prednisolone</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1969</td>
<td>7/11</td>
<td>9/13</td>
<td>0.92 [0.52, 1.63]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.0 [0.0, 0.0]</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 7 (indomethacin), 9 (prednisolone)

Heterogeneity: not applicable

Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)

Analysis 7.1. Comparison 7 Indomethacin versus chloroquine, Outcome 1 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved).

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

Comparison: 7 Indomethacin versus chloroquine

Outcome: 1 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>Indomethacin</th>
<th>Chloroquine</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio M-H, Random, 95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1969</td>
<td>7/11</td>
<td>8/12</td>
<td>0.95 [0.52, 1.74]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.0 [0.0, 0.0]</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 7 (indomethacin), 8 (chloroquine)

Heterogeneity: not applicable

Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)
Analysis 7.2. Comparison 7 Indomethacin versus chloroquine, Outcome 2 Time to next clinical ENL episode.

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum
Comparison: 7 Indomethacin versus chloroquine
Outcome: 2 Time to next clinical ENL episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>indomethacin</th>
<th>chloroquine</th>
<th>Risk Ratio (95% CI)</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1969</td>
<td>4/7</td>
<td>4/8</td>
<td>1.14 [0.44, 2.94]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subtotal (95% CI) 0 0 0.0 [0.0, 0.0]

Total events: 4 (indomethacin), 4 (chloroquine)
Heterogeneity: not applicable
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)

Analysis 7.3. Comparison 7 Indomethacin versus chloroquine, Outcome 3 Adverse effects.

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum
Comparison: 7 Indomethacin versus chloroquine
Outcome: 3 Adverse effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>indomethacin</th>
<th>chloroquine</th>
<th>Risk Ratio (95% CI)</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1969</td>
<td>7/11</td>
<td>7/12</td>
<td>1.09 [0.57, 2.10]</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Subtotal (95% CI) 0 0 0.0 [0.0, 0.0]

Total events: 7 (indomethacin), 7 (chloroquine)
Heterogeneity: not applicable
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)
**Analysis 8.1. Comparison 8 Indomethacin versus aspirin, Outcome 1 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved).**

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

Comparison: 8 Indomethacin versus aspirin

Outcome: 1 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>indomethacin</th>
<th>aspirin</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>M-H, Random, 95% CI</td>
<td></td>
<td>M-H, Random, 95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karat 1969</td>
<td>7/11</td>
<td>10/14</td>
<td>0.89 [0.51, 1.55]</td>
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</table>

Subtotal (95% CI)

Total events: 7 (indomethacin), 10 (aspirin)

Heterogeneity: not applicable

Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)

---

**Analysis 8.2. Comparison 8 Indomethacin versus aspirin, Outcome 2 Time to next clinical ENL episode.**

Review: Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

Comparison: 8 Indomethacin versus aspirin

Outcome: 2 Time to next clinical ENL episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>indomethacin</th>
<th>aspirin</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
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<td>M-H, Random, 95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4/7</td>
<td>7/10</td>
<td>0.82 [0.38, 1.74]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Subtotal (95% CI)

Total events: 4 (indomethacin), 7 (aspirin)

Heterogeneity: not applicable

Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)
### Analysis 8.3. Comparison 8 Indomethacin versus aspirin, Outcome 3 Adverse effects.

**Review:** Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

**Comparison:** 8 Indomethacin versus aspirin

**Outcome:** 3 Adverse effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>indomethacin</th>
<th>aspirin</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
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<tr>
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<td>M-H,Random,95% CI</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4/14</td>
<td>2.23 [0.87, 5.71]</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 [0.0, 0.0]</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 7 (indomethacin), 4 (aspirin)
Heterogeneity: not applicable
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)

### Analysis 9.1. Comparison 9 Levamisole versus placebo, Outcome 1 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved).

**Review:** Interventions for erythema nodosum leprosum

**Comparison:** 9 Levamisole versus placebo

**Outcome:** 1 Change in ENL severity (proportion improved)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or subgroup</th>
<th>levamisole</th>
<th>placebo</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>n/N</td>
<td>M-H,Random,95% CI</td>
<td></td>
<td>M-H,Random,95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arora 1985</td>
<td>4/7</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>0.95 [0.36, 2.49]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 [0.0, 0.0]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total events: 4 (levamisole), 3 (placebo)
Heterogeneity: not applicable
Test for overall effect: Z = 0.0 (P < 0.00001)
APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Cochrane Library search strategy

#1(type 2 leprosy):ti,ab,kw or (lepr* reaction):ti,ab,kw or (erythema nodosum) or (erythema nodosum leprosum) or 'ENL':ti,ab,kw or (borderline leprosy):ti,ab,kw or (lepromatous leprosy):ti,ab,kw

#2MeSH descriptor Leprosy, Borderline, this term only

#3MeSH descriptor Leprosy, Lepromatous, this term only

#4(SR-SKIN)

#5(#1 OR #2 OR #3)

#6(#5 AND NOT #4)

Appendix 2. MEDLINE search strategy

1. randomized controlled trial.pt.
2. controlled clinical trial.pt.
3. randomized.ab.
4. placebo.ab.
5. clinical trials as topic.sh.
6. randomly.ab.
7. trial.ti.
8. 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7
9. humans.sh.
10. 8 and 9
11. leprosy.mp. or exp LEPROSY/
12. type 2 reaction.mp.
13. lepra reaction.mp.
14. ENL.mp.
15. *Erythema Nodosum/
16. LEPROSY, BORDERLINE/
17. LEPROSY, LEPROMATOUS/
18. 11 and 12
19. 11 and 14
20. 15 or 16 or 17 or 18 or 19
21. 10 and 20

