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#### Discontinuation of alpha-blocker therapy in men with lower urinary tract symptoms: A systematic review and metaanalysis

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# Discontinuation of alpha-blocker therapy in men with lower urinary tract symptoms: A systematic review and meta-analysis

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** We aimed to synthesize the available data for the effect of stopping alphablocker therapy among men with lower urinary tract symptoms. The focus was on symptom, uroflowmetry, and quality of life outcomes, but we also reviewed the adverse events and the number of patients who restarted therapy.

Eligibility criteria: We selected studies in which men were treated with an alpha-blocker for at least 3 months and in which the effects of alpha-blocker discontinuation were subsequently studied. Information Sources: We searched MEDLINE/PubMed, EMBASE/Ovid, and The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials from inception to May 2018

**Risk of bias:** Two reviewers independently assessed the risk of bias using the Cochrane Collaboration's tool for assessing risk of bias.

Included studies: We identified ten studies (1,081 participants) assessing the primary objective. Six studies (733 participants) assessed differences in adverse events between continuation and discontinuation and six studies (501 participants) reported the numbers of subjects that restarted treatment after discontinuation. No studies in primary care were identified.

Synthesis of the results: After discontinuing monotherapy, symptom scores increased and peak flow rates decreased at 3 and 6 months, but not at 12 months; however, neither parameter changed when alpha-blockers were stopped during combination therapy. Small differences in post-void residual volumes and quality of life scores were considered clinically irrelevant. We also found that adverse events did not increase with discontinuation and that 0%–49% of patients restarted after stopping alpha-blocker therapy.

**Description of the effect:** Discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy leads to a worsening

compared with continuing therapy. Discontinuing the alpha-blocker after combination therapy had no significant effects on outcomes in either the short or long term. **Interpretation:** We conclude that discontinuation may be appropriate for the frail, elderly, or those with concomitant illness or polypharmacy. However, studies in primary care are lacking.

Registration: PROSPERO database (CRD42016032648)

https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/prospero/display\_record.php?RecordID=32648

#### Strengths and limitations of the study:

- This is the first systematic review that synthesizes the literature concerning alpha-blocker discontinuation.
- The review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA-guidelines.
- The number of studies that could be included was limited and the risk of bias was high for most outcomes preventing the drawing of firm conclusions.

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#### **Competing interest declaration**

All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at <u>www.icmje.org/coi\_disclosure.pdf</u> and declare: no support from any organisation for the submitted work; no financial relationships with any organisations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous three years; no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work. Enseignement Superieur (ABES) . Protected by copyright, including for uses related to text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Alpha-blockers are the first-choice treatment for men with moderate-to-severe lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) because of their proven, but small, superiority over placebo,[1-3] but their use can associated with dizziness, orthostatic hypotension, and increased fall risk.[3, 4] This may be especially problematic in the elderly, who often have polypharmacy and multi-morbidity. Given the natural course of LUTS, with 30% of patients showing improvement over time,[5] it may be appropriate to consider discontinuation of alpha-blocker therapy, especially in the elderly. There are no clear data on the effect of this approach but the guideline on male LUTS for Dutch general practitioners advises that alpha-blocker therapy be discontinued after 3–6 months, followed by symptom review.[2] By contrast, guidelines followed by urologists do not advocate routine discontinuation,[1, 6] though the European Association of Urology (EAU) do mention that alpha-blocker discontinuation may be considered after 6 months in the context of combination therapy.[1]

A number of researchers have studied the effects of discontinuing alpha-blockers, but to date, there has been no synthesis of this literature.

We performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to obtain data about the effect of discontinuing alpha-blockers on male LUTS. Our primary objective was to compare the effects of discontinuing therapy with those of continuing therapy. Secondary objectives were (1) to determine the proportion of men who restart alpha-blocker therapy and (2) to determine the possible adverse effects of both discontinuation and continuation.

#### **METHODS**

We completed this review according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) and registered the protocol in the PROSPERO database (CRD42016032648)

http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/display\_record.php?ID=CRD42016032648.

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We selected studies in which men were treated with an alpha-blocker for at least 3 months and in which the effects of alpha-blocker discontinuation were subsequently studied. For the primary objective, only randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and non-randomized controlled trials (NRCTs, including quasi-randomized trials) that compared alpha-blocker discontinuation to continuation were selected. For the secondary objectives, we also included uncontrolled studies. At all stages, we excluded studies written in languages other than Dutch, English, French, or German.

#### **Outcome measures**

The following outcomes were used for the primary objective: symptom scores, such as the International Prostate Symptom Score (IPSS); urinary flow rates; post-void residual urine volume (PVR); and quality of life (QoL). For the secondary objectives, we calculated the percentage of patients who restarted alpha-blocker therapy and the numbers of adverse events (AEs) in the continuation and discontinuation groups.

#### Search methods for identification of studies

We searched MEDLINE/PubMed, EMBASE/Ovid, and The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials using search terms covering LUTS, alpha-blockers, and discontinuation (see Supplementary File 1 for detailed information). We ran the searches in January 2016 and updated them in July 2017 and May 2018. The reference lists of relevant articles were also screened to identify additional eligible studies. All duplicate files were removed before the titles and abstracts of the remaining records were independently screened by three reviewers [IH, LK, MB] and classified as "inclusion," "exclusion," or "uncertain." Next, the same reviewers independently applied the selection criteria to the full-text papers of all records classified into the inclusion or uncertain groups, and decided whether to include or exclude the research. Discrepancies in the selection procedure were resolved by consensus.

#### **Data extraction process**

Two authors [HW, IH] independently performed data extraction using standardized forms.

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We extracted the following data: 1) the participant characteristics; 2) the interventions used; 3) the primary and secondary outcomes, as well as the timing of the outcome assessment; and 4) the study design. If possible, we extracted data by allocated intervention to allow an intention-to-treat analysis. Discrepancies were resolved by re-examination and discussion of the full-text papers or by consultation with a third author [MB].

#### **Risk of bias**

Two reviewers [HW, YL] independently assessed the risk of bias using the Cochrane Collaboration's tool for assessing risk of bias.[7] This tool includes six domains, as follows: selection bias, performance bias, detection bias, attrition bias, reporting bias, and other bias. Only RCTs and NRCTs were assessed, because these were used for the primary objective. Discrepancies in the risk of bias assessment were resolved by consensus or arbitration with a third party [MB]. Risk of bias was described for the different domains and summarized across studies and outcomes.[7]

#### Data analysis

Data were analyzed using Review Manager, Version 5.3.[8] We calculated the risk difference and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for dichotomous variables and the mean differences (MD) with 95% CIs for continuous variables. For AEs, we also calculated the rate of AEs per 1,000 patient-days, based on the sample sizes and follow-up times.

Statistical heterogeneity was assessed by visual inspection of the forest plots and of the results of statistical testing for heterogeneity (I<sup>2</sup> statistic). We pooled data if we identified two or more studies with an I<sup>2</sup> of <40%,[9] using a random effects model. Data from both RCTs and NRCTs were pooled. Synthesizing and pooling were done separately for monotherapy and combination therapy. If the data for pooling were only presented in figures (e.g., standard deviations), it was extracted from those figures. If data was not present at all in the article, we contacted the authors if the article had been published in the past 10 years. If data could not be obtained in this way, we imputed data from a previous meta-analysis on the efficacy of alpha-blockers,[3] as described in the Cochrane Handbook.[9, 10]

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#### Patient and public involvement

This study was performed without patient involvement. Patients were not invited to comment on the study design and were not consulted to interpret the results. Patients were not invited to contribute to the writing or editing of this document for readability or accuracy.

#### RESULTS

The searches yielded 1,039 publications (Supplementary File 2), of which 16 with a total of 1,823 participants were included (Table 1). All included studies were performed in secondary or tertiary care. Nine studies (772 participants) reported discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy: two double-blind RCTs,[11, 12] one open-label RCT,[13] two NRCTs,[14, 15] and four uncontrolled studies.[16-19] Six studies (980 participants) reported discontinuing alpha-blockers used in combination therapy: one double-blind RCT,[20] three open-label RCTs,[21-23] one NRCT,[24] and one uncontrolled study.[25] Finally, one uncontrolled study (N = 71) reported discontinuing both alpha-blocker monotherapy and combination therapy.[26]

Two of the included studies randomized patients into three groups: a discontinuation group, a continuation group, and a third group that continued with alternate-day use of alpha-blockers.[13, 14] We only used the data from the discontinuation and continuation groups.

In another three studies, the data required for pooling were missing.[11, 12, 20] Because these studies had been published over 15 years previously, no efforts were made to contact the authors. For one of the studies, means and standard deviations could be obtained from the figures.[12] For the other two studies,[11, 20] the standard deviations were missing and were imputed from the results of a previous meta-analysis (see Supplementary File 3).[3]

#### **Risk of bias**

Most of the included studies had risks of bias (Supplementary File 4). The most common were lack of blinding and randomization, with only three out of ten studies having a "low risk" for these items. There was no evidence of reporting bias in any of the included studies. The summary of

bias by study indicated that only one study had low risk of bias,[11] while two studies had unclear risks of bias,[12, 20] and the remaining studies had high risks of bias.[13-15, 21-24] As a result, risk of bias was high for all but one outcome.

#### Effects of alpha-blocker discontinuation

Five studies of monotherapy (n = 341) [11, 12, 14, 15] and five studies of combination therapy (n=740) [20-24] were used for the primary research objective. Only three provided data on the number of patients who did not comply with the intervention and who restarted alpha-blocker use after discontinuation. Two of these provided a per protocol analysis excluding those patients [23, 24] and the third provided an intention-to-treat analysis for categorized variables, with a per protocol analysis for the raw outcomes,[22] effectively precluding an intention-to-treat analysis. Because all included studies reported outcomes at 3, 6, or 12 months, we compared outcomes at these time points.

#### Symptom scores

All but one study [12] assessed symptoms with the IPSS questionnaire, or its predecessor the AUA symptom score (n = 1,054).

By 3 months after discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy, symptoms increased in the discontinuation group compared with the continuation group (MD = 4.17; 95% Cl 2.91 to 5.43),[13, 14] whereas there was no difference between the continuation and discontinuation groups in the studies of combination therapy (MD = 0.97; 95% Cl -0.32 to 2.27, Figure 1A).[20, 24]

After 6 months, two RCTs and one NRCT on monotherapy found a significant worsening of symptoms (differences varying from 2.0 to 5.8 points) in subjects that discontinued alphablockers.[11, 13, 14] No difference was found for studies on combination therapy after 6 months (MD = 0.56; 95% CI -1.57; 2.69, Figure 1B).[23, 24]

After 12 months, the one study that looked at discontinuing monotherapy found a nonsignificant difference of 1.2 points between groups.[15] No differences were found in two open-label RCTs that looked at alpha-blocker discontinuation after combination therapy.[21, 22] Another NRCT

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presented data for both groups, but did not make a direct statistical comparison between groups.[24] Data could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup>=61%).

#### Peak urine flow rate

Nine studies (804 patients) assessed peak urine flow rate (Q-max): five studies for monotherapy,[11-15] and four studies for combination therapy.[21-24]

After 3 months, Q-max reduced by 2.59 mL/s (95% CI 1.40 to 3.77, Figure 2A) in those who discontinued alpha-blocker monotherapy compared with those who continued therapy.[12-14] A single study on discontinuing combination therapy found that there was an increase of 1.4 mL/s in those who discontinued compared to those who continued therapy, but the researchers did not perform a statistical comparison.[24]

After 6 months, a reduction was again found in the Q-max after discontinuing monotherapy (MD = 1.79; 95% CI 0.73 to 2.86),[11, 13, 14] but no difference was found after discontinuing in the context of combination therapy (MD -0.23; 95% CI -1.51 to 1.05, Figure 2B).[23, 24]

After 12 months, no differences were found in an NRCT reporting on the effects of discontinuing monotherapy.[15] Three studies assessed Q-max 12 months after combination therapy. Among these, two open-label RCTs found no difference between groups:[21, 22] one study found a difference of 0.1 mL/s in favor of the continuation group and the other found that 7% fewer patients in the discontinuation group had a reduction in Q-max of >2 mL/s compared with the continuation group. Again, the NRCT on combination therapy showed an increase of 2.5 mL/s after alpha-blocker discontinuation, which was not seen in the group that continued alpha-blockers, but differences were not tested.[24] Data could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup> = 68%).

Average urine flow rate (Q-avg)

Data from two RCTs on monotherapy (84 patients) could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup> = 70%).[12, 13] After 3 months, one RCT reported a reduction of 2.2 mL/s in subjects who discontinued therapy compared with those who continued therapy,[12] whereas no statistical testing of the difference of 0.6 mL/s between groups was performed in the other RCT.[13]

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After 6 months, this second study found a difference of 0.9 mL/s between groups in favor of continuing monotherapy.[13]

Post voided residual urine volume (PVR)

PVR volume was measured in five studies (n = 468), with three measuring it after discontinuing monotherapy [12, 13, 15] and two measuring it after discontinuing the alpha-blocker in combination therapy.[21, 22]

After 3 months, discontinuing monotherapy resulted in a PVR volume increase of 9.98 mL (95% CI 0.84 to 19.12, Figure 3).[12, 13]

After 6 months, an open-label trial on discontinuing monotherapy (57 participants) also found a statistically significant difference (14.1 mL) in favor of continuing therapy.[13]

At 12 months after discontinuing monotherapy, an NRCT did not find a significant difference between groups.[15] Two open-label RCTs on discontinuing combination therapy did report nonsignificant differences: one showed a 2 mL difference between groups,[21] and the other showed that 8% more patients in the discontinuation group reported a PVR increase of >50%.[22] *Quality of life* 

All five studies (one of monotherapy and four of combination therapy; 677 patients) that assessed QoL used the IPSS QoL sub-score.

After 3 months, one study of combination therapy found no difference between groups (0 points).[20] In another NRCT of combination therapy, a difference of 0.4 points was reported in favor of the group that discontinued therapy, but this was not statistically tested.[24]

After 6 months, one study on monotherapy found a statistically significant difference of 0.2 points in favor of those who continued alpha-blocker therapy.[11] This was the only outcome with a low risk of bias. A difference was found for the pooled studies of combination therapy (MD = 0.42; 95% CI 0.11–0.73, Figure 4).[23, 24]

After 12 months, no differences in QoL scores (only 0.1 points in favor of discontinuation) were found in an RCT of 117 participants receiving combination therapy.[21] Another NRCT of

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patients receiving combination therapy found a difference of 0.4 in favor of continuation, but did not compare groups statistically.[24] Data could not be pooled ( $I^2 = 60\%$ ).

#### **Restart of prior treatment and AEs**

#### Patients restarting treatment

Six studies (501 patients) reported data on restarting alpha-blockers after discontinuation.[15, 16, 19, 22-24] In three of these (187 patients), 7%–49% of subjects restarted alpha-blockers after 6 months.[16, 19, 23] One of these,[19] together with another three studies (374 patients), [15, 22, 24] described that 0%–33% of subjects had restarted alpha-blockers at 12 months. The highest (49%) and lowest percentages (0%) restarting therapy were found in studies of monotherapy.[15, 16] However, four of the included studies explicitly advised subjects to restart alpha-blocker use if their PVR was >100 mL,[16, 19] or if symptoms worsened.[22, 24] These studies reported the highest restart rates.

Three other studies provided indirect information about restarting alpha-blocker use.[17, 25, 26] Two of these reported on successful discontinuation, defined as no increase in symptoms and no request for continuation of treatment. After 6 months, one indicated success among 69% of those receiving monotherapy.[17] Another study reported success rates of 13%–87% one month after discontinuing combination therapy, with percentages increasing as the duration of alpha-blocker use increased (ranging from 3 – 12 months).[25] Discontinuation was successful in 13%–20% of subjects who used alpha-blockers for 3 months and in 84%–87% of subjects who used them for 12 months. A third study stated that most patients whose symptoms worsened after discontinuation wished to restart their medication rather than undergo surgery.[26]

#### Adverse events

Nine studies provided no data on AEs during discontinuation, or if they did, provided data without a clear indication of the treatment group.[23] Another study only reported AEs during follow-up for those who discontinued alpha-blockers.[18] The six remaining studies reported 49 AEs

in 363 patients who discontinued alpha-blockers and 58 AEs in 370 patients who continued to use alpha-blockers.[11-14, 20, 21] The AE rates in patients who discontinued or continued alpha-blockers were 0.13 and 0.15 per 1,000 patient-days, respectively. The pooled data showed no risk difference for AEs when discontinuing or continuing either monotherapy (risk difference = -0.01; 95% CI -0.08 to 0.07) or combination therapy (risk difference = -0.03; 95% CI -0.07 to 0.01, Figure 5).

Respiratory tract infection and urinary retention were the two most common AEs after discontinuing alpha-blockers (11 studies in total), being reported in 1%–4% of patients [11, 20] and in 1%–3% of patients,[11, 21] respectively. The incidence of these AEs did not differ between groups.

#### DISCUSSION

The results of this systematic review indicate that discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy leads to a worsening of clinical symptoms and a decrease of urinary flow rates in the short-term (3–6 months) compared with continuing therapy. However, after one year, no differences were found in these or other outcomes. Discontinuing the alpha-blocker after combination therapy had no significant effects on outcomes in either the short or long term.

