

The Imaginary Placebo Pill



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Imaginary Placebo Pill



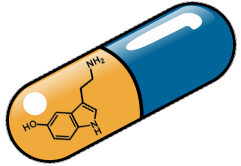
What would happen
if you just imagined
taking a placebo pill?
Would that work?



Dismantling components



Pill with
chemical



Hidden placebo pill



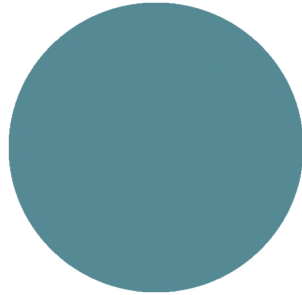
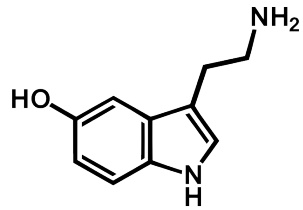
Open placebo pill



Imaginary
placebo pill





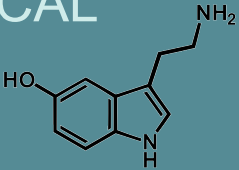
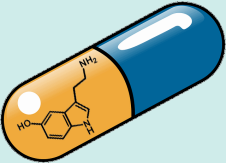

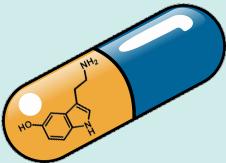


Experience of
taking a pill



REMOVED



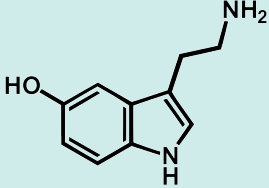

Pill type and ingredient matrix



		TREATMENT "CARRIER"	
		PHYSICAL PILL 	IMAGINARY PILL 
ACTIVE	CHEMICAL 		
	PLACEBO EFFECT FACTORS 	 	

Dimensions of pills



	PHYSICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL
TREATMENT "CARRIER"	Physical pill 	Imaginary pill 
ACTIVE COMPONENT	Chemical 	Placebo effect factors 

What is the imaginary placebo pill?



The imaginary placebo pill is the experience of a placebo pill created collaboratively from the therapist suggestions and the client's imagination and memory. It is perceived by the client with a sense of reality both externally and internally. It can be a carrier of placebo effects.

Placebo sensitive problems



- Pain
- Immune system disorder
(Allergies, etc.)
- Gastrointestinal disorders
(Irritable bowel syndrome, etc.)
- Cardiovascular disorders
(Hypertension, etc.)
- Respiratory disorders
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Addiction
- Sleep disorder
-

Placebo effect factors



- Expectation
- Conditioning
- Observational learning
- Mindset
- Emotion
- Therapeutic relationship
 - Empathy, alliance, positive regard
- Context - physical and social
- Ritual



Elements of treatment context



External context

Verbal suggestions:
“This is going to make you feel better”

Place cues:
Doctor’s office

Social cues:

- Eye gaze
- Body language
- Voice cues
- White coat



Treatment cues:

- Syringe
- Needle puncture



Internal context

- **Outcome expectancies:**
“My pain will go away”
- **Emotions:**
“I am less anxious”
- **Meaning schema:**
“I am being cared for”
- **Explicit memories**
- **Pre-cognitive associations**

Wager, T. D., & Atlas, L. Y. (2015). The neuroscience of placebo effects: Connecting context, learning and health. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 16(7), 403-418. doi:10.1038/nrn3976

Placebo pill factors



- Color
- Size
- Number
- Frequency
- Type (pill, capsule, etc.)
- Brand name
- Price
- Administered by
- Side effects



Therapeutic inspirations



- Placebo research
- Psychotherapy research
- Hypnosis
- Visualisation
- Focusing (Gendlin)
- Person centered perspective
- Emotion Focused Therapy
- Compassion Focused Therapy
- Phenomenology
- Constructivism



Method / Procedure



- Build alliance
- Identify placebo sensitive problem
- Build trust in placebo effect and imagination
- Find personalized desired effect
- Collaborative internal search for imaginary pill with expectation of effect
- Guide administration of imaginary placebo pill
- Instructions for self administration

Case illustrations



- Pain
- Sleeping problems
- Inflammatory bowel disease, IBD
- Anxiety
- Depression

Results



- Can be administered by clinicians
- Clients understand open placebo effect
- Clients can imagine placebo pills
- Effects for placebo sensitive problems:
Pain, sleeping problems, inflammatory bowel disease, anxiety and depression

Perspectives



- **Clinically**
 - Easy use, no prescription-purely psychological, can be learned, personalized
- **Ethically**
 - No deception, empowering, no harm (addiction, sideeffects, withdrawal problems)
- **Society**
 - Reduce problems with addiction, sideeffects, withdrawal, cost efficient, public health
- **Research**
 - Further research on effect and process, comparative studies, experience of taking pills

Conclusion



The imaginary placebo pill is a promising way to harness the placebo effect for placebo sensitive problems because:

- Effective - probably as much as physical placebos & drugs
- Easy to administer for clinicians and clients
- Flexible adjustment of treatment characteristics (color, size, etc.)
- Cost efficient
- Personalized and empowering
- Ethical to use
- No sideeffects, addictions and withdrawal problems

Psychological Intervention



The treatment with imaginary placebo pills
for placebo sensitive problems
is a purely **psychological intervention**

No chemicals and no physical pill

But with "taking pills" and placebo effects

Thanks to



Irving Kirsch

Cláudia Carvalho

Rebecca Acabchuck

Thank You



***“LOGIC WILL GET YOU FROM A TO Z;
IMAGINATION WILL GET YOU EVERYWHERE.”***

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