Appendix 3. EMBASE search strategy

1. random$.mp.
2. factorial$.mp.
3. crossover$.mp.
4. placebo$.mp. or PLACEBO/
5. (doubl$ adj blind$).mp. [mp=title, abstract, subject headings, heading word, drug trade name, original title, device manufacturer, drug manufacturer name]
6. (singl$ adj blind$).mp. [mp=title, abstract, subject headings, heading word, drug trade name, original title, device manufacturer, drug manufacturer name]
7. assign$.mp.
8. volunteer$.mp. or VOLUNTEER/
9. Crossover Procedure/
10. Double Blind Procedure/
11. Randomized Controlled Trial/
12. Single Blind Procedure/
Appendix 4. AMED search strategy

1. randomized controlled trial.pt.
2. controlled clinical trial.pt.
3. randomized.ab.
4. placebo.ab.
5. clinical trials as topic.sh.
6. randomly.ab.
7. trial.ti.
8. 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7
9. humans.sh.
10. 8 and 9
11. leprosy.mp. or exp LEPROSY/
12. type 2 reaction.mp.
13. 11 or 12
14. 10 and 13

Appendix 5. LILACS search strategy

((Pt RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL OR Pt CONTROLLED CLINICAL TRIAL OR Mh RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIALS OR Mh RANDOM ALLOCATION OR Mh DOUBLE-BLIND METHOD OR Mh SINGLE-BLIND METHOD OR Pt MULTICENTER STUDY) OR ((tw ensai or tw ensayo or tw trial) and (tw azar or tw acaso or tw placebo or tw control$ or tw aleat$ or tw random$ or (tw duplo and tw cego) or (tw doble and tw ciego) or (tw double and tw blind)) and tw clinic$)) AND NOT ((CT ANIMALS OR MH ANIMALS OR CT RABBITS OR CT MICE OR MH RATS OR MH PRIMATES OR MH DOGS OR MH RABBITS OR MH SWINE) AND NOT (CT HUMAN AND CT ANIMALS)) [Palavras] and ((eritema nudoso leprso) or lepra or (leprorreacion) [Palavras] or lepra lepromatosa) or (lepra bipolar) or (lepra dimorfa intermedia) [Palavras]

Appendix 6. CINAHL search strategy

1. randomized controlled trial.pt.
2. controlled clinical trial.pt.
3. randomized.ab.
4. placebo.ab.
5. clinical trials as topic.sh.
6. randomly.ab.
7. trial.ti.
8. 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7
9. humans.sh.
10. 8 and 9
11. leprosy.tx.
12. type 2 reaction.tx.
13. erythema nodosum leprosum.tx.
14. 11 and 12
15. 11 and 13
16. 14 or 15
9. 10 and 16.

**WHAT’S NEW**

Last assessed as up-to-date: 11 March 2009.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 September 2012</td>
<td>Amended</td>
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**HISTORY**

Protocol first published: Issue 1, 2008
Review first published: Issue 3, 2009

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<td>6 June 2008</td>
<td>Amended</td>
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**CONTRIBUTIONS OF AUTHORS**

Link with editorial base and co-ordinate contributions from co-authors (NvV)
Draft protocol (NvV, DL, WvB, JRJ, JHR)
Run search (NvV, FD)
Identify relevant titles and abstracts from searches (NvV, JHR)
Obtain copies of trials (NvV)
Selection of trials (NvV, JHR)
Extract data from trials (NvV)
Enter data into RevMan (NvV) Check data (JHR)
Carry out analysis (NvV, JHR)
Interpret data (NvV, DL, WvB, JHR)
Draft final review (NvV, DL, WvB, JRJ, JHR)
Update review (NvV)
Guarantor review (NvV)
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

DNL has been a paid advisor to the drug company Pharmion (who makes thalidomide) advising them on their application to have thalidomide registered within the EU.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Internal sources

• The Netherlands Leprosy Relief, Netherlands.

External sources

• No sources of support supplied

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PROTOCOL AND REVIEW

In the original published protocol outcomes recorded for four weeks or less from the start of treatment were considered to reflect short-term benefit, and data that were recorded for three months or longer from the start of treatment were considered long-term outcomes. After extracting data, we found that timing of outcome assessment varied between four days and one year from the start of treatment.

We decided that studies with outcomes of four weeks or less from the start of treatment were considered as short-term outcomes. We added medium-term outcomes defined as outcomes between four weeks and six months from the start of treatment and changed long-term outcome assessment to more than six months from the start of treatment.

In the original published protocol we planned for two authors to independently extract the data, but it was more efficient to have one author extract the data and enter it into Review Manager, and a second author to check the data.

INDEX TERMS

Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)

Aspirin [therapeutic use]; Clofazimine [therapeutic use]; Erythema Nodosum [*drug therapy]; Leprostatic Agents [*therapeutic use]; Leprosy, Lepromatous [*drug therapy]; Prednisolone [therapeutic use]; Randomized Controlled Trials as Topic; Remission Induction; Thalidomide [therapeutic use]

MeSH check words

Humans