The worsening of symptoms over the short-term after stopping monotherapy was probably relevant to clinical practice. The reported differences in the IPSS between groups exceeded the minimal clinically important difference (MCID) of 2.7 points.[27] The difference in Q-max was also clinically relevant, exceeding the MCID of 2 mL/s after 3 months (between-group difference, 2.59 mL/s),[3] but not after 6 months (1.79 mL/s). The difference of 0.42 points in the QoL scores at 6 months after discontinuing combination therapy remained below the MCID of 0.5 points.[3] Although no MCID was available for PVR, we do not think that the reported mean difference of 10 mL after 3 months was clinically relevant.

The worsening of symptoms noted by 3–6 months after discontinuing monotherapy was larger than the reported improvement of symptoms after initiating therapy, which was reported to be 2.55 points (95% CI, 1.92–3.17) based on 12 RCTs with a total of 9,335 participants.[3] The

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magnitude of change in the present review may have been influenced by the lack of blinding of both patients and assessors in many of the studies, which will have favored the continuation groups. Men in these studies who had no clear symptom improvements are likely to have dropped out before the discontinuation phase, so the participants subsequently included in the discontinuation trials will generally have had larger treatment effects and larger changes after discontinuation. The outcomes after 12 months relied on data from a single study on discontinuing doxazosin (not a controlledrelease version),[15] which has a lower efficacy than other alpha-blockers. This might explain the lack of any meaningful long-term impact.

Among patients receiving combination therapy, outcomes were not significantly different between those discontinuing and continuing alpha-blockers. Although 5-alpha-reductase inhibitors have no significant impact on LUTS severity after treatment initiation, [28, 29] their continuation seems to be protective against symptom worsening after discontinuing alpha-blockers.

The results for restarting a discontinued alpha-blocker were heterogeneous, ranging widely from 0% to 49%. These conflicting findings can be explained by the differences in instructions given to patients in these studies. Indeed, participants in some studies received explicit instructions about when to restart therapy, whereas in other studies, no instructions were given. Also, subjects in cohort studies who volunteered to discontinue therapy may have had greater freedom to restart therapy than those participating in an RCT.

It was also shown that discontinuing alpha-blockers did not result in more AEs, including acute urinary retention.[30] Equally, continuation was not associated with more AEs, with neither dizziness nor orthostatic hypotension being more common.[4] This may be explained by subject drop-out due to AEs before entering the discontinuation phase. The number of patients reporting AEs in the included studies was, however, too small to draw meaningful conclusions regarding AEs.

Interpretation of our findings is hampered by some limitations. For example, the limited numbers of studies and large amount of statistical heterogeneity limited data pooling. We therefore decided to include both RCTs and NRCTs when pooling data, but the NRCT data may have introduced

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selection bias. The limited number of RCTs also precluded sensitivity analyses. In addition, some studies gave unclear data about treatment compliance or only presented per protocol analyses, which may have led to bias (e.g., drop-out due to severe complaints) and loss of generalizability. Another issue is that all studies were performed in secondary or tertiary care settings. This is important if we consider that in some countries, most men with LUTS are treated in primary care. The high risk of bias, which was noted for all but one outcome, also hampers the interpretation of our findings. Finally, two of the trials of combination therapy compared discontinuing alpha-blockers and 5-alpha-reductase inhibitors, but the others compared discontinuing and continuing only the alpha-blocker.[22, 24]

No firm conclusions can be drawn from this review because of the low quality of the available evidence. Overall, the data suggest that there is a short-term clinical worsening of LUTS after discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy, as assessed by symptom scores and urinary flow rates, but that this does not increase the risk of a complicated symptom course.

Patients frequently discontinue alpha-blocker treatment in clinical practice. We have recently shown that men who continue to use alpha-blockers are typically unconcerned about stopping that therapy if advised to do so by a doctor.[31] The present review also provides evidence that the magnitude of symptom deterioration is limited, indicating that physicians can change their prescribing policy without risking harm. Indeed, the alternative approach may promote unnecessary polypharmacy, which is especially relevant in vulnerable groups. Active follow-up should then be used to monitor the need to restart alpha-blockers if symptoms worsen.

Our findings support the existing EAU guidance to consider discontinuing alpha-blockers in patients receiving combination therapy for 6 months.[1] Unfortunately, because the studies in this review were only performed in secondary care, we cannot give firm support for the recommendation of the Dutch GP guideline to review therapy after 3–6 months in primary care.[2] Symptom levels before treatment are generally lower in primary care, where conditions are typically less severe than in secondary care. Although the data from this review may be applicable to primary care, further

efficacy studies and discontinuation trials are needed to assess the outcomes specific to this setting.

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#### Author statement

The corresponding author attests that all listed authors meet authorship criteria and that no others meeting the criteria have been omitted.

MHB had the idea for the article. Acquisition of the data was done by IH, LK, HW and MHB. Analysis

and interpretation of the data was done by HW, MHB, PJ, YL and MGS. HW and MHB wrote the

manuscript. All authors critically reviewed the manuscript.

#### **Data sharing statement**

Data collected for this study will be available from the corresponding author upon request.

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#### **Figure Captions**

#### Figure 1. Forest plots of the IPSS when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

A. Forest plot of the IPSS after 3 months for alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. B. Forest plot of the IPSS after 6 months for alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. Abbreviations: IPSS, International Prostate Symptom Score.

#### Figure 2. Forest plots of the Q-max when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

A. Forest plot of the Q-max 3 months after alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. B. Forest plot of the Q-max 6 months after alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. Abbreviations: Q-max, peak urine flow rate.

#### Figure 3. Forest plot of the PVR 3 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

Abbreviations: PVR, Post-void residual volume.

#### Figure 4. Forest plot of the QoL score 6 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

Abbreviations: QoL, quality of life.

#### Figure 5. Forest plot of AEs after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

Abbreviations: AEs, adverse events.

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Authors	Design	Type of AB	AB Use	No. Patients	Age	IPSS at Baseline	Measured Outo	comes	Follow-L
		<b>N</b>	(Before Stopping)	(Stop Phase)	(Mean)	ر ⊆ (Mea <b>ج) Z</b>	Primary	Secondary	(Month
Controlled trials							-		<u> </u>
Monotherapy						es ses			
Fabricius et al. 1990 [12]	Double-blind RCT	TER	24 wk	27	68	er 2 Pigr	Q-max, Q-avg, PVR,	AEs	3
Debruyne et al. 1996 [11]	Double-blind RCT	TER	26 wk	167	63.6	19.1 <b>d</b>	IPSS, Q-max, QoL	AEs	6
Gerber et al. 1997 [15]	NRCT	DOX	3 mo	37	65	C=20.9; DO	IPSS	Restart	12
Kaplan et al. 1998 [14]	NRCT	ALF	3 mo	53	60.5	15.6 <b>X U</b>	IPSS, Q-max	AEs	3/6
Yanardag et al. 2005 [13]	Open-label RCT	ТАМ	3 mo	57	61.3	12.30 and a load	IPSS, Q-max, Q-avg,	AEs	3/6
						ded ded	PVR		
Combination therapy						ata i AE			
Barkin et al. 2003 [20]	Double-blind RCT	TAM	24 wk	277	C=67.6; DC=66.9	C=16.4; DG 105	IPSS, QoL	AEs	3
Liaw & Kuo 2006 [24]	NRCT	TAM	1 yr	47	C=70.7; DC=72.1	15. <b>60</b> · <b>b</b>	IPSS, Q-max, QoL	Restart	3/6/1
Lee et al. 2012 [23]	Open-label RCT	TAM	48 wk	69	68	15.3 <b>2</b>	IPSS, Q-max, QoL	Restart, AEs	6
Lin et al. 2014 [22]	Open-label RCT	DOX	2 yrs	230	75	C=13.1; De. 15.0	IPSS, Q-max, PVR	Restart	12
Matsukawa et al. 2017 [21]	Open-label RCT	SIL	12 mo	117	C=70.1; DC=69.1	C=17.4; DC=17.2	IPSS, Q-max, PVR, QoL	AEs	12
Uncontrolled studies						g, b ar			
Monotherapy						d s			
Kobayashi et al. 2006 [17]	CS	TAM	28.5 ± 26.8 mo	33	70.4	16.3		Restart	6
Yokoyama et al. 2007 [19]	CS	NAF/ TAM /URA	2–200 mo	60	70 (median)	15.9 t		Restart	12
Nickel et al. 2008 [18]	CS	ALF/DOX/ TAM /TER	9 mo	220	66.1 (total sample)	19.9 <b>C</b>		Restart	9
Chung et al. 2013 [16]	CS	ALF	12 wk	58	68.6 (total sample)	16.7 (total somple)		Restart	6
Combination therapy						, 20 logi			
Baldwin et al. 2001 [25]	CS	DOX	3–12 mo	240	66 (total sample)	Range: 20–33 (total		Restart	1
						study sample) 🎽			
Both*						ıger			
Kuo 1998 [26]	CS	DIB	6 mo	ABM=71; ABC=65	ABM=66.3; ABC=66.8	ABM=21.2; ABC=2		Restart	1
						Bit			

Page 21 of 34	BMJ Open So Pen
$     \begin{array}{c}       1 \\       2 \\       3 \\       4 \\       5 \\       6 \\       7 \\       8 \\       9 \\       10 \\       11 \\       12 \\       13 \\       14 \\       15 \\       16 \\       17 \\       18 \\       19 \\       20 \\       21 \\       22 \\       23 \\       24 \\       25 \\       26 \\       27 \\       28 \\       29 \\       30 \\       31 \\       32 \\       33 \\       34 \\       35 \\       36 \\       37 \\       38 \\       39 \\       40 \\       41 \\     \end{array} $	study; DC, discontinuation group; DIB = Diberyline; DOX = Doxazosin; NAF = Naftopidil; NRCT, non-randomized controlled trigger wine volume; Q-avg, average urine flow rate; Q-max, peak urine flow rate; SIL = Silodosin; TAM = Tamsulosin; TER = Terazori Busingtometry Supervised in the rapy discontinuation * both monotherapy and combination therapy discontinuation
42 43 44 45	For peer review only - http://bmjopen.bmj.com/site/about/guidelines.xhtml

#### 1A. IPSS - 3 months

	Disco	ntinua	tion	Cont	inuat	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% CI
Monotherapy									
Kaplan et al	11.4	4.8	26	7.1	2.9	27	34.5%	4.30 [2.16, 6.44]	<b>_</b>
Yanardag et al	11.3	3.4	26	7.2	2.4	31	65.5%	4.10 [2.54, 5.66]	<b>−</b> ∎−
Subtotal (95% CI)			52			58	100.0%	4.17 [2.91, 5.43]	
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi	<sup>2</sup> = 0.0	2, df =	1 (P = 0.	88); l <sup>a</sup>	= 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 6.49 (	P < 0.	00001)						
Combination therapy	/								
Barkin et al	11.1	6.2	137	10.3	6.2	140	78.5%	0.80 [-0.66, 2.26]	-+ <b></b>
Liaw & Kuo	6.8	5	27	5.2	4.7	20	21.5%	1.60 [-1.19, 4.39]	
Subtotal (95% CI)			164			160	100.0%	0.97 [-0.32, 2.27]	◆
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi	<sup>2</sup> = 0.2	5, df =	1 (P = 0.	62); l²	= 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 1.47 (	P = 0.	14)		,.				
			,						
									-10 -5 0 5 10
									Favours discontinuation Favours continuation
1B. IPSS - 6 mc	onths								
	Disco	ntinua	tion	Con	tinuat	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% CI
Combination therap	у								
Lee et al	11.1	5.4	33	10.9	5.6	36	67.1%	0.20 [-2.40, 2.80]	
Liaw & Kuo	7.9	6.7	27	6.6	6.2	20	32.9%	1.30 [-2.41, 5.01]	
Subtotal (95% CI)			60			56	100.0%	0.56 [-1.57, 2.69]	
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	= 0.00; Chi	<sup>2</sup> = 0.2	3, df =	1 (P = 0	63); l <sup>a</sup>	<sup>e</sup> = 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 0.52	(P = 0.	60)						
									-10 -5 0 5 1
									Favours discontinuation Favours continuation

Figure 1. Forest plots of the IPSS when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

	Cont	inuati	ion	Disco	ntinuat	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% CI
Monotherapy									
abricius	13.9	3	13	10.4	3	14	27.4%	3.50 [1.24, 5.76]	_ <b>_</b> _
Kaplan et al	12.7	4.8	27	9.7	2.5	26	33.5%	3.00 [0.95, 5.05]	_ <b>_</b> _
Yanardag et al Subtotal (95% CI)	11.3	4	31 71	9.7	3.3	26 66	39.1% 100.0%	1.60 [-0.30, 3.50] 2.59 [1.40, 3.77]	•
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Ch	i <sup>2</sup> = 1.2	82. df =	= 2 (P = 0	).40); l <sup>2</sup>	= 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 4.28	(P < 0	0.0001)		,,				
									-20 -10 0 10
									-20 -10 0 10 .
									Favours discontinuation Favours continuation
2B. Q-max - 6 m	nonth	inusti	ion	Disco	ntinus	ion		Maan Difference	Pavours discontinuation Pravours continuation
2B. Q-max - 6 m	nonths Cont	inuati	ion Total	Disco	ntinuat	ion Total	Weight	Mean Difference	Mean Difference
2B. Q-max - 6 m Study or Subgroup Monotherapy	nonths Cont Mean	inuati SD	ion Total	Disco Mean	ntinuat SD	ion Total	Weight	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% CI	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 m Study or Subgroup Monotherapy Debruyne et al	Cont Mean	inuati SD	ion <u>Total</u> 84	Disco Mean	ntinuat SD 4.6	ion Total 83	Weight 47.5%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% CI 1.00 I-0.40, 2.40]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 m Study or Subgroup Monotherapy Debruyne et al Kaplan et al	Cont Mean 13.1	inuati SD 4.6 5.2	ion <u>Total</u> 84 27	Disco Mean 12.1 9.3	ntinuat SD 4.6 2.1	tion Total 83 26	Weight 47.5% 23.0%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% CI 1.00 [-0.40, 2.40] 2.40 [0.28, 4.52]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 m Study or Subgroup Monotherapy Debruyne et al Gaplan et al Ganardag et al	Cont <u>Mean</u> 13.1 11.7 11.1	inuati SD 4.6 5.2 4	ion <u>Total</u> 84 27 31	Disco Mean 12.1 9.3 8.5	ntinuat SD 4.6 2.1 3.1	tion Total 83 26 26	Weight 47.5% 23.0% 29.5%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% CI 1.00 [-0.40, 2.40] 2.40 [0.28, 4.52] 2.60 [0.76, 4.44]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 m Study or Subgroup Monotherapy Debruyne et al Kaplan et al Yanardag et al Subtotal (95% CI)	Cont <u>Mean</u> 13.1 11.7 11.1	inuati SD 4.6 5.2 4	ion Total 84 27 31 142	Disco Mean 12.1 9.3 8.5	ntinuat SD 4.6 2.1 3.1	tion Total 83 26 26 26 135	Weight 47.5% 23.0% 29.5% 100.0%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl 1.00 [-0.40, 2.40] 2.40 [0.28, 4.52] 2.60 [0.76, 4.44] 1.79 [0.73, 2.86]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 m Study or Subgroup Monotherapy Debruyne et al (aplan et al Yanardag et al Subtotal (95% CI) eterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	Cont Mean 13.1 11.7 11.1	inuati SD 4.6 5.2 4 i <sup>2</sup> = 2.	ion Total 84 27 31 142 29, df =	Disco <u>Mean</u> 12.1 9.3 8.5 = 2 (P = 0	ntinuat SD 4.6 2.1 3.1 0.32); I <sup>2</sup>	tion Total 83 26 26 135 = 13%	Weight 47.5% 23.0% 29.5% 100.0%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% CI 1.00 [-0.40, 2.40] 2.40 [0.28, 4.52] 2.60 [0.76, 4.44] 1.79 [0.73, 2.86]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 m Study or Subgroup Monotherapy Debruyne et al Kaplan et al Yanardag et al Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> = Test for overall effect:	Cont Mean 13.1 11.7 11.1 0.12; Ch Z = 3.30	inuati SD 4.6 5.2 4 i <sup>2</sup> = 2 (P = 0	ion Total 84 27 31 142 29, df = 0.0010)	Disco Mean 12.1 9.3 8.5 = 2 (P = 0	ntinuat SD 4.6 2.1 3.1 0.32); I <sup>2</sup>	ion Total 83 26 26 135 = 13%	Weight 47.5% 23.0% 29.5% 100.0%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% CI 1.00 [-0.40, 2.40] 2.40 [0.28, 4.52] 2.60 [0.76, 4.44] 1.79 [0.73, 2.86]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 n Study or Subgroup Monotherapy Debruyne et al Kaplan et al Yanardag et al Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> = Test for overall effect:	Cont Mean 13.1 11.7 11.1 0.12; Ch Z = 3.30	inuati SD 4.6 5.2 4 i <sup>2</sup> = 2 (P = 0	ion Total 84 27 31 142 29, df = 0.0010)	Disco Mean 12.1 9.3 8.5 = 2 (P = 0	ntinuar SD 4.6 2.1 3.1 ).32); I <sup>2</sup>	tion Total 83 26 26 135 = 13%	Weight 47.5% 23.0% 29.5% 100.0%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl 1.00 [-0.40, 2.40] 2.40 [0.28, 4.52] 2.60 [0.76, 4.44] 1.79 [0.73, 2.86]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 m Study or Subgroup Monotherapy Debruyne et al Kaplan et al Yanardag et al Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> = Test for overall effect: Combination therapy	Cont Mean 13.1 11.7 11.1 0.12; Ch Z = 3.30	inuati SD 4.6 5.2 4 j <sup>2</sup> = 2.: (P = 0	ion Total 84 27 31 142 29, df = 0.0010)	Disco <u>Mean</u> 12.1 9.3 8.5 = 2 (P = 0	ntinuar SD 4.6 2.1 3.1 0.32); I <sup>2</sup>	tion Total 26 26 135 = 13%	Weight 47.5% 23.0% 29.5% 100.0%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl 1.00 [-0.40, 2.40] 2.40 [0.28, 4.52] 2.60 [0.76, 4.44] 1.79 [0.73, 2.86]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 m Study or Subgroup Monotherapy Debruyne et al (aplan et al Yanardag et al Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> = Fest for overall effect: Combination therapy see et al	Cont Mean 13.1 11.7 11.1 0.12; Ch Z = 3.30	inuati SD 4.6 5.2 4 i <sup>2</sup> = 2 (P = 0	ion Total 84 27 31 142 29, df = 0.0010) 36	Disco <u>Mean</u> 12.1 9.3 8.5 = 2 (P = 0 10.7	ntinuat SD 4.6 2.1 3.1 0.32); I <sup>2</sup> 2.9	tion Total 83 26 26 135 = 13%	Weight 47.5% 23.0% 29.5% 100.0%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% CI 1.00 [-0.40, 2.40] 2.40 [0.28, 4.52] 2.60 [0.76, 4.44] 1.79 [0.73, 2.86]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 n <u>Study or Subgroup</u> Wonotherapy Debruyne et al (aplan et al Anardag et al Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> = Fest for overall effect: Combination therapy 	Cont Mean 13.1 11.7 11.1 0.12; Ch Z = 3.30 / 10.4 11.1	inuati SD 4.6 5.2 4 i <sup>2</sup> = 2.: (P = 0 3.3 4.9	ion Total 84 27 31 142 29, df = 0.0010) 36 20 56	Disco Mean 12.1 9.3 8.5 = 2 (P = 0 10.7 11.1	ntinuat SD 4.6 2.1 3.1 0.32); I <sup>2</sup> 2.9 4.2	tion <u>Total</u> 83 26 26 135 = 13% 33 27 60	Weight 47.5% 23.0% 29.5% 100.0% 76.9% 23.1%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% CI 1.00 [-0.40, 2.40] 2.40 [0.28, 4.52] 2.60 [0.76, 4.44] 1.79 [0.73, 2.86]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl
2B. Q-max - 6 m Study or Subgroup Monotherapy Debruyne et al Kaplan et al Yanardag et al Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> = Test for overall effect: Combination therapy Lee et al Liaw & Kuo Subtotal (95% CI)	Cont Mean 13.1 11.7 11.1 0.12; Ch Z = 3.30 ( 10.4 11.1	inuati SD 4.6 5.2 4 i <sup>2</sup> = 2 (P = ( 3.3 4.9	ion Total 84 27 31 142 29, df = 0.0010) 36 20 56	Disco Mean 12.1 9.3 8.5 = 2 (P = C 10.7 11.1	ntinuar SD 4.6 2.1 3.1 0.32); I <sup>2</sup> 2.9 4.2	tion Total 83 26 26 135 = 13% 33 27 60 0 - 0%	Weight 47.5% 23.0% 29.5% 100.0% 76.9% 23.1% 100.0%	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl 1.00 [-0.40, 2.40] 2.40 [0.28, 4.52] 2.60 [0.76, 4.44] 1.79 [0.73, 2.86] -0.30 [-1.76, 1.16] 0.00 [-2.67, 2.67] -0.23 [-1.51, 1.05]	Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% Cl

