

Is the Mind-Body healing effect getting stronger?

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The mind-body is a very powerful healing system, even more powerful according to current research than many drugs. And it is an effect that has been increasing in the last 20 years. More details on this in this [article](#) with excerpts below

In a study last year, Harvard Medical School researcher Ted Kaptchuk devised a clever strategy for testing his volunteers' response to varying levels of therapeutic ritual. The study focused on irritable bowel syndrome, a painful disorder that costs more than \$40 billion a year worldwide to treat. First the volunteers were placed randomly in one of three groups. One group was simply put on a waiting list; researchers know that some patients get better just because they sign up for a trial. Another group received placebo treatment from a clinician who declined to engage in small talk. Volunteers in the third group got the same sham treatment from a clinician who asked them questions about symptoms, outlined the causes of IBS, and displayed optimism about their condition.

Not surprisingly, the health of those in the third group improved most. **In fact, just by participating in the trial, volunteers in this high-interaction group got as much relief as did people taking the two leading prescription drugs for IBS . And the benefits of their bogus treatment persisted for weeks afterward ,** contrary to the belief—widespread in the pharmaceutical industry—that the placebo response is short-lived.

It's not only trials of new drugs that are crossing the futility boundary. Some products that have been on the market for decades, like Prozac, are faltering in more recent follow-up tests. In many cases, these are the compounds that, in the late '90s, made Big Pharma more profitable than Big Oil. But if these same drugs were vetted now, the FDA might not approve some of them. Two comprehensive analyses of antidepressant trials have uncovered a dramatic increase in placebo response since the 1980s. **One estimated that the so-called effect size (a measure of statistical significance) in placebo groups had nearly doubled over that time.**

It's not that the old meds are getting weaker, drug developers say. It's as if the placebo effect is somehow getting stronger.

Benedetti has helped design a protocol for minimizing volunteers' expectations that he calls " **open/hidden .**" In standard trials, the act of taking a pill or receiving an injection activates the placebo response. In open/hidden trials, drugs and placebos are given to some test subjects in the usual way and to others at random intervals through an IV line controlled by a concealed computer. **Drugs that work only when the patient knows they're being administered are placebos themselves.**

Ironically, Big Pharma's attempt to dominate the central nervous system has ended up revealing how powerful the brain really is . The placebo response doesn't care if the catalyst for healing is a triumph of pharmacology, a compassionate therapist, or a syringe of salt water. All it requires is a reasonable expectation of getting better. That's potent medicine.

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