

THE PLACEBO EFFECT

Have you ever been sick, taken medicine, and felt better as soon as you took it? Chances are, the medicine wasn't able to work instantly. But just knowing that you were taking it may have made you feel better.

This is known in medicine as the **placebo effect**. A placebo is a sham treatment or fake medication, like a sugar pill. It has been shown that, in many cases, the mere act of treating a patient, whether through medicine, physical treatments, or surgery, can improve the patient's health and well-being. The patient not only may feel better, but may actually get better, too. Placebos can affect everything from minor aches and pains to serious illnesses.

When you read about a drug's effectiveness or side effects, you often hear them compared with a placebo. In studies of new drugs and treatments, it is common for one group of subjects to receive the new drug and another to receive a placebo. The placebo is designed to look, taste, smell, or feel just like the real treatment. It is delivered in the exact same way. In order to be considered effective, a new treatment must not only make patients feel better; it must be significantly more effective than a placebo. Similarly, side effects of drugs are often compared with those (if any) of placebos to show how much of the side effect is really caused by the treatment itself, rather than just the idea of getting the treatment.

The placebo effect is still mysterious, but it's important to remember that it's not "all in your head." Our bodies seem to respond to cues from our mind and the world around us, and they react in very real ways to what we think, feel, see, hear, and believe.