Figure 2. Forest plots of the Q-max when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

PVR - 3 months

	Disco	ontinua	tion	Cont	tinuat	ion		Mean Difference		Mean I	Difference		
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% C	1	IV, Rand	lom, 95% Cl		
Monotherapy													
Fabricius	55.4	21.7	14	38.7	23	13	29.3%	16.70 [-0.20, 33.60]			-		
Yanardag et al	82.3	23.6	26	75.1	17	31	70.7%	7.20 [-3.67, 18.07]			+		
Subtotal (95% CI)			40			44	100.0%	9.98 [0.84, 19.12]			◆		
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	= 0.00; Ch	i² = 0.8	6, df =	1 (P = 0.	35); l <sup>a</sup>	² = 0%							
Test for overall effect:	Z = 2.14	(P = 0.	03)										
									100	50	+	50	100
									-100 Fai	-50	Eavours co	ontinuation	100

Figure 3. Forest plot of the PVR 3 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

	Disco	ntinua	tion	Con	tinuati	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% Cl
Combination therapy	,								
Lee et al	3.1	0.1	33	2.6	1.2	36	61.3%	0.50 [0.11, 0.89]	
Liaw & Kuo	1.85	1.04	27	1.55	0.69	20	38.7%	0.30 [-0.20, 0.80]	+
Subtotal (95% CI)			60			56	100.0%	0.42 [0.11, 0.73]	•

Figure 4. Forest plot of the QoL score 6 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

#### Adverse events

	Discontinu	ation	Continua	ation		Risk Difference	Risk Difference
Study or Subgroup	Events	Total	Events	Total	Weight	M-H, Random, 95% CI	M-H, Random, 95% CI
Monotherapy							
Debruyne et al	39	83	40	84	5.0%	-0.01 [-0.16, 0.15]	
Fabricius	0	14	0	13	6.5%	0.00 [-0.13, 0.13]	
Kaplan et al	2	26	2	27	5.7%	0.00 [-0.14, 0.15]	
Yanardag et al	2	26	3	31	5.4%	-0.02 [-0.17, 0.13]	
Subtotal (95% CI)		149		155	22.6%	-0.01 [-0.08, 0.07]	
Total events	43		45				
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi <sup>2</sup> = 0	).06, df =	= 3 (P = 1.0	00); I <sup>2</sup> =	0%		
Test for overall effect:	Z = 0.15 (P =	0.88)		,.			
Combination therapy							
Barkin et al	4	148	10	149	50.2%	-0.04 [-0.09, 0.01]	
Matsukawa	2	66	3	66	27.2%	-0.02 [-0.08, 0.05]	<b>_</b>
Subtotal (95% CI)		214		215	77.4%	-0.03 [-0.07, 0.01]	$\bullet$
Total events	6		13				
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi <sup>2</sup> = 0	).37, df =	= 1 (P = 0.	54); l² =	0%		
Test for overall effect: 2	Z = 1.59 (P =	0.11)					
Total (95% CI)		363		370	100.0%	-0.03 [-0.06, 0.01]	
Total events	49		58				
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00: Chi <sup>2</sup> = 0	).86. df =	= 5 (P = 0.9	97): l² =	0%		
Test for overall effect:	Z = 1.47 (P =	0.14)	- (	,,,,			-0.2 -0.1 0 0.1 0.2
Test for subgroup diffe	rences: Chi <sup>2</sup>	= 0.39, 0	f = 1 (P =	0.53), l <sup>a</sup>	² = 0%		Favours discontinuation Favours continuation



#### Supplementary File 1. Search terms

#### Search terms

Adrenergic alpha blockers [MeSH] AND (LUTS OR BPH OR lower urinary tract symptoms OR benign prostate hypertrophy OR benign prostate enlargement) AND (discontinu\* OR interrup\* OR cessa\* OR stop\* OR withdra\* OR intermit\*). For peer teriew only

Fo	r peer review only -	http://bmjopen.k	omj.com/site/ab	out/guidelines.xhtml

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#### Supplementary File 2. Flow diagram of inclusion and exclusion of studies



Teel	Def		Creating	NI	<b>C</b> D	Pooled SD by	Pooled S
1001	Ref.	Main author	Groups	IN	SD	study	overall
IPSS		N = 12 studies					
	49	Chapple	no data				
	73	Djavan	no data				
	147	Kirby	1	250	5.8	6.3	
			2	239	6.2		
			3	265	6.2		
			4	253	6.9		
	160	Lepor	no data				
	163	Lepor	no data				
	191	McConnell	no data				
	201	Mohanty	placebo	33	4	4.2	
			AB	36	4.4		
	208	Narayan	no data				
	254	Roehrborn	no data				
	255	Roehrborn	no data				
	262	Roehrborn	no data				
	205	van					
	305	Kerrebroeck	N/A				
							6.2
Q-max		N = 21 studies	(Y)				
	6	Abrams	N/A				
	33	Brawer	no data				
	50	chapple	no data				
	51	chapple	meta-analysis				
	53	christensen	N/A				
	79	elhilali	no data				
	101	gillenwater	no data				
	138	Kawabe	N/A				
	147	kirby	1	250	4.9		
			2	239	4.7	4.7	
			3	265	5.1		
			4	253	4.2		
	160	Lepor	no data				
	161	Lepor	no data				
	163	Lepor	no data				
	169	Lloyd	1	20	3.6		
		·	2	19	3.5	3.5	
			3	19	3.9		
			4	22	2.8		
	184	Martorana	N/A				
	201	Mohantv	placebo	33	2.6		
			1				

	208	Narayan	no data				
	254	Roehrborn	no data				
	255	Roehrborn	no data				
	262	Roehrborn	no data				
	269	Schulman	N/A				
	305	van Kerrebroeck	N/A				
							4.6
Qo	ρL	N = 5					
	49	chapple	placebo	350	1		
			ocas 0.4	354	1.1	1.1	
			mr 0.4	699	1.1		
			ocas 0.8	706	1.1		
	160	Lepor	no data				
	254	Roehrborn	no data				
	255	Roehrborn	placebo	763	1.1		
			alfuzosin	759	1.1	1.1	
	305	van Kerrebroeck	N/A				
							1.1

In total, 12 studies assessed the IPSS, 21 assessed Q-max, and 5 assessed the IPSS QoL domain. Only studies that reported an SD at follow-up were included for the IPSS and Q-max data. No follow-up SDs were available for the QoL data, so baseline SDs were used. The SDs were imputed based on Table 6-35 from the NICE guideline on the management of LUTS [ref. 3].

*Abbreviations:* IPSS, International Prostate Symptom Score; N/A, article not accessible; Q-max, Peak urine flow rate; QoL, Quality of life; SD, standard deviation.

								_
	Random sequence generation (selection bias)	Allocation concealment (selection bias)	Blinding of participants and personnel (performance bias)	Blinding of outcome assessment (detection bias)	Incomplete outcome data (attrition bias)	Selective reporting (reporting bias)	Other bias	
Barkin et al	?	?	•	•	•	•	•	
Debruyne et al	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Fabricius	?	?	•	•	•	•	•	
Gerber et al	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Kaplan et al	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Lee et al	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	1
Liaw & Kuo	•	?	•	•	?	•	?	-2
Lin et al	•	?	•	•	•	•	•	
Matsukawa	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	21
Yanardag et al	?	?	•	?	•	•	•	1
								]

Supplementary File 4. Results of the risk of bias assessment

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## PRISMA 2009 Checklist

		BMJ Open BMJ Open BMJ Open	Page 32 of
PRISMA 2	2009	Checklist	
Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported on page #
TITLE		ic v fo Z	
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review, meta-analysis, or both.	1
ABSTRACT		seicer re	
Structured summary	2	Provide a structured summary including, as applicable: background; objectives; data source study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions; study appraisal and synthesis methods; results; literations; conclusions and implications of key findings; systematic review registration number.	2
INTRODUCTION		xt an t an t an	
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of what is already known.	4
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of questions being addressed with reference to participants being addressed with reference to participants being realized by the statement of questions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design (PICOS).	4
METHODS		ê Î	
Protocol and registration	5	Indicate if a review protocol exists, if and where it can be accessed (e.g., Web address), and if available, provide registration information including registration number.	4
Eligibility criteria	6	Specify study characteristics (e.g., PICOS, length of follow-up) and report characteristics de.g., years considered, language, publication status) used as criteria for eligibility, giving rationale.	5
Information sources	7	Describe all information sources (e.g., databases with dates of coverage, contact with story suthors to identify additional studies) in the search and date last searched.	5
Search	8	Present full electronic search strategy for at least one database, including any limits used such that it could be repeated.	Supplement
Study selection	9	State the process for selecting studies (i.e., screening, eligibility, included in systematic review, and, if applicable, included in the meta-analysis).	5-6
Data collection process	10	Describe method of data extraction from reports (e.g., piloted forms, independently, in duplicate) and any processes for obtaining and confirming data from investigators.	5-6
Data items	11	List and define all variables for which data were sought (e.g., PICOS, funding sources) and any assumptions and simplifications made.	5-6
Risk of bias in individual studies	12	Describe methods used for assessing risk of bias of individual studies (including specification of whether this was done at the study or outcome level), and how this information is to be used in any data synthesis.	6
Summary measures	13	State the principal summary measures (e.g., risk ratio, difference in means).	6
Synthesis of results	14	Describe the methods of handling data and combining results of studies, if done, including measures of consistency (e.g., I <sup>2</sup> ) for each meta-analysis.	6

Page 33 of 34		BMJ Open	
	009	Checklist	
3		Page 1 of 2	
Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported on page #
Risk of bias across studies	15	Specify any assessment of risk of bias that may affect the cumulative evidence (e.g., pub) cation bias, selective reporting within studies).	6
Additional analyses	16	Describe methods of additional analyses (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression), if done, indicating which were pre-specified.	NA
RESULTS			
4 Study selection	17	Give numbers of studies screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review, with gessons for exclusions at each stage, ideally with a flow diagram.	7
19 17 Study characteristics	18	For each study, present characteristics for which data were extracted (e.g., study size, PC stations, and provide the citations.	7 + supplement
Risk of bias within studies	19	Present data on risk of bias of each study and, if available, any outcome level assessme	7+ Supplement
22 Results of individual studies 23	20	For all outcomes considered (benefits or harms), present, for each study: (a) simple sum ary data for each intervention group (b) effect estimates and confidence intervals, ideally with a forest plot.	Figures
25 26 26	21	Present results of each meta-analysis done, including confidence intervals and measureator of consistency. ଞ୍ରୁ	8-12 + supplement
Risk of bias across studies	22	Present results of any assessment of risk of bias across studies (see Item 15).	7- 9+supplement
Additional analysis	23	Give results of additional analyses, if done (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression [see Item 16]).	NA
		olog	
A Summary of evidence	24	Summarize the main findings including the strength of evidence for each main outcome; for sum their relevance to key groups (e.g., healthcare providers, users, and policy makers).	12-13
<sup>36</sup> Limitations	25	Discuss limitations at study and outcome level (e.g., risk of bias), and at review-level (e.g., in complete retrieval of identified research, reporting bias).	13-14
Generations	26	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence, and implications for future research.	14
FUNDING		ý ra	
42 43 44	27	Describe sources of funding for the systematic review and other support (e.g., supply of data role of funders for the systematic review.	3
<sub>45</sub> <i>From:</i> Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaf 46 47	f J, Altn	an DG, The PRISMAcOnoupv(2009)n Prefletited/Reporting it doms i foo Systematilo Reivig wiscladio Metal And Iyses: The RISMA Statement. PLoS	Med 6(7): e1000097.



### **PRISMA 2009 Checklist**

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6/bmjopen-2019-030405 on 7 November 2019. Downloaded from http://bmjopen.bmj.com/ on June 13, 2025 at Agence Bibliographique de l Enseignement Superieur (ABES) . cted by copyright, including for uses related to text and data mining, Al training, and similar technologies.
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## Discontinuation of alpha-blocker therapy in men with lower urinary tract symptoms: A systematic review and metaanalysis

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<b>Primary Subject Heading</b> :	Urology
Secondary Subject Heading:	General practice / Family practice
Keywords:	alpha-blockers, discontinuation, lower urinary tract symptoms, meta- analysis

## SCHOLARONE<sup>™</sup> Manuscripts

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Discontinuation of alpha-blocker therapy in men with lower urinary tract symptoms: A systematic review and meta-analysis

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#### 

## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** We aimed to synthesize the available data for the effect of stopping alphablocker therapy among men with lower urinary tract symptoms. The focus was on symptom, uroflowmetry, and quality of life outcomes, but we also reviewed the adverse events and the number of patients who restarted therapy.

**Eligibility criteria:** We selected studies regardless of study design in which men were treated with an alpha-blocker for at least 3 months and in which the effects of alpha-blocker discontinuation were subsequently studied. Only controlled trials were used for the primary objective.

Information Sources: We searched MEDLINE/PubMed, EMBASE/Ovid, and The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials from inception to May 2018

**Risk of bias:** Two reviewers independently assessed the risk of bias for the controlled studies only, using the Cochrane Collaboration's tool for assessing risk of bias.

**Included studies:** We identified ten studies (1,081 participants) assessing the primary objective. Six studies (733 participants) assessed differences in adverse events between continuation and discontinuation and six studies (501 participants) reported the numbers of subjects that restarted treatment after discontinuation. No studies in primary care were identified.

