

# Is the Placebo Effect Dangerous?

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## *The Huffington Post:*

Physician and medical gadfly Ben Goldacre is well known for his relentless crusade to keep medical researchers and drug makers honest — and improve healing in the process. His recent and popular TEDTalk focuses on a particular form of research misconduct that strikes at the core of all evidence-based treatment — the failure to publish negative findings. This publication “bias” is not subtle or inadvertent in most cases; indeed the opposite. The deliberate non-reporting of results unfavorable to a drug’s reputation is often motivated by greed, and can be lethal to patients.

The scientists making this claim are Walter Boot, Cary Stothart and Cassie Stutts of Florida State University, and Daniel Simons of the University of Illinois. They describe their argument — and supporting evidence — in a paper to be published this year in the journal *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. Here’s the gist of what they’re saying:

Psychological interventions — ranging from mental training to psychotherapy — must be proven effective, and this is typically done by comparing people getting the intervention to others who are not, called controls. The purpose of the control group is to account for improvements that might have happened even without the treatment — the well-known placebo effect. When drugs are the treatment in question, the control subjects receive a sugar pill that is identical to the drug being tested, so that the subjects cannot tell which group they are in. The subjects are said to be “blind” to their condition, and as a result they all have the same expectations for improvement. This design is considered the gold standard for clinical study: any differences in outcomes can rightly be attributed to the treatment itself.

Read the whole story: [\*The Huffington Post\*](#)

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