

The Magic Pill Sometimes the best medicine is no medicine. Doctors may give a patient a placebo for many kinds of problems that have no clear cause. For example, they are sometimes given for skin problems, for headaches, or for allergies. Studies have shown that placebos can really help in these cases. But you weren't told it was a placebo; they were told it was a painkiller. When the problem isn't serious, they may give it to patients instead of real medicine. A placebo doesn't have any real medical effect. Scientists say it only works if you believe that it's real medicine. The effect of a placebo is both psychological and physical. There may be as much improvement after a placebo as after real medicine. It has no side effects, and it is inexpensive. How does the placebo work?