**Synthesis of the results:** After discontinuing monotherapy, symptom scores increased and peak flow rates decreased at 3 and 6 months, but not at 12 months; however, neither parameter changed when alpha-blockers were stopped during combination therapy. Small differences in post-void residual volumes and quality of life scores were considered clinically irrelevant. We also found that 0%–49% of patients restarted after stopping alpha-blocker therapy and that adverse events did not increase with discontinuation.

Description of the effect: Discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy leads to a worsening

compared with continuing therapy. Discontinuing the alpha-blocker after combination therapy had no significant effects on outcomes in either the short or long term. **Interpretation:** We conclude that discontinuation may be appropriate for the frail, elderly, or those with concomitant illness or polypharmacy. However, studies in primary care are lacking.

Registration: PROSPERO database (CRD42016032648)

https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/prospero/display\_record.php?RecordID=32648

## Strengths and limitations of the study:

- This is the first systematic review that synthesizes the literature concerning alpha-blocker discontinuation.
- The review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA-guidelines.
- The number of studies that could be included was limited and the risk of bias was high for most outcomes preventing the drawing of firm conclusions.

## **Role of funding sources**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or notfor-profit sectors

## **Competing interest declaration**

All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at <u>www.icmje.org/coi\_disclosure.pdf</u> and declare: no support from any organisation for the submitted work; no financial relationships with any organisations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous three years; no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work. Enseignement Superieur (ABES) . Protected by copyright, including for uses related to text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Alpha-blockers are the first-choice treatment for men with moderate-to-severe lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) because of their proven, but small, superiority over placebo,[1-3] but their use can associated with dizziness, orthostatic hypotension, and increased fall risk.[3, 4] This may be especially problematic in the elderly, who often have polypharmacy and multi-morbidity. Given the natural course of LUTS, with 30% of patients showing improvement over time,[5] it may be appropriate to consider discontinuation of alpha-blocker therapy, especially in the elderly. There are no clear data on the effect of this approach but the guideline on male LUTS for Dutch general practitioners advises that alpha-blocker therapy be discontinued after 3–6 months, followed by symptom review.[2] By contrast, guidelines followed by urologists do not advocate routine discontinuation,[1, 6] though the European Association of Urology (EAU) do mention that alpha-blocker discontinuation may be considered after 6 months in the context of combination therapy.[1]

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A number of researchers have studied the effects of discontinuing alpha-blockers, but to date, there has been no synthesis of this literature.

We performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to obtain data about the effect of discontinuing alpha-blockers on male LUTS. Our primary objective was to compare the effects of discontinuing therapy with those of continuing therapy. Secondary objectives were (1) to determine the proportion of men who restart alpha-blocker therapy and (2) to determine the possible adverse effects of both discontinuation and continuation.

#### **METHODS**

We completed this review according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) and registered the protocol in the PROSPERO database (CRD42016032648)

http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/display\_record.php?ID=CRD42016032648.

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We selected studies in which men were treated with an alpha-blocker for at least 3 months and in which the effects of alpha-blocker discontinuation were subsequently studied. For the primary objective, only randomized controlled trials (RCTs, including quasi-randomized trials) and nonrandomized trials (NRTs) that compared alpha-blocker discontinuation to continuation were selected. For the secondary objectives, we also included uncontrolled studies. At all stages, we excluded studies written in languages other than Dutch, English, French, or German.

#### Outcome measures

The following outcomes were used for the primary objective: symptom scores, such as the International Prostate Symptom Score (IPSS); urinary flow rates; post-void residual urine volume (PVR); and quality of life (QoL). For the secondary objectives, we calculated the percentage of patients who restarted alpha-blocker therapy and the numbers of adverse events (AEs) in the continuation and discontinuation groups.

#### Search methods for identification of studies

We searched MEDLINE/PubMed, EMBASE/Ovid, and The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials using search terms covering LUTS, alpha-blockers, and discontinuation (see Supplementary File 1 for detailed information). We ran the searches in January 2016 and updated them in July 2017 and May 2018. The reference lists of relevant articles were also screened to identify additional eligible studies. All duplicate files were removed before the titles and abstracts of the remaining records were independently screened by three reviewers [IH, LK, MB] and classified as "inclusion," "exclusion," or "uncertain." Next, the same reviewers independently applied the selection criteria to the full-text papers of all records classified into the inclusion or uncertain groups, and decided whether to include or exclude the research. Discrepancies in the selection procedure were resolved by consensus.

#### **Data extraction process**

Two authors [HW, IH] independently performed data extraction using standardized forms.

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We extracted the following data: 1) the participant characteristics; 2) the interventions used; 3) the primary and secondary outcomes, as well as the timing of the outcome assessment; and 4) the study design. If possible, we extracted data by allocated intervention to allow an intention-to-treat analysis. Discrepancies were resolved by re-examination and discussion of the full-text papers or by consultation with a third author [MB].

#### **Risk of bias**

Two reviewers [HW, YL] independently assessed the risk of bias using the Cochrane Collaboration's tool for assessing risk of bias.[7] This tool includes six domains, as follows: selection bias, performance bias, detection bias, attrition bias, reporting bias, and other bias. Only RCTs and NRCTs were assessed, because these were used for the primary objective. Discrepancies in the risk of bias assessment were resolved by consensus or arbitration with a third party [MB]. Risk of bias was described for the five domains (selection, performance, attrition, reporting, and other) and summarized across studies and outcomes.[7]To ascertain graphically the existence of publication bias, the construction of funnel plots was planned in case at least 10 studies were included.

#### Data analysis

Data were analyzed using Review Manager, Version 5.3.[8] We calculated the risk difference and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for dichotomous variables (inverse-variance method) and the mean differences (MD) with 95% CIs for continuous variables (Mantel-Haenszel method). For AEs, we also calculated the rate of AEs per 1,000 patient-days, based on the sample sizes and follow-up times.

Clinical heterogeneity was assessed by checking the characteristics of participants and interventions. Statistical heterogeneity was assessed by visual inspection of the forest plots and of the results of statistical testing for heterogeneity (I<sup>2</sup> statistic). We pooled data if we identified two or more studies with an I<sup>2</sup> of <40%,[9] using a random effects model. Data from both RCTs and NRCTs were pooled. Synthesizing and pooling were done separately for monotherapy and combination therapy. If the data for pooling were only presented in figures (e.g., standard deviations), it was

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extracted from those figures. If data was not present at all in the article, we contacted the authors if the article had been published in the past 10 years. If data could not be obtained in this way, we imputed data from a previous meta-analysis on the efficacy of alpha-blockers,[3] as described in the Cochrane Handbook.[9, 10]

The following cut-off values were used to define the minimal clinical important difference (MCID): 2.7 points for IPSS,[27] 2mL/s for Q-max,[3] and 0.5 points for the IPSS-QoL scores.[3] The MCID is the smallest change in a treatment outcome that an individual patient would identify as important and which would indicate a change in the patient's management.

#### Patient and public involvement

This study was performed without patient involvement. Patients were not invited to comment on the study design and were not consulted to interpret the results. Patients were not invited to contribute to the writing or editing of this document for readability or accuracy.

## RESULTS

The searches yielded 1,039 publications (Supplementary File 2), of which 16 with a total of 1,823 participants were included (Table 1). All included studies were performed in secondary or tertiary care. Nine studies (772 participants) reported discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy: two double-blind RCTs,[11, 12] two open-label RCTs,[13, 14] one NRCT,[15] and four uncontrolled studies.[16-19] Six studies (980 participants) reported discontinuing alpha-blockers used in combination therapy: one double-blind RCT,[20] four open-label RCTs,[21-24] and one uncontrolled study.[25] Finally, one uncontrolled study (N = 71) reported discontinuing both alpha-blocker monotherapy.[26]

Two of the included studies randomized patients into three groups: a discontinuation group, a continuation group, and a third group that continued with alternate-day use of alpha-blockers.[13, 14] We only used the data from the discontinuation and continuation groups.

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Table 1. Characteris	tics of the contr	olled and uncon	trolled studie	s of monotherap	y and combina	ation therapy	includ	Manual Qu		Collow U
Authors	Design	Туре от АВ	Daily dose	AB USe	No. Patients	Age (Moon)		Brimany	Socondary	Follow-U
Controlled trials				(Belore Stopping)	(Stop Fliase)	(ivicali)		Fillinal y	Secondary	(INIOIITIIS
Monotherapy							ses ses			
Fabricius et al. 1990 [12]	Double-blind RCT	TER	10 mg	24 wk	27	68	eigi rela	O-max. O-avg. PVR.	AEs	3
Debruyne et al. 1996	Double-blind RCT	TFR	5 mg/10 mg	26 wk	167	63.6	1019 ate	IPSS, O-max, Ool	AFs	6
[11]			- 0,0				). D lient to			-
 Gerber et al. 1997 [15]	NRT	DOX	4 mg	3 mo	37	65	C=20.5	IPSS	Restart	12
Kaplan et al. 1998 [14]	Open-label RCT	ALF	7.5 mg	3 mo	53	60.5	aperi	IPSS, Q-max	AEs	3/6
	(quasi- randomized)		$\mathcal{O}$				ded fror eur (AB d data n			
Yanardag et al. 2005	Open-label RCT	TAM	0.4 mg	3 mo	57	61.3	n Pris	IPSS, Q-max, Q-avg,	AEs	3/6
[13]							ng,	PVR		
Combination therapy							Al t			
Barkin et al. 2003 [20]	Double-blind RCT	TAM	0.4 mg	24 wk	277	C=67.6; DC=66.9	C=16.2.DC=6.5	IPSS, QoL	AEs	3
Liaw & Kuo 2006 [24]	Open-label RCT (quasi- randomized)	ТАМ	0.2 – 0.4 mg	1 yr	47	C=70.7; DC=72.1	en.bmj.cc <sup>.6</sup> liĦg, and s	IPSS, Q-max, QoL	Restart	3/6/12
Lee et al. 2012 [23]	Open-label RCT	TAM	0.2 mg	48 wk	69	68		IPSS, Q-max, QoL	Restart, AEs	6
Lin et al. 2014 [22]	Open-label RCT	DOX	4 mg	2 yrs	230	75	C=13.1, DC=15.6	IPSS, Q-max, PVR	Restart	12
Matsukawa et al. 2017	Open-label RCT	SIL	8 mg	12 mo	117	C=70.1; DC=69.1	C=17.6 DC=7.2	IPSS, Q-max, PVR,	AEs	12
[21]							e 13 nno	QoL		
Uncontrolled studies										
Monotherapy							95. 95.			
Kobayashi et al. 2006	CS	TAM	0.2 mg	28.5 ± 26.8 mo	33	70.4			Restart	6
[17]							gen			
Yokoyama et al. 2007	CS	NAF/ TAM /URA	25-50 mg/0.2	2–200 mo	60	70 (median)	15.9 <b>6</b>		Restart	12
[19]			mg/30 mg				Bibl			
Nickel et al. 2008 [18]	CS	ALF/DOX/ TAM	No data	9 mo	220	66.1 (total sample)	<sup>19.9</sup> 19.9 <b>raphi</b>		Restart	9
		For p	eer review or	nly - http://bmjop	en.bmj.com/s	ite/about/guidelin	ohique es.xhtml e			

Page 9 of 36					В	MJ Open		njopen-2 1 by cop		
1 2 3			/TER					019-030405 yright, inclu		
4 5 6	Chung et al. 2013 [16] Combination therapy	CS	ALF	10 mg	12 wk	58	68.6 (total sample)	16.7 (togal sample) 9 7 16 7	Restart	6
7 8 9	Baldwin et al. 2001 [25]	CS	DOX	2-8 mg	3–12 mo	240	66 (total sample)	Range: 20–33 total or me studys: 30 pe r 0 0	Restart	1
10 11 12	Botn* Kuo 1998 [26]	CS	DIB	20 mg	6 mo	ABM=71; ABC=65	ABM=66.3; ABC=66.8	elated 60 r	Restart	1

AB, alpha-blocker; ABC, alpha-blocker combination treatment; ABM, alpha-blocker monotherapy; AEs, adverse events; ALF = Affording and since the study; DC, discontinuation group; DIB = Dibenyline; DQX = Doxazosin; NAF = Naftopidil; NRCT, non-randomized controlled trigger and the study urine volume; Q-avg, average urine flow rate; Q-max, peak urine flow rate; SIL = Silodosin; TAM = Tamsulosin; TER = Terazosia and the study of the st



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In another three studies, the data required for pooling were missing.[11, 12, 20] Because these studies had been published over 15 years previously, no efforts were made to contact the authors. For one of the studies, means and standard deviations could be obtained from the figures.[12] For the other two studies,[11, 20] the standard deviations were missing and were imputed from the results of a previous meta-analysis (see Supplementary File 3).[3] No studies were excluded form pooling based on statistical heterogeneity.

#### **Risk of bias**

Most of the included studies had risks of bias (Supplementary File 4). The most common were lack of blinding and randomization, with only three out of ten studies having a "low risk" for these items. There was no evidence of reporting bias in any of the included studies. The summary of bias by study indicated that only one study had low risk of bias,[11] while two studies had unclear risks of bias,[12, 20] and the remaining studies had high risks of bias.[13-15, 21-24] As a result, risk of bias was high for all but one outcome.

We did not construct funnel plots to ascertain the existence of publication bias graphically, as the number of included studies in each meta-analysis was less than 10.

#### Effects of alpha-blocker discontinuation

Five studies of monotherapy (n = 341) [11, 12, 14, 15] and five studies of combination therapy (n=740) [20-24] were used for the primary research objective. Only three provided data on the number of patients who did not comply with the intervention and who restarted alpha-blocker use after discontinuation. Two of these provided a per protocol analysis excluding those patients [23, 24] and the third provided an intention-to-treat analysis for categorized variables, with a per protocol analysis for the raw outcomes,[22] effectively precluding an intention-to-treat analysis. Because all included studies reported outcomes at 3, 6, or 12 months, we compared outcomes at these time points.

Symptom scores

Page 12 of 36

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All but one study [12] assessed symptoms with the IPSS questionnaire, or its predecessor the AUA symptom score (n = 1,054).

By 3 months after discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy, symptoms increased in the discontinuation group compared with the continuation group (MD = 4.17; 95% Cl 2.91 to 5.43),[13, 14] whereas there was no difference between the continuation and discontinuation groups in the studies of combination therapy (MD = 0.97; 95% Cl -0.32 to 2.27, Figure 1A).[20, 24]

After 6 months, two RCTs and one NRCT on monotherapy found a significant worsening of symptoms (differences varying from 2.0 to 5.8 points) in subjects that discontinued alphablockers.[11, 13, 14] No difference was found for studies on combination therapy after 6 months (MD = 0.56; 95% CI -1.57; 2.69, Figure 1B).[23, 24]

After 12 months, the one study that looked at discontinuing monotherapy found a nonsignificant difference of 1.2 points between groups.[15] No differences were found in two open-label RCTs that looked at alpha-blocker discontinuation after combination therapy.[21, 22] Another NRCT presented data for both groups, but did not make a direct statistical comparison between groups.[24] Data could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup>=61%).

Peak urine flow rate

Nine studies (804 patients) assessed peak urine flow rate (Q-max): five studies for monotherapy,[11-15] and four studies for combination therapy.[21-24]

After 3 months, Q-max reduced by 2.59 mL/s (95% CI 1.40 to 3.77, Figure 2A) in those who discontinued alpha-blocker monotherapy compared with those who continued therapy.[12-14] A single study on discontinuing combination therapy found that there was an increase of 1.4 mL/s in those who discontinued compared to those who continued therapy, but the researchers did not perform a statistical comparison.[24]

After 6 months, a reduction was again found in the Q-max after discontinuing monotherapy (MD = 1.79; 95% CI 0.73 to 2.86),[11, 13, 14] but no difference was found after discontinuing in the context of combination therapy (MD -0.23; 95% CI -1.51 to 1.05, Figure 2B).[23, 24]

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After 12 months, no differences were found in an NRCT reporting on the effects of discontinuing monotherapy.[15] Three studies assessed Q-max 12 months after combination therapy. Among these, two open-label RCTs found no difference between groups:[21, 22] one study found a difference of 0.1 mL/s in favor of the continuation group and the other found that 7% fewer patients in the discontinuation group had a reduction in Q-max of >2 mL/s compared with the continuation group. Again, the NRCT on combination therapy showed an increase of 2.5 mL/s after alpha-blocker discontinuation, which was not seen in the group that continued alpha-blockers, but differences were not tested.[24] Data could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup> = 68%).

Average urine flow rate (Q-avg)

Data from two RCTs on monotherapy (84 patients) could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup> = 70%).[12, 13] After 3 months, one RCT reported a reduction of 2.2 mL/s in subjects who discontinued therapy compared with those who continued therapy,[12] whereas no statistical testing of the difference of 0.6 mL/s between groups was performed in the other RCT.[13]

After 6 months, this second study found a difference of 0.9 mL/s between groups in favor of continuing monotherapy.[13]

Post voided residual urine volume (PVR)

PVR volume was measured in five studies (n = 468), with three measuring it after discontinuing monotherapy [12, 13, 15] and two measuring it after discontinuing the alpha-blocker in combination therapy.[21, 22]

After 3 months, discontinuing monotherapy resulted in a PVR volume increase of 9.98 mL

(95% CI 0.84 to 19.12, Figure 3).[12, 13]

After 6 months, an open-label trial on discontinuing monotherapy (57 participants) also found a statistically significant difference (14.1 mL) in favor of continuing therapy.[13]

At 12 months after discontinuing monotherapy, an NRCT did not find a significant difference

between groups.[15] Two open-label RCTs on discontinuing combination therapy did report non-

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significant differences: one showed a 2 mL difference between groups,[21] and the other showed that 8% more patients in the discontinuation group reported a PVR increase of >50%.[22] *Quality of life* 

All five studies (one of monotherapy and four of combination therapy; 677 patients) that assessed QoL used the IPSS QoL sub-score.

After 3 months, one study of combination therapy found no difference between groups (0 points).[20] In another NRCT of combination therapy, a difference of 0.4 points was reported in favor of the group that discontinued therapy, but this was not statistically tested.[24]

After 6 months, one study on monotherapy found a statistically significant difference of 0.2 points in favor of those who continued alpha-blocker therapy.[11] This was the only outcome with a low risk of bias. A difference was found for the pooled studies of combination therapy (MD = 0.42; 95% CI 0.11–0.73, Figure 4).[23, 24]

After 12 months, no differences in QoL scores (only 0.1 points in favor of discontinuation) were found in an RCT of 117 participants receiving combination therapy.[21] Another NRCT of patients receiving combination therapy found a difference of 0.4 in favor of continuation, but did not compare groups statistically.[24] Data could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup> = 60%).

#### **Restart of prior treatment and AEs**

#### Patients restarting treatment

Six studies (501 patients) reported data on restarting alpha-blockers after discontinuation.[15, 16, 19, 22-24] In three of these (187 patients), 7%–49% of subjects restarted alpha-blockers after 6 months.[16, 19, 23] One of these,[19] together with another three studies (374 patients), [15, 22, 24] described that 0%–33% of subjects had restarted alpha-blockers at 12 months. The highest (49%) and lowest percentages (0%) restarting therapy were found in studies of monotherapy.[15, 16] However, four of the included studies explicitly advised subjects to restart alpha-blocker use if their PVR was >100 mL,[16, 19] or if symptoms worsened.[22, 24] These studies

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Three other studies provided indirect information about restarting alpha-blocker use.[17, 25, 26] Two of these reported on successful discontinuation, defined as no increase in symptoms and no request for continuation of treatment. After 6 months, one indicated success among 69% of those receiving monotherapy.[17] Another study reported success rates of 13%–87% one month after discontinuing combination therapy, with percentages increasing as the duration of alpha-blocker use increased (ranging from 3 – 12 months).[25] Discontinuation was successful in 13%–20% of subjects who used alpha-blockers for 3 months and in 84%–87% of subjects who used them for 12 months. A third study stated that most patients whose symptoms worsened after discontinuation wished to restart their medication rather than undergo surgery.[26]

#### Adverse events

Nine studies provided no data on AEs during discontinuation, or if they did, provided data without a clear indication of the treatment group.[23] Another study only reported AEs during follow-up for those who discontinued alpha-blockers.[18] The six remaining studies reported 49 AEs in 363 patients who discontinued alpha-blockers and 58 AEs in 370 patients who continued to use alpha-blockers.[11-14, 20, 21] The AE rates in patients who discontinued or continued alpha-blockers were 0.13 and 0.15 per 1,000 patient-days, respectively. The pooled data showed no risk difference for AEs when discontinuing or continuing either monotherapy (risk difference = -0.01; 95% CI -0.08 to 0.07) or combination therapy (risk difference = -0.03; 95% CI -0.07 to 0.01, Figure 5).

Respiratory tract infection and urinary retention were the two most common AEs after discontinuing alpha-blockers (11 studies in total), being reported in 1%–4% of patients [11, 20] and in 1%–3% of patients,[11, 21] respectively. The incidence of these AEs did not differ between groups.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this systematic review indicate that discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy leads to a worsening of clinical symptoms and a decrease of urinary flow rates in the short-term (3–6

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> months) compared with continuing therapy. However, after one year, no differences were found in these or other outcomes. Discontinuing the alpha-blocker after combination therapy had no significant effects on outcomes in either the short or long term.

The worsening of symptoms over the short-term after stopping monotherapy was probably relevant to clinical practice. The reported differences in the IPSS between groups exceeded the minimal clinically important difference (MCID) of 2.7 points.[27] The difference in Q-max was also clinically relevant, exceeding the MCID of 2 mL/s after 3 months (between-group difference, 2.59 mL/s),[3] but not after 6 months (1.79 mL/s). One might argue about the relevance of this outcome for patient, as men will not be able to notice a difference in flow rate at these values. The difference of 0.42 points in the QoL scores at 6 months after discontinuing combination therapy remained below the MCID of 0.5 points.[3] Although no MCID was available for PVR, we do not think that the reported mean difference of 10 mL after 3 months was clinically relevant.

The worsening of symptoms noted by 3–6 months after discontinuing monotherapy was larger than the reported improvement of symptoms after initiating therapy, which was reported to be 2.55 points (95% CI, 1.92–3.17) based on 12 RCTs with a total of 9,335 participants.[3] The magnitude of change in the present review may have been influenced by the lack of blinding of both patients and assessors in many of the studies, which will have favored the continuation groups. Men in these studies who had no clear symptom improvements are likely to have dropped out before the discontinuation phase, so the participants subsequently included in the discontinuation trials will generally have had larger treatment effects and larger changes after discontinuation. The outcomes after 12 months relied on data from a single study on discontinuing doxazosin (not a controlled-release version),[15] which has a lower efficacy than other alpha-blockers. This might explain the lack of any meaningful long-term impact.

Among patients receiving combination therapy, outcomes were not significantly different between those discontinuing and continuing alpha-blockers. Although 5-alpha-reductase inhibitors have no significant impact on LUTS severity after treatment initiation, [28, 29] their continuation

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seems to be protective against symptom worsening after discontinuing alpha-blockers.

The results for restarting a discontinued alpha-blocker were heterogeneous, ranging widely from 0% to 49%. These conflicting findings can be explained by the differences in instructions given to patients in these studies. Indeed, participants in some studies received explicit instructions about when to restart therapy, whereas in other studies, no instructions were given. Also, subjects in cohort studies who volunteered to discontinue therapy may have had greater freedom to restart therapy than those participating in an RCT.

It was also shown that discontinuing alpha-blockers did not result in more AEs, including acute urinary retention.[30] Equally, continuation was not associated with more AEs, with neither dizziness nor orthostatic hypotension being more common.[4] This may be explained by subject drop-out due to AEs before entering the discontinuation phase. The number of patients reporting AEs in the included studies was, however, too small to draw meaningful conclusions regarding AEs.

Interpretation of our findings is hampered by some limitations. For example, the limited numbers of studies and large amount of statistical heterogeneity limited data pooling. Heterogeneity, especially on IPSS outcomes after 6 months could be explained by differences in alpha-blockers studied and baseline symptom severity differences ranging from 12 to 19 in the included studies. The limited number of RCTs also precluded sensitivity analyses, and subgroup analyses, that were planned in the original review protocol. Another limitation related to the limited number of studies is the reduction in statistical power. It has been shown that at least five studies have to be pooled to achieve a greater power than the original studies independently.[31] So, our results could also be subject to Type I error. In addition, some studies gave unclear data about treatment compliance or only presented per protocol analyses, which may have led to bias (e.g., drop-out due to severe complaints) and loss of generalizability. Another issue is that all studies were performed in secondary or tertiary care settings. This is important if we consider that in some countries, most men with LUTS are treated in primary care. The high risk of bias, which was noted for all but one outcome, also hampers the interpretation of our findings. Finally, two of the trials of

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combination therapy compared discontinuing alpha-blockers and 5-alpha-reductase inhibitors, but the others compared discontinuing and continuing only the alpha-blocker.[22, 24]

No firm conclusions can be drawn from this review because of the low quality of the available evidence. Overall, the data suggest that there is a short-term clinical worsening of LUTS after discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy, as assessed by symptom scores and urinary flow rates, but that this does not increase the risk of a complicated symptom course.

Patients frequently discontinue alpha-blocker treatment in clinical practice. We have recently shown that men who continue to use alpha-blockers are typically unconcerned about stopping that therapy if advised to do so by a doctor.[32] The present review also provides evidence that the magnitude of symptom deterioration is limited, indicating that physicians can change their prescribing policy without risking harm. Indeed, the alternative approach may promote unnecessary polypharmacy, which is especially relevant in vulnerable groups. Active follow-up should then be used to monitor the need to restart alpha-blockers if symptoms worsen.

Our findings support the existing EAU guidance to consider discontinuing alpha-blockers in patients receiving combination therapy for 6 months.[1] Unfortunately, because the studies in this review were only performed in secondary care, we cannot give firm support for the recommendation of the Dutch GP guideline to review therapy after 3–6 months in primary care.[2] Symptom levels before treatment are generally lower in primary care, where conditions are typically less severe than in secondary care. Although the data from this review may be applicable to primary care, further efficacy studies and discontinuation trials are needed to assess the outcomes specific to this setting.

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#### Author statement

The corresponding author attests that all listed authors meet authorship criteria and that no others meeting the criteria have been omitted.

MHB had the idea for the article. Acquisition of the data was done by IH, LK, HW and MHB. Analysis and interpretation of the data was done by HW, MHB, PJ, YL and MGS. HW and MHB wrote the manuscript. All authors critically reviewed the manuscript.

## Data sharing statement

Data collected for this study will be available from the corresponding author upon request. Enseignement Superieur (ABES) Protected by copyright, including for uses related to text and data mining, Al training, and similar technologies.

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## **Figure Captions**

#### Figure 1. Forest plots of the IPSS when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

A. Forest plot of the IPSS after 3 months for alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. B. Forest plot of the IPSS after 6 months for alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. Abbreviations: IPSS, International Prostate Symptom Score.

#### Figure 2. Forest plots of the Q-max when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

A. Forest plot of the Q-max 3 months after alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. B. Forest plot of the Q-max 6 months after alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. Abbreviations: Q-max, peak urine flow rate.

#### Figure 3. Forest plot of the PVR 3 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

Abbreviations: PVR, Post-void residual volume.

## Figure 4. Forest plot of the QoL score 6 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

Abbreviations: QoL, quality of life.

#### Figure 5. Forest plot of AEs after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

Abbreviations: AEs, adverse events.

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#### 1A. IPSS - 3 months

	Disco	ntinua	tion	Cont	inuat	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% CI
Monotherapy									
Kaplan et al	11.4	4.8	26	7.1	2.9	27	34.5%	4.30 [2.16, 6.44]	<b>_</b>
Yanardag et al	11.3	3.4	26	7.2	2.4	31	65.5%	4.10 [2.54, 5.66]	<b>−</b> ∎−
Subtotal (95% CI)			52			58	100.0%	4.17 [2.91, 5.43]	
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi	<sup>2</sup> = 0.0	2, df =	1 (P = 0.	88); l <sup>a</sup>	= 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 6.49 (	P < 0.	00001)						
Combination therapy	/								
Barkin et al	11.1	6.2	137	10.3	6.2	140	78.5%	0.80 [-0.66, 2.26]	-+ <b></b>
Liaw & Kuo	6.8	5	27	5.2	4.7	20	21.5%	1.60 [-1.19, 4.39]	
Subtotal (95% CI)			164			160	100.0%	0.97 [-0.32, 2.27]	◆
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi	<sup>2</sup> = 0.2	5, df =	1 (P = 0.	62); l²	= 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 1.47 (	P = 0.	14)		,.				
			,						
									-10 -5 0 5 10
									Favours discontinuation Favours continuation
1B. IPSS - 6 mc	onths								
	Disco	ntinua	tion	Con	tinuat	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% CI
Combination therap	у								
Lee et al	11.1	5.4	33	10.9	5.6	36	67.1%	0.20 [-2.40, 2.80]	
Liaw & Kuo	7.9	6.7	27	6.6	6.2	20	32.9%	1.30 [-2.41, 5.01]	
Subtotal (95% CI)			60			56	100.0%	0.56 [-1.57, 2.69]	
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	= 0.00; Chi	<sup>2</sup> = 0.2	3, df =	1 (P = 0	63); l <sup>a</sup>	<sup>e</sup> = 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 0.52	(P = 0.	60)						
									-10 -5 0 5 1
									Favours discontinuation Favours continuation



	Cont	inuat	ion	Disco	ntinuat	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% CI
Monotherapy									
Fabricius	13.9	3	13	10.4	3	14	27.4%	3.50 [1.24, 5.76]	_ <b>_</b>
Kaplan et al	12.7	4.8	27	9.7	2.5	26	33.5%	3.00 [0.95, 5.05]	- <b>-</b> -
Yanardag et al Subtotal (95% CI)	11.3	4	31 71	9.7	3.3	26 66	39.1% 100.0%	1.60 [-0.30, 3.50] 2.59 [1.40, 3.77]	•
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> = Test for overall effect:	0.00; Ch Z = 4.28	i² = 1. (P < 0	82, df = ).0001)	= 2 (P = 0	0.40); I²	= 0%			
									Favours discontinuation Favours continuation
2B. Q-max - 6 n	nonths	5							
	Cont	tinuat	ion	Disco	ntinua	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% CI
Monotherapy									_
Debruyne et al	13.1	4.6	84	12.1	4.6	83	47.5%	1.00 [-0.40, 2.40]	
Kaplan et al	11.7	5.2	27	9.3	2.1	26	23.0%	2.40 [0.28, 4.52]	
Subtotal (95% CI)	11.1	4	142	8.5	3.1	135	29.5%	2.60 [0.76, 4.44]	▲
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0 12 <sup>.</sup> Ch	i <sup>2</sup> = 2	29 df =	= 2 (P = 0	) 32)· l²	= 13%			•
Test for overall effect:	Z = 3.30	(P = (	0.0010)	2(, ,		1070			
Combination therapy	,								
Lee et al	10.4	3.3	36	10.7	2.9	33	76.9%	-0.30 [-1.76, 1.16]	<b>+</b>
iour & Kuo	11.1	4.9	20	11.1	4.2	27	23.1%	0.00 [-2.67, 2.67]	
			56			60	100.0%	-0.23 [-1.51, 1.05]	<b>+</b>
Subtotal (95% CI)			04 46-	- 1 (D - C	85) 12	= 0%			
Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Ch	$i^{2} = 0.$	04, ai -	- 1 (F - 0		0 /0			

Figure 2. Forest plots of the Q-max when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

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PVR - 3 months

	Disco	ontinua	tion	Cont	tinuat	ion		Mean Difference		Mean I	Difference		
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% C	1	IV, Rand	lom, 95% Cl		
Monotherapy													
Fabricius	55.4	21.7	14	38.7	23	13	29.3%	16.70 [-0.20, 33.60]			-		
Yanardag et al	82.3	23.6	26	75.1	17	31	70.7%	7.20 [-3.67, 18.07]			+		
Subtotal (95% CI)			40			44	100.0%	9.98 [0.84, 19.12]			◆		
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	= 0.00; Ch	i² = 0.8	6, df =	1 (P = 0.	35); l <sup>a</sup>	² = 0%							
Test for overall effect:	Z = 2.14	(P = 0.	03)										
									100	50	+	50	100
									-100 Fai	-50	Eavours co	ontinuation	100

Figure 3. Forest plot of the PVR 3 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

	Disco	ntinua	tion	Con	tinuati	on		Mean Difference	Mean	Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Ran	dom, 95% Cl
Combination therapy	/									
Lee et al	3.1	0.1	33	2.6	1.2	36	61.3%	0.50 [0.11, 0.89]		- <b>=</b> -
Liaw & Kuo	1.85	1.04	27	1.55	0.69	20	38.7%	0.30 [-0.20, 0.80]		+
Subtotal (95% CI)			60			56	100.0%	0.42 [0.11, 0.73]		◆
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Ch	i² = 0.3	8, df = '	1 (P = 0	.54); l²	= 0%				
Test for overall effect:	Z = 2.69	(P = 0.	007)							
								-		
									-4 -2	0 2 4

#### Adverse events

	Discontinu	ation	Continu	ation		Risk Difference	Risk Difference
Study or Subgroup	Events	Total	Events	Total	Weight	M-H, Random, 95% CI	M-H, Random, 95% CI
Monotherapy							
Debruyne et al	39	83	40	84	5.0%	-0.01 [-0.16, 0.15]	
Fabricius	0	14	0	13	6.5%	0.00 [-0.13, 0.13]	
Kaplan et al	2	26	2	27	5.7%	0.00 [-0.14, 0.15]	
Yanardag et al	2	26	3	31	5.4%	-0.02 [-0.17, 0.13]	
Subtotal (95% CI)		149		155	22.6%	-0.01 [-0.08, 0.07]	
Total events	43		45				
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi <sup>2</sup> = 0	).06, df =	= 3 (P = 1.	00); I <sup>2</sup> =	0%		
Test for overall effect:	Z = 0.15 (P =	0.88)	-				
Combination therapy							
Barkin et al	4	148	10	149	50.2%	-0.04 [-0.09, 0.01]	
Matsukawa	2	66	3	66	27.2%	-0.02 [-0.08, 0.05]	
Subtotal (95% CI)		214		215	77.4%	-0.03 [-0.07, 0.01]	$\bullet$
Total events	6		13				
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi <sup>2</sup> = 0	).37, df =	= 1 (P = 0.	54); l² =	0%		
Test for overall effect:	Z = 1.59 (P =	0.11)					
Total (95% CI)		363		370	100.0%	-0.03 [-0.06, 0.01]	-
Total events	49		58				
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi <sup>2</sup> = 0	).86. df =	= 5 (P = 0.	97); l² =	0%		
Test for overall effect:	Z = 1.47 (P =	0.14)	,				-U.2 -U.1 U 0.1 0.2
Test for subgroup diffe	rences: Chi2	= 0.39, c	if = 1 (P =	0.53), l <sup>i</sup>	² = 0%		Favours discontinuation Favours continuation



## Supplementary File 1. Search terms

## Search terms

(Adrenergic alpha blockers [MeSH] OR Adrenergic alpha blockers OR alpha blockers OR doxazosin OR terazosin OR silodosin OR tamsulosin OR alfuzosin) AND (LUTS [MeSH] OR Prostatic Hyperplasia [MeSH] OR LUTS OR BPH OR lower urinary tract symptoms OR benign prostate hypertrophy OR benign prostate enlargement) AND (discontinu\* OR interrup\* OR cessa\* OR stop\* OR withdra\* OR intermit\*).

to occurrences

# Supplementary File 2. Flow diagram of inclusion and exclusion of studies



Tecl	Def		Gravit		<u> </u>	Pooled SD by	Pooled S
1001	Ref.	Main author	Groups	N	SD	study	overall
IPSS		N = 12 studies					
	49	Chapple	no data				
	73	Djavan	no data				
	147	Kirby	1	250	5.8	6.3	
			2	239	6.2		
			3	265	6.2		
			4	253	6.9		
	160	Lepor	no data				
	163	Lepor	no data				
	191	McConnell	no data				
	201	Mohanty	placebo	33	4	4.2	
			AB	36	4.4		
	208	Narayan	no data				
	254	Roehrborn	no data				
	255	Roehrborn	no data				
	262	Roehrborn	no data				
	205	van	N1/A				
	305	Kerrebroeck	N/A				
							6.2
Q-max		N = 21 studies					
	6	Abrams	N/A 🧹				
	33	Brawer	no data				
	50	chapple	no data				
	51	chapple	meta-analysis				
	53	christensen	N/A				
	79	elhilali	no data				
	101	gillenwater	no data				
	138	Kawabe	N/A				
	147	kirby	1	250	4.9		
			2	239	4.7	4.7	
			3	265	5.1		
			4	253	4.2		
	160	Lepor	no data				
	161	Lepor	no data				
	163	Lepor	no data				
	169	Lloyd	1	20	3.6		
			2	19	3.5	3.5	
			3	19	3.9		
			4	22	2.8		
	184	Martorana	N/A				
	201	Mohanty	placebo	33	2.6		
			·				

		208	Narayan	no data				
		254	Roehrborn	no data				
		255	Roehrborn	no data				
		262	Roehrborn	no data				
		269	Schulman	N/A				
		305	van Kerrebroeck	N/A				
								4.6
	QoL		N = 5					
-		49	chapple	placebo	350	1		
				ocas 0.4	354	1.1	1.1	
				mr 0.4	699	1.1		
				ocas 0.8	706	1.1		
		160	Lepor	no data				
		254	Roehrborn	no data				
		255	Roehrborn	placebo	763	1.1		
				alfuzosin	759	1.1	1.1	
		305	van Kerrebroeck	N/A				
_								1.1

In total, 12 studies assessed the IPSS, 21 assessed Q-max, and 5 assessed the IPSS QoL domain. Only studies that reported an SD at follow-up were included for the IPSS and Q-max data. No follow-up SDs were available for the QoL data, so baseline SDs were used. The SDs were imputed based on Table 6-35 from the NICE guideline on the management of LUTS [ref. 3].

Abbreviations: IPSS, International Prostate Symptom Score; N/A, article not accessible; Q-max, Peak urine flow rate; QoL, Quality of life; SD, standard deviation.

	Random sequence generation (selection bias)	Allocation concealment (selection bias)	Blinding of participants and personnel (performance bias)	Blinding of outcome assessment (detection bias)	Incomplete outcome data (attrition bias)	Selective reporting (reporting bias)	Other bias	
Barkin et al	?	?	•	•	•	•	•	
Debruyne et al	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Fabricius	?	?	•	•	•	•	•	
Gerber et al	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Kaplan et al	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6
Lee et al	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	4
Liaw & Kuo	•	?	•	•	?	•	?	
Lin et al	•	?	•	•	•	•	•	
Matsukawa	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	2/
Yanardag et al	?	?	•	?	•	•	•	1

Supplementary File 4. Results of the risk of bias assessment

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		BMJ Open de by op	Page 34 of
PRISMA 2	2009	Checklist	
Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported on page #
TITLE		ic v fo Z	
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review, meta-analysis, or both.	1
ABSTRACT		s cic	
Structured summary	2	Provide a structured summary including, as applicable: background; objectives; data solo study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions; study appraisal and synthesis methods; results; Intraftons; conclusions and implications of key findings; systematic review registration number.	2
INTRODUCTION		Xtpe	
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of what is already known.	4
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of questions being addressed with reference to participants being addressed with reference to participants being realized by the statement of questions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design (PICOS).	4
METHODS	<u> </u>	ê. 5 20	
Protocol and registration	5	Indicate if a review protocol exists, if and where it can be accessed (e.g., Web address), and if available, provide registration information including registration number.	4
Eligibility criteria	6	Specify study characteristics (e.g., PICOS, length of follow-up) and report characteristics de.g., years considered, language, publication status) used as criteria for eligibility, giving rationale.	5
Information sources	7	Describe all information sources (e.g., databases with dates of coverage, contact with story suthors to identify additional studies) in the search and date last searched.	5
Search	8	Present full electronic search strategy for at least one database, including any limits used, such that it could be repeated.	Supplemen
Study selection	9	State the process for selecting studies (i.e., screening, eligibility, included in systematic review, and, if applicable, included in the meta-analysis).	5-6
Data collection process	10	Describe method of data extraction from reports (e.g., piloted forms, independently, in duplicate) and any processes for obtaining and confirming data from investigators.	5-6
Data items	11	List and define all variables for which data were sought (e.g., PICOS, funding sources) and any assumptions and simplifications made.	5-6
Risk of bias in individual studies	12	Describe methods used for assessing risk of bias of individual studies (including specification of whether this was done at the study or outcome level), and how this information is to be used in any data synthesis.	6
Summary measures	13	State the principal summary measures (e.g., risk ratio, difference in means).	6
Synthesis of results	14	Describe the methods of handling data and combining results of studies, if done, including measures of consistency (e.g., 1 <sup>2</sup> ) for each meta-analysis.	6

P	age 35 of 36		BMJ Open d t	
1 2	PRISMA 20	009	Checklist	
3 ⊿			Page 1 of 2	
- 5 6 7	Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported on page #
, 8 9	Risk of bias across studies	15	Specify any assessment of risk of bias that may affect the cumulative evidence (e.g., pub) cation bias, selective reporting within studies).	6
1 1 1	Additional analyses	16	Describe methods of additional analyses (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regies ion), if done, indicating which were pre-specified.	NA
1.			d mo. to	
1 1	Study selection	17	Give numbers of studies screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review, with gessons for exclusions at each stage, ideally with a flow diagram.	7
1 1 1	Study characteristics	18	For each study, present characteristics for which data were extracted (e.g., study size, P D B S, follow-up period) and provide the citations.	7 + supplement
1 2 2	Risk of bias within studies	19	Present data on risk of bias of each study and, if available, any outcome level assessme	7+ Supplement
2	Results of individual studies	20	For all outcomes considered (benefits or harms), present, for each study: (a) simple sum arg data for each intervention group (b) effect estimates and confidence intervals, ideally with a forest plot.	Figures
2 2 2	Synthesis of results	21	Present results of each meta-analysis done, including confidence intervals and measure for consistency.	8-12 + supplement
2	Risk of bias across studies	22	Present results of any assessment of risk of bias across studies (see Item 15).	7- 9+supplement
3 3	Additional analysis	23	Give results of additional analyses, if done (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-negression [see Item 16]).	NA
32				
3. 3. 3.	Summary of evidence	24	Summarize the main findings including the strength of evidence for each main outcome; going der their relevance to key groups (e.g., healthcare providers, users, and policy makers).	12-13
3	Limitations	25	Discuss limitations at study and outcome level (e.g., risk of bias), and at review-level (e.g., incomplete retrieval of identified research, reporting bias).	13-14
3 3 4	Conclusions	26	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence, and implications for future research.	14
4	4 FUNDING		je na se	
4 4 4	Funding	27	Describe sources of funding for the systematic review and other support (e.g., supply of data role of funders for the systematic review.	3
4 4 4	5 <i>From:</i> Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff 6 7	J, Altm	ian DG, The PRFSMAGroup/(2000)ා Prefetrent/Reporting Itams joo Systematic Rel/igwislanich Metan Andlyses: The BRISMA Statement. PLoS —	Med 6(7): e1000097.
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## **PRISMA 2009 Checklist**

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## Discontinuation of alpha-blocker therapy in men with lower urinary tract symptoms: A systematic review and metaanalysis

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Keywords:	alpha-blockers, discontinuation, lower urinary tract symptoms, meta- analysis

## SCHOLARONE<sup>™</sup> Manuscripts

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Discontinuation of alpha-blocker therapy in men with lower urinary tract symptoms: A systematic review and meta-analysis

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Word count: 3499

Keywords: alpha-blockers; discontinuation; lower urinary tract symptoms; meta-analysis

## ABSTRACT

 **Objectives:** We aimed to synthesize the available data for the effect of stopping alphablocker therapy among men with lower urinary tract symptoms. The focus was on symptom, uroflowmetry, and quality of life outcomes, but we also reviewed the adverse events and the number of patients who restarted therapy.

**Data Sources:** We searched MEDLINE/PubMed, EMBASE/Ovid, and The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials from inception to May 2018

**Eligibility criteria:** We selected studies regardless of study design in which men were treated with an alpha-blocker for at least 3 months and in which the effects of alpha-blocker discontinuation were subsequently studied. Only controlled trials were used for the primary objective.

**Data extraction and synthesis:** Two reviewers independently extracted data and assessed the risk of bias for the controlled studies only, using the Cochrane Collaboration's tool for assessing risk of bias. Data were pooled using random-effects meta-analyses.

**Results:** We identified ten studies (1,081 participants) assessing the primary objective. Six studies (733 participants) assessed differences in adverse events between continuation and discontinuation and six studies (501 participants) reported the numbers of subjects that restarted treatment after discontinuation. No studies in primary care were identified. After discontinuing monotherapy, symptom scores increased and peak flow rates decreased at 3 and 6 months, but not at 12 months; however, neither parameter changed when alphablockers were stopped during combination therapy. Small differences in post-void residual volumes and quality of life scores were considered clinically irrelevant. We also found that 0%–49% of patients restarted after stopping alpha-blocker therapy and that adverse events did not increase with discontinuation.

**Conclusions:** Discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy leads to a worsening compared with

continuing therapy. Discontinuing the alpha-blocker after combination therapy had no significant effects on outcomes in either the short or long term. Discontinuation may be appropriate for the frail, elderly, or those with concomitant illness

or polypharmacy. However, studies in primary care are lacking.

Registration: PROSPERO database (CRD42016032648)

https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/prospero/display\_record.php?RecordID=32648

## Strengths and limitations of the study:

This is the first systematic review that synthesizes the literature concerning

alpha-blocker discontinuation.

- The review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA-guidelines.
- The number of studies that could be included was limited and the risk of bias was high for most outcomes preventing the drawing of firm conclusions.

## **Role of funding sources**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or notfor-profit sectors

#### **Competing interest declaration**

All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at <u>www.icmje.org/coi\_disclosure.pdf</u> and declare: no support from any organisation for the submitted work; no financial relationships with any organisations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous three years; no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.

## INTRODUCTION

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Alpha-blockers are the first-choice treatment for men with moderate-to-severe lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) because of their proven, but small, superiority over placebo,[1-3] but their use can associated with dizziness, orthostatic hypotension, and increased fall risk.[3, 4] This may be especially problematic in the elderly, who often have polypharmacy and multi-morbidity. Given the natural course of LUTS, with 30% of patients showing improvement over time,[5] it may be appropriate to consider discontinuation of alpha-blocker therapy, especially in the elderly. There are no clear data on the effect of this approach but the guideline on male LUTS for Dutch general practitioners advises that alpha-blocker therapy be discontinued after 3–6 months, followed by symptom review.[2] By contrast, guidelines followed by urologists do not advocate routine discontinuation,[1, 6] though the European Association of Urology (EAU) do mention that alpha-blocker discontinuation may be considered after 6 months in the context of combination therapy.[1]

A number of researchers have studied the effects of discontinuing alpha-blockers, but to date, there has been no synthesis of this literature.

We performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to obtain data about the effect of discontinuing alpha-blockers on male LUTS. Our primary objective was to compare the effects of discontinuing therapy with those of continuing therapy. Secondary objectives were (1) to determine the proportion of men who restart alpha-blocker therapy and (2) to determine the possible adverse effects of both discontinuation and continuation.

### **METHODS**

We completed this review according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) and registered the protocol in the PROSPERO database (CRD42016032648)

http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/display\_record.php?ID=CRD42016032648.

#### Selection criteria

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We selected studies in which men were treated with an alpha-blocker for at least 3 months and in which the effects of alpha-blocker discontinuation were subsequently studied. For the primary objective, only randomized controlled trials (RCTs, including quasi-randomized trials) and nonrandomized trials (NRTs) that compared alpha-blocker discontinuation to continuation were selected. For the secondary objectives, we also included uncontrolled studies. At all stages, we excluded studies written in languages other than Dutch, English, French, or German.

#### **Outcome measures**

The following outcomes were used for the primary objective: symptom scores, such as the International Prostate Symptom Score (IPSS); urinary flow rates; post-void residual urine volume (PVR); and quality of life (QoL). For the secondary objectives, we calculated the percentage of patients who restarted alpha-blocker therapy and the numbers of adverse events (AEs) in the continuation and discontinuation groups.

#### Search methods for identification of studies

We searched MEDLINE/PubMed, EMBASE/Ovid, and The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials using search terms covering LUTS, alpha-blockers, and discontinuation (see Supplementary File 1 for detailed information). We ran the searches in January 2016 and updated them in July 2017 and May 2018. The reference lists of relevant articles were also screened to identify additional eligible studies. All duplicate files were removed before the titles and abstracts of the remaining records were independently screened by three reviewers [IH, LK, MB] and classified as "inclusion," "exclusion," or "uncertain." Next, the same reviewers independently applied the selection criteria to the full-text papers of all records classified into the inclusion or uncertain groups, and decided whether to include or exclude the research. Discrepancies in the selection procedure were resolved by consensus.

#### **Data extraction process**

Two authors [HW, IH] independently performed data extraction using standardized forms. We extracted the following data: 1) the participant characteristics; 2) the interventions used; 3) the Enseignement Superieur (ABES) . Protected by copyright, including for uses related to text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies.

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primary and secondary outcomes, as well as the timing of the outcome assessment; and 4) the study design. If possible, we extracted data by allocated intervention to allow an intention-to-treat analysis. Discrepancies were resolved by re-examination and discussion of the full-text papers or by consultation with a third author [MB].

#### **Risk of bias**

Two reviewers [HW, YL] independently assessed the risk of bias using the Cochrane Collaboration's tool for assessing risk of bias.[7] This tool includes six domains, as follows: selection bias, performance bias, detection bias, attrition bias, reporting bias, and other bias. Only RCTs and NRTs were assessed, because these were used for the primary objective. Discrepancies in the risk of bias assessment were resolved by consensus or arbitration with a third party [MB]. Risk of bias was described for the five domains (selection, performance, attrition, reporting, and other) and summarized across studies and outcomes.[7]To ascertain graphically the existence of publication bias, the construction of funnel plots was planned in case at least 10 studies were included.

#### Data analysis

Data were analyzed using Review Manager, Version 5.3.[8] We calculated the risk difference and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for dichotomous variables (inverse-variance method) and the mean differences (MD) with 95% CIs for continuous variables (Mantel-Haenszel method). For AEs, we also calculated the rate of AEs per 1,000 patient-days, based on the sample sizes and follow-up times.

Clinical heterogeneity was assessed by checking the characteristics of participants and interventions. Statistical heterogeneity was assessed by visual inspection of the forest plots and of the results of statistical testing for heterogeneity (I<sup>2</sup> statistic). We pooled data if we identified two or more studies with an I<sup>2</sup> of <40%,[9] using a random effects model. Data from both RCTs and NRTs were pooled. Synthesizing and pooling were done separately for monotherapy and combination therapy. If the data for pooling were only presented in figures (e.g., standard deviations), it was extracted from those figures. If data was not present at all in the article, we contacted the authors if

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the article had been published in the past 10 years. If data could not be obtained in this way, we imputed data from a previous meta-analysis on the efficacy of alpha-blockers,[3] as described in the Cochrane Handbook.[9, 10]

The following cut-off values were used to define the minimal clinical important difference (MCID): 2.7 points for IPSS,[11] 2mL/s for Q-max,[3] and 0.5 points for the IPSS-QoL scores.[3] The MCID is the smallest change in a treatment outcome that an individual patient would identify as important and which would indicate a change in the patient's management.

## Patient and public involvement

This study was performed without patient involvement. Patients were not invited to comment on the study design and were not consulted to interpret the results. Patients were not invited to contribute to the writing or editing of this document for readability or accuracy.

## RESULTS

The searches yielded 1,039 publications (Supplementary File 2), of which 16 with a total of 1,823 participants were included (Table 1). All included studies were performed in secondary or tertiary care. Nine studies (772 participants) reported discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy: two double-blind RCTs,[12, 13] two open-label RCTs,[14, 15] one NRT,[16] and four uncontrolled studies.[17-20] Six studies (980 participants) reported discontinuing alpha-blockers used in combination therapy: one double-blind RCT,[21] four open-label RCTs,[22-25] and one uncontrolled study.[26] Finally, one uncontrolled study (N = 71) reported discontinuing both alpha-blocker monotherapy.[27]

Two of the included studies randomized patients into three groups: a discontinuation group, a continuation group, and a third group that continued with alternate-day use of alpha-blockers.[14, 15] We only used the data from the discontinuation and continuation groups.

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Fable 1. Characterist           Authors	ics of the contro	olled and uncon	trolled studie	s of monotherap	y and combina	ation therapy		Measured Ou	tcomes	Follow-L
	Design		Bully dose	(Before Stopping)	(Stop Phase)	(Mean)	i os constante Q √ (Mateantz	Primary	Secondary	(Month
Controlled trials										-
Monotherapy							inse es i			
Fabricius et al. 1990 [13]	Double-blind RCT	TER	10 mg	24 wk	27	68	er 2 rela	Q-max, Q-avg, PVR,	AEs	3
Debruyne et al. 1996	Double-blind RCT	TER	5 mg/10 mg	26 wk	167	63.6		IPSS, Q-max, QoL	AEs	6
[12]							to t			
Gerber et al. 1997 [16]	NRT	DOX	4 mg	3 mo	37	65	C=20.% (C=20.%)	IPSS	Restart	12
Kaplan et al. 1998 [15]	Open-label RCT	ALF	7.5 mg	3 mo	53	60.5	ano ano ano	IPSS, Q-max	AEs	3/6
	(quasi- randomized)						led fror eur (AB I data n			
Yanardag et al. 2005	Open-label RCT	TAM	0.4 mg	3 mo	57	61.3	n <del>h</del> ₩i ₩i	IPSS, Q-max, Q-avg,	AEs	3/6
[14]							ng,	PVR		
Combination therapy							Al 1			
Barkin et al. 2003 [21]	Double-blind RCT	TAM	0.4 mg	24 wk	277	C=67.6; DC=66.9	C=16.	IPSS, QoL	AEs	3
Liaw & Kuo 2006 [25]	Open-label RCT (quasi- randomized)	ТАМ	0.2 – 0.4 mg	1 yr	47	C=70.7; DC=72.1	hips, and a	IPSS, Q-max, QoL	Restart	3/6/12
Lee et al. 2012 [24]	Open-label RCT	TAM	0.2 mg	48 wk	69	68	<b>1</b> <b>1</b> <b>1</b> <b>1</b> <b>1</b> <b>1</b> <b>1</b> <b>1</b> <b>1</b> <b>1</b>	IPSS, Q-max, QoL	Restart, AEs	6
Lin et al. 2014 [23]	Open-label RCT	DOX	4 mg	2 yrs	230	75	C=13.1 DC=15.6	IPSS, Q-max, PVR	Restart	12
Matsukawa et al. 2017	Open-label RCT	SIL	8 mg	12 mo	117	C=70.1; DC=69.1	C=17.4 DC=17.2	IPSS, Q-max, PVR,	AEs	12
[22]							e 1: hno	QoL		
Uncontrolled studies							8, 20 Ilogi			
Monotherapy							es.			
Kobayashi et al. 2006	CS	TAM	0.2 mg	28.5 ± 26.8 mo	33	70.4	16.3 <b>a</b>		Restart	6
[18]							ıger			
Yokoyama et al. 2007	CS	NAF/ TAM /URA	25-50 mg/0.2	2–200 mo	60	70 (median)	15.9 <b>Ee</b>		Restart	12
[20]			mg/30 mg				Bib			
Nickel et al. 2008 [19]	CS	ALF/DOX/ TAM	No data	9 mo	220	66.1 (total sample)	19.9 <b>liograph</b>		Restart	9
							iq			

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1 2 3			/TER					019-0304( /right, inc		
4 5 6	Chung et al. 2013 [17] Combination therapy	CS	ALF	10 mg	12 wk	58	68.6 (total sample)	تت 55 16.7 (togal sagnple) 19 7 7	Restart	6
6 7 8	Baldwin et al. 2001 [26]	CS	DOX	2-8 mg	3–12 mo	240	66 (total sample)	Range: 2D–3 Stotal stud State stud Stud State Stud State Stud State Stud State Stud State Stud State Stud State Stud Stud State Stud State Stud State Stud State Stud State Stud Stud State Stud Stud Stud State Stud Stud Stud Stud Stud State Stud Stud Stud Stud Stud Stud Stud Stud	Restart	1
9 10 11 12	<i>Both*</i> Kuo 1998 [27]	CS	DIB	20 mg	6 mo	ABM=71; ABC=65	ABM=66.3; ABC=66.8	er 2019. Do eignament related to AB	Restart	1

AB, alpha-blocker; ABC, alpha-blocker combination treatment; ABM, alpha-blocker monotherapy; AEs, adverse events; ALF = 🖗 🕰 Šosin; C, continuation group; CS, cohort study; DC, discontinuation group; DIB = Dibenyline; DOX = Doxazosin; NAF = NaftopidII; NRT, non-randomized controlled triaid definition of the state volume; Q-avg, average urine flow rate; Q-max, peak urine flow rate; SIL = Silodosin; TAM = Tamsulosin; TER = Terazosin; UR empirity, At raining, and similar technologies. study; DC, discontinuation group; DIB = Dibenyline; DOX = Doxazosin; NAF = Naftopidil; NRT, non-randomized controlled trial of a stated; PVR, post voided residual urine

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In another three studies, the data required for pooling were missing.[12, 13, 21] Because these studies had been published over 15 years previously, no efforts were made to contact the authors. For one of the studies, means and standard deviations could be obtained from the figures.[13] For the other two studies,[12, 21] the standard deviations were missing and were imputed from the results of a previous meta-analysis (see Supplementary File 3).[3] No studies were excluded form pooling based on statistical heterogeneity.

#### **Risk of bias**

Most of the included studies had risks of bias (Supplementary File 4). The most common were lack of blinding and randomization, with only three out of ten studies having a "low risk" for these items. There was no evidence of reporting bias in any of the included studies. The summary of bias by study indicated that only one study had low risk of bias,[12] while two studies had unclear risks of bias,[13, 21] and the remaining studies had high risks of bias.[14-16, 22-25] As a result, risk of bias was high for all but one outcome.

We did not construct funnel plots to ascertain the existence of publication bias graphically, as the number of included studies in each meta-analysis was less than 10.

#### Effects of alpha-blocker discontinuation

Five studies of monotherapy (n = 341) [12, 13, 15, 16] and five studies of combination therapy (n=740) [21-25] were used for the primary research objective. Only three provided data on the number of patients who did not comply with the intervention and who restarted alpha-blocker use after discontinuation. Two of these provided a per protocol analysis excluding those patients [24, 25] and the third provided an intention-to-treat analysis for categorized variables, with a per protocol analysis for the raw outcomes,[23] effectively precluding an intention-to-treat analysis. Because all included studies reported outcomes at 3, 6, or 12 months, we compared outcomes at these time points.

Symptom scores

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All but one study [13] assessed symptoms with the IPSS questionnaire, or its predecessor the AUA symptom score (n = 1,054).

By 3 months after discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy, symptoms increased in the discontinuation group compared with the continuation group (MD = 4.17; 95% Cl 2.91 to 5.43),[14, 15] whereas there was no difference between the continuation and discontinuation groups in the studies of combination therapy (MD = 0.97; 95% Cl -0.32 to 2.27, Figure 1A).[21, 25]

After 6 months, two RCTs and one NRT on monotherapy found a significant worsening of symptoms (differences varying from 2.0 to 5.8 points) in subjects that discontinued alphablockers.[12, 14, 15] No difference was found for studies on combination therapy after 6 months (MD = 0.56; 95% CI -1.57; 2.69, Figure 1B).[24, 25]

After 12 months, the one study that looked at discontinuing monotherapy found a nonsignificant difference of 1.2 points between groups.[16] No differences were found in two open-label RCTs that looked at alpha-blocker discontinuation after combination therapy.[22, 23] Another NRT presented data for both groups, but did not make a direct statistical comparison between groups.[25] Data could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup>=61%).

Peak urine flow rate

Nine studies (804 patients) assessed peak urine flow rate (Q-max): five studies for monotherapy,[12-16] and four studies for combination therapy.[22-25]

After 3 months, Q-max reduced by 2.59 mL/s (95% CI 1.40 to 3.77, Figure 2A) in those who discontinued alpha-blocker monotherapy compared with those who continued therapy.[13-15] A single study on discontinuing combination therapy found that there was an increase of 1.4 mL/s in those who discontinued compared to those who continued therapy, but the researchers did not perform a statistical comparison.[25]

After 6 months, a reduction was again found in the Q-max after discontinuing monotherapy (MD = 1.79; 95% CI 0.73 to 2.86),[12, 14, 15] but no difference was found after discontinuing in the context of combination therapy (MD -0.23; 95% CI -1.51 to 1.05, Figure 2B).[24, 25]

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After 12 months, no differences were found in an NRT reporting on the effects of discontinuing monotherapy.[16] Three studies assessed Q-max 12 months after combination therapy. Among these, two open-label RCTs found no difference between groups:[22, 23] one study found a difference of 0.1 mL/s in favor of the continuation group and the other found that 7% fewer patients in the discontinuation group had a reduction in Q-max of >2 mL/s compared with the continuation group. Again, the NRT on combination therapy showed an increase of 2.5 mL/s after alpha-blocker discontinuation, which was not seen in the group that continued alpha-blockers, but differences were not tested.[25] Data could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup> = 68%).

Average urine flow rate (Q-avg)

Data from two RCTs on monotherapy (84 patients) could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup> = 70%).[13, 14] After 3 months, one RCT reported a reduction of 2.2 mL/s in subjects who discontinued therapy compared with those who continued therapy,[13] whereas no statistical testing of the difference of 0.6 mL/s between groups was performed in the other RCT.[14]

After 6 months, this second study found a difference of 0.9 mL/s between groups in favor of continuing monotherapy.[14]

Post voided residual urine volume (PVR)

PVR volume was measured in five studies (n = 468), with three measuring it after discontinuing monotherapy [13, 14, 16] and two measuring it after discontinuing the alpha-blocker in combination therapy.[22, 23]

After 3 months, discontinuing monotherapy resulted in a PVR volume increase of 9.98 mL

(95% CI 0.84 to 19.12, Figure 3).[13, 14]

After 6 months, an open-label trial on discontinuing monotherapy (57 participants) also found a statistically significant difference (14.1 mL) in favor of continuing therapy.[14]

At 12 months after discontinuing monotherapy, an NRT did not find a significant difference

between groups.[16] Two open-label RCTs on discontinuing combination therapy did report non-

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significant differences: one showed a 2 mL difference between groups,[22] and the other showed that 8% more patients in the discontinuation group reported a PVR increase of >50%.[23] *Quality of life* 

All five studies (one of monotherapy and four of combination therapy; 677 patients) that assessed QoL used the IPSS QoL sub-score.

After 3 months, one study of combination therapy found no difference between groups (0 points).[21] In another NRT of combination therapy, a difference of 0.4 points was reported in favor of the group that discontinued therapy, but this was not statistically tested.[25]

After 6 months, one study on monotherapy found a statistically significant difference of 0.2 points in favor of those who continued alpha-blocker therapy.[12] This was the only outcome with a low risk of bias. A difference was found for the pooled studies of combination therapy (MD = 0.42; 95% CI 0.11–0.73, Figure 4).[24, 25]

After 12 months, no differences in QoL scores (only 0.1 points in favor of discontinuation) were found in an RCT of 117 participants receiving combination therapy.[22] Another NRT of patients receiving combination therapy found a difference of 0.4 in favor of continuation, but did not compare groups statistically.[25] Data could not be pooled (I<sup>2</sup> = 60%).

#### **Restart of prior treatment and AEs**

#### Patients restarting treatment

Six studies (501 patients) reported data on restarting alpha-blockers after discontinuation.[16, 17, 20, 23-25] In three of these (187 patients), 7%–49% of subjects restarted alpha-blockers after 6 months.[17, 20, 24] One of these,[20] together with another three studies (374 patients), [16, 23, 25] described that 0%–33% of subjects had restarted alpha-blockers at 12 months. The highest (49%) and lowest percentages (0%) restarting therapy were found in studies of monotherapy.[16, 17] However, four of the included studies explicitly advised subjects to restart alpha-blocker use if their PVR was >100 mL,[17, 20] or if symptoms worsened.[23, 25] These studies

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reported the highest restart rates.

Three other studies provided indirect information about restarting alpha-blocker use.[18, 26, 27] Two of these reported on successful discontinuation, defined as no increase in symptoms and no request for continuation of treatment. After 6 months, one indicated success among 69% of those receiving monotherapy.[18] Another study reported success rates of 13%–87% one month after discontinuing combination therapy, with percentages increasing as the duration of alpha-blocker use increased (ranging from 3 – 12 months).[26] Discontinuation was successful in 13%–20% of subjects who used alpha-blockers for 3 months and in 84%–87% of subjects who used them for 12 months. A third study stated that most patients whose symptoms worsened after discontinuation wished to restart their medication rather than undergo surgery.[27]

#### Adverse events

Nine studies provided no data on AEs during discontinuation, or if they did, provided data without a clear indication of the treatment group.[24] Another study only reported AEs during follow-up for those who discontinued alpha-blockers.[19] The six remaining studies reported 49 AEs in 363 patients who discontinued alpha-blockers and 58 AEs in 370 patients who continued to use alpha-blockers.[12-15, 21, 22] The AE rates in patients who discontinued alpha-blockers were 0.13 and 0.15 per 1,000 patient-days, respectively. The pooled data showed no risk difference for AEs when discontinuing or continuing either monotherapy (risk difference = -0.01; 95% CI -0.08 to 0.07) or combination therapy (risk difference = -0.03; 95% CI -0.07 to 0.01, Figure 5).

Respiratory tract infection and urinary retention were the two most common AEs after discontinuing alpha-blockers (11 studies in total), being reported in 1%–4% of patients [12, 21] and in 1%–3% of patients,[12, 22] respectively. The incidence of these AEs did not differ between groups.

#### DISCUSSION

The results of this systematic review indicate that discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy leads to a worsening of clinical symptoms and a decrease of urinary flow rates in the short-term (3–6

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months) compared with continuing therapy. However, after one year, no differences were found in these or other outcomes. Discontinuing the alpha-blocker after combination therapy had no significant effects on outcomes in either the short or long term.

The worsening of symptoms over the short-term after stopping monotherapy was probably relevant to clinical practice. The reported differences in the IPSS between groups exceeded the minimal clinically important difference (MCID) of 2.7 points.[11] The difference in Q-max was also clinically relevant, exceeding the MCID of 2 mL/s after 3 months (between-group difference, 2.59 mL/s),[3] but not after 6 months (1.79 mL/s). One might argue about the relevance of this outcome for patient, as men will not be able to notice a difference in flow rate at these values. The difference of 0.42 points in the QoL scores at 6 months after discontinuing combination therapy remained below the MCID of 0.5 points.[3] Although no MCID was available for PVR, we do not think that the reported mean difference of 10 mL after 3 months was clinically relevant.

The worsening of symptoms noted by 3–6 months after discontinuing monotherapy was larger than the reported improvement of symptoms after initiating therapy, which was reported to be 2.55 points (95% CI, 1.92–3.17) based on 12 RCTs with a total of 9,335 participants.[3] The magnitude of change in the present review may have been influenced by the lack of blinding of both patients and assessors in many of the studies, which will have favored the continuation groups. Men in these studies who had no clear symptom improvements are likely to have dropped out before the discontinuation phase, so the participants subsequently included in the discontinuation trials will generally have had larger treatment effects and larger changes after discontinuation. The outcomes after 12 months relied on data from a single study on discontinuing doxazosin (not a controlled-release version),[16] which has a lower efficacy than other alpha-blockers. This might explain the lack of any meaningful long-term impact.

Among patients receiving combination therapy, outcomes were not significantly different between those discontinuing and continuing alpha-blockers. Although 5-alpha-reductase inhibitors have no significant impact on LUTS severity after treatment initiation, [28, 29] their continuation

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seems to be protective against symptom worsening after discontinuing alpha-blockers.

The results for restarting a discontinued alpha-blocker were heterogeneous, ranging widely from 0% to 49%. These conflicting findings can be explained by the differences in instructions given to patients in these studies. Indeed, participants in some studies received explicit instructions about when to restart therapy, whereas in other studies, no instructions were given. Also, subjects in cohort studies who volunteered to discontinue therapy may have had greater freedom to restart therapy than those participating in an RCT.

It was also shown that discontinuing alpha-blockers did not result in more AEs, including acute urinary retention.[30] Equally, continuation was not associated with more AEs, with neither dizziness nor orthostatic hypotension being more common.[4] This may be explained by subject drop-out due to AEs before entering the discontinuation phase. The number of patients reporting AEs in the included studies was, however, too small to draw meaningful conclusions regarding AEs.

Interpretation of our findings is hampered by some limitations. For example, the limited numbers of studies and large amount of statistical heterogeneity limited data pooling. Heterogeneity, especially on IPSS outcomes after 6 months could be explained by differences in alpha-blockers studied and baseline symptom severity differences ranging from 12 to 19 in the included studies. The limited number of RCTs also precluded sensitivity analyses, and subgroup analyses, that were planned in the original review protocol. Another limitation related to the limited number of studies is the reduction in statistical power. It has been shown that at least five studies have to be pooled to achieve a greater power than the original studies independently.[31] So, our results could also be subject to Type I error. In addition, some studies gave unclear data about treatment compliance or only presented per protocol analyses, which may have led to bias (e.g., drop-out due to severe complaints) and loss of generalizability. Another issue is that all studies were performed in secondary or tertiary care settings. This is important if we consider that in some countries, most men with LUTS are treated in primary care. The high risk of bias, which was noted for all but one outcome, also hampers the interpretation of our findings. Finally, two of the trials of

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combination therapy compared discontinuing alpha-blockers and 5-alpha-reductase inhibitors, but the others compared discontinuing and continuing only the alpha-blocker.[23, 25]

No firm conclusions can be drawn from this review because of the low quality of the available evidence. Overall, the data suggest that there is a short-term clinical worsening of LUTS after discontinuing alpha-blocker monotherapy, as assessed by symptom scores and urinary flow rates, but that this does not increase the risk of a complicated symptom course.

Patients frequently discontinue alpha-blocker treatment in clinical practice. We have recently shown that men who continue to use alpha-blockers are typically unconcerned about stopping that therapy if advised to do so by a doctor.[32] The present review also provides evidence that the magnitude of symptom deterioration is limited, indicating that physicians can change their prescribing policy without risking harm. Indeed, the alternative approach may promote unnecessary polypharmacy, which is especially relevant in vulnerable groups. Active follow-up should then be used to monitor the need to restart alpha-blockers if symptoms worsen.

Our findings support the existing EAU guidance to consider discontinuing alpha-blockers in patients receiving combination therapy for 6 months.[1] Unfortunately, because the studies in this review were only performed in secondary care, we cannot give firm support for the recommendation of the Dutch GP guideline to review therapy after 3–6 months in primary care.[2] Symptom levels before treatment are generally lower in primary care, where conditions are typically less severe than in secondary care. Although the data from this review may be applicable to primary care, further efficacy studies and discontinuation trials are needed to assess the outcomes specific to this setting.

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#### Author statement

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> The corresponding author attests that all listed authors meet authorship criteria and that no others meeting the criteria have been omitted.

MHB had the idea for the article. Acquisition of the data was done by IH, LK, HW and MHB. Analysis and interpretation of the data was done by HW, MHB, PJ, YL and MGS. HW and MHB wrote the manuscript. All authors critically reviewed the manuscript.

## Data sharing statement

 

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 Data collected for this study will be available from the corresponding author upon request.

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#### **Figure Captions**

#### Figure 1. Forest plots of the IPSS when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

A. Forest plot of the IPSS after 3 months for alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. B. Forest plot of the IPSS after 6 months for alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. Abbreviations: IPSS, International Prostate Symptom Score.

#### Figure 2. Forest plots of the Q-max when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

A. Forest plot of the Q-max 3 months after alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. B. Forest plot of the Q-max 6 months after alpha-blocker discontinuation or continuation. Abbreviations: Q-max, peak urine flow rate.

#### Figure 3. Forest plot of the PVR 3 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

Abbreviations: PVR, Post-void residual volume.

#### Figure 4. Forest plot of the QoL score 6 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

Abbreviations: QoL, quality of life.

#### Figure 5. Forest plot of AEs after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

Abbreviations: AEs, adverse events.

	Disco	ntinua	tion	Cont	inuat	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% CI
Monotherapy									
Kaplan et al	11.4	4.8	26	7.1	2.9	27	34.5%	4.30 [2.16, 6.44]	
Yanardag et al	11.3	3.4	26	7.2	2.4	31	65.5%	4.10 [2.54, 5.66]	
Subtotal (95% CI)			52			58	100.0%	4.17 [2.91, 5.43]	
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi	<sup>2</sup> = 0.02	2, df = '	1 (P = 0.	88); l²	! = 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 6.49	(P < 0.0	00001)						
Combination therapy	/								
Barkin et al	11.1	6.2	137	10.3	6.2	140	78.5%	0.80 [-0.66, 2.26]	-+ <b>-</b>
Liaw & Kuo	6.8	5	27	5.2	4.7	20	21.5%	1.60 [-1.19, 4.39]	
Subtotal (95% CI)			164			160	100.0%	0.97 [-0.32, 2.27]	◆
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi	<sup>2</sup> = 0.2	5, df = '	1 (P = 0.	62); l²	<sup>e</sup> = 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 1.47	(P = 0.	14)						
									Favours discontinuation Favours continuation
1B. IPSS - 6 mo	nths								
	Disco	ntinua	tion	Cont	inuat	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% CI
Combination therap	y								
Lee et al	11.1	5.4	33	10.9	5.6	36	67.1%	0.20 [-2.40, 2.80]	
Liaw & Kuo	7.9	6.7	27	6.6	6.2	20	32.9%	1.30 [-2.41, 5.01]	
Subtotal (95% CI)			60			56	100.0%	0.56 [-1.57, 2.69]	
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi	<sup>2</sup> = 0.2	3, df =	1 (P = 0.	63); l <sup>a</sup>	² = 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 0.52	(P = 0.	60)						
									Favours discontinuation Favours continuation

Figure 1. Forest plots of the IPSS when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

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Figure 2. Forest plots of the Q-max when discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

	Disco	ontinua	tion	Cont	tinuat	ion		Mean Difference		Mean D	Difference		
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% C	1	IV, Rand	lom, 95% Cl		
Monotherapy													
Fabricius	55.4	21.7	14	38.7	23	13	29.3%	16.70 [-0.20, 33.60]					
Yanardag et al Subtotal (95% CI)	82.3	23.6	26 40	75.1	17	31 44	70.7% 100.0%	7.20 [-3.67, 18.07] 9.98 [0.84, 19.12]			•		
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> = Test for overall effect:	0.00; Ch Z = 2.14	i <sup>2</sup> = 0.8 (P = 0.	6, df = 03)	1 (P = 0.	35); l <sup>a</sup>	² = 0%							
									-100	-50	0	50	100
									Fav	ours discontinuation	Favours co	ontinuation	

Figure 3. Forest plot of the PVR 3 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

QoL - 6 months

	Disco	ontinua	tion	Con	tinuat	ion		Mean Difference	Mean Difference
Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total	Weight	IV, Random, 95% CI	IV, Random, 95% CI
Combination therapy	/								
Lee et al	3.1	0.1	33	2.6	1.2	36	61.3%	0.50 [0.11, 0.89]	
Liaw & Kuo	1.85	1.04	27	1.55	0.69	20	38.7%	0.30 [-0.20, 0.80]	+
Subtotal (95% CI)			60			56	100.0%	0.42 [0.11, 0.73]	◆
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Ch	i² = 0.3	8, df =	1 (P = 0	.54); l²	² = 0%			
Test for overall effect:	Z = 2.69	(P = 0.	007)						
									-4 -2 0 2 4
									Favours discontinuation Favours continuation

Figure 4. Forest plot of the QoL score 6 months after discontinuing or continuing alpha-blockers

#### Adverse events

	Discontinu	uation	Continu	ation		Risk Difference	Risk Difference
Study or Subgroup	Events	Total	Events	Total	Weight	M-H, Random, 95% CI	M-H, Random, 95% Cl
Monotherapy							
Debruyne et al	39	83	40	84	5.0%	-0.01 [-0.16, 0.15]	
Fabricius	0	14	0	13	6.5%	0.00 [-0.13, 0.13]	
Kaplan et al	2	26	2	27	5.7%	0.00 [-0.14, 0.15]	
Yanardag et al	2	26	3	31	5.4%	-0.02 [-0.17, 0.13]	
Subtotal (95% CI)		149		155	22.6%	-0.01 [-0.08, 0.07]	
Total events	43		45				
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi <sup>2</sup> =	0.06, df =	= 3 (P = 1.	00); l <sup>2</sup> =	0%		
Test for overall effect:	Z = 0.15 (P =	= 0.88)					
Combination therapy	/						_
Barkin et al	4	148	10	149	50.2%	-0.04 [-0.09, 0.01]	
Matsukawa Subtotal (95% CI)	2	66 214	3	66 215	27.2% 77.4%	-0.02 [-0.08, 0.05] -0.03 [-0.07, 0.01]	
Total events	6		13				_
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi <sup>2</sup> =	0.37, df :	= 1 (P = 0.	54); l <sup>2</sup> =	0%		
Test for overall effect:	Z = 1.59 (P =	= 0.11)					
Total (95% CI)		363		370	100.0%	-0.03 [-0.06, 0.01]	-
Total events	49		58				
Heterogeneity: Tau <sup>2</sup> =	0.00; Chi <sup>2</sup> =	0.86, df :	= 5 (P = 0.	97); l² =	0%	-	
Test for overall effect:	Z = 1.47 (P =	= 0.14)					-U.2 -U.1 U U.1 U.2
Test for subaroup diffe	erences: Chi <sup>2</sup>	= 0.39. 0	df = 1 (P =	0.53), F	<sup>2</sup> = 0%		ravours discontinuation Favours continuation



## Supplementary File 1. Search terms

## Search terms

(Adrenergic alpha blockers [MeSH] OR Adrenergic alpha blockers OR alpha blockers OR doxazosin OR terazosin OR silodosin OR tamsulosin OR alfuzosin) AND (LUTS [MeSH] OR Prostatic Hyperplasia [MeSH] OR LUTS OR BPH OR lower urinary tract symptoms OR benign prostate hypertrophy OR benign prostate enlargement) AND (discontinu\* OR interrup\* OR cessa\* OR stop\* OR withdra\* OR intermit\*).

to occurrences



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Tool	Pof	Main author	Groups	NI	<u>ر</u> ب	Pooled SD by	Pooled SD
1001	Ref.	Main author	Groups	IN	SD	study	overall
IPSS		N = 12 studies					
	49	Chapple	no data				
	73	Djavan	no data				
	147	Kirby	1	250	5.8	6.3	
			2	239	6.2		
			3	265	6.2		
			4	253	6.9		
	160	Lepor	no data				
	163	Lepor	no data				
	191	McConnell	no data				
	201	Mohanty	placebo	33	4	4.2	
			AB	36	4.4		
	208	Narayan	no data				
	254	Roehrborn	no data				
	255	Roehrborn	🔨 no data				
	262	Roehrborn	no data				
	205	van					
	305	Kerrebroeck	N/A				
							6.2
-max		N = 21 studies					
	6	Abrams	N/A				
	33	Brawer	no data 🛛 🗸				
	50	chapple	no data				
	51	chapple	meta-analysis				
	53	christensen	N/A				
	79	elhilali	no data				
	101	gillenwater	no data				
	138	Kawabe	N/A				
	147	kirby	1	250	4.9		
			2	239	4.7	4.7	
			3	265	5.1		
			4	253	4.2		
	160	Lepor	no data				
	161	Lepor	no data				
	163	Lepor	no data				
	169	Lloyd	1	20	3.6		
			2	19	3.5	3.5	
			3	19	3.9		
			4	22	2.8		
	184	Martorana	N/A		-		
	201	Mohantv	placebo	33	2.6		
		1					

	208	Narayan	no data					
	254	Roehrborn	no data					
	255	Roehrborn	no data					
	262	Roehrborn	no data					
	269	Schulman	N/A					
	305	van Kerrebroeck	N/A					
							4.6	
QoL		N = 5						
	49	chapple	placebo	350	1			
			ocas 0.4	354	1.1	1.1		
			mr 0.4	699	1.1			
			ocas 0.8	706	1.1			
	160	Lepor	no data					
	254	Roehrborn	no data					
	255	Roehrborn	placebo	763	1.1			
			alfuzosin	759	1.1	1.1		
	305	van Kerrebroeck	N/A					
							11	1

In total, 12 studies assessed the IPSS, 21 assessed Q-max, and 5 assessed the IPSS QoL domain. Only studies that reported an SD at follow-up were included for the IPSS and Q-max data. No follow-up SDs were available for the QoL data, so baseline SDs were used. The SDs were imputed based on Table 6-35 from the NICE guideline on the management of LUTS [ref. 3].

Abbreviations: IPSS, International Prostate Symptom Score; N/A, article not accessible; Q-max, Peak urine flow rate; QoL, Quality of life; SD, standard deviation.



## Supplementary File 4. Results of the risk of bias assessment

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# PRISMA 2009 Checklist

Page 33 of 35		BMJ Open BMJ Open	
PRISMA	2009	Checklist	
4 5 Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported on page #
7 TITLE		g 7 V fo	
<sup>8</sup> Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review, meta-analysis, or both.	1
		s reici	
12 Structured summary 13 14	2	Provide a structured summary including, as applicable: background; objectives; data sould be study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions; study appraisal and synthesis methods; results; lime at lons; conclusions and implications of key findings; systematic review registration number.	2
17 Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of what is already known.	4
18 Objectives 19	4	Provide an explicit statement of questions being addressed with reference to participants for forventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design (PICOS).	4
21 METHODS		ing,	
22 Protocol and registration	5	Indicate if a review protocol exists, if and where it can be accessed (e.g., Web address), and if available, provide registration information including registration number.	4
24 25 26	6	Specify study characteristics (e.g., PICOS, length of follow-up) and report characteristics is e.g., years considered, language, publication status) used as criteria for eligibility, giving rationale.	5
27 Information sources 28	7	Describe all information sources (e.g., databases with dates of coverage, contact with study authors to identify additional studies) in the search and date last searched.	5
<sup>29</sup> 30 31	8	Present full electronic search strategy for at least one database, including any limits use such that it could be repeated.	Supplement
32 Study selection 33	9	State the process for selecting studies (i.e., screening, eligibility, included in systematic review, and, if applicable, included in the meta-analysis).	5-6
34 Data collection process 35	10	Describe method of data extraction from reports (e.g., piloted forms, independently, in duplicate) and any processes for obtaining and confirming data from investigators.	5-6
37 Data items 38	11	List and define all variables for which data were sought (e.g., PICOS, funding sources) and any simplifications made.	5-6
<ul> <li><sup>39</sup> Risk of bias in individual</li> <li><sup>40</sup> studies</li> </ul>	12	Describe methods used for assessing risk of bias of individual studies (including specification by the there this was done at the study or outcome level), and how this information is to be used in any data synthesis.	6
42 Summary measures	13	State the principal summary measures (e.g., risk ratio, difference in means).	6
<ul> <li><sup>43</sup> Synthesis of results</li> <li>44</li> <li>45</li> </ul>	14	Describe the methods of handling data and combining results of studies, if done, including measures of consistency (e.g., I <sup>2</sup> ) for each meta-analysis. For peer review only - http://bmjopen.bmj.com/site/about/guidelines.xhtml	6



# PRISMA 2009 Checklist

		BMJ Open	Page 34 o
PRISMA 20	009	Checklist	
		Page 1 of 2	
Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported on page #
Risk of bias across studies	15	Specify any assessment of risk of bias that may affect the cumulative evidence (e.g., pub) cation bias, selective reporting within studies).	6
Additional analyses	16	Describe methods of additional analyses (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression), if done, indicating which were pre-specified.	NA
RESULTS			
Study selection	17	Give numbers of studies screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review, with each stage, ideally with a flow diagram.	7
Study characteristics	18	For each study, present characteristics for which data were extracted (e.g., study size, PC b , follow-up period) and provide the citations.	7 + supplement
Risk of bias within studies	19	Present data on risk of bias of each study and, if available, any outcome level assessme	7+ Supplement
Results of individual studies	20	For all outcomes considered (benefits or harms), present, for each study: (a) simple sum arg data for each intervention group (b) effect estimates and confidence intervals, ideally with a forest plot.	Figures
Synthesis of results	21	Present results of each meta-analysis done, including confidence intervals and measure of consistency.	8-12 + supplement
Risk of bias across studies	22	Present results of any assessment of risk of bias across studies (see Item 15).	7- 9+supplemen
Additional analysis	23	Give results of additional analyses, if done (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression [see Item 16]).	NA
DISCUSSION			
Summary of evidence	24	Summarize the main findings including the strength of evidence for each main outcome; for sider their relevance to key groups (e.g., healthcare providers, users, and policy makers).	12-13
Limitations	25	Discuss limitations at study and outcome level (e.g., risk of bias), and at review-level (e.g., incomplete retrieval of identified research, reporting bias).	13-14
Conclusions	26	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence, and implications for future research.	14
FUNDING			
Funding	27	Describe sources of funding for the systematic review and other support (e.g., supply of data p. role of funders for the systematic review.	3
Page 3	5 of	35	
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