



## Can placebos work if we know what they are?

**Transcript: Video clip from *Horizon*, episode: *The Power of the Placebo*, BBC Two.**

*PROF TED KAPTCHUK*

We decided to test whether or not you could still get a placebo effect if you gave a person a placebo and told them it was a placebo.

*NARRATOR*

Linda Buonanno has suffered from Irritable Bowel Syndrome for sixteen years. At times the symptoms are bad enough that she doesn't want to leave home. Along with eighty other sufferers of IBS, she was recruited onto Ted's trial. She was given some pills and told they were a placebo with no active ingredient, but that they might work thanks to her own self-healing processes.

*LINDA BUONANNO*

I said what a Placebo? Because I ain't just finished, you know, college as a medical assistant. And I'm thinking: "he wants me to take sugar pills? This isn't gonna to work". But I said I'd do it to, so I went home, I started taking them...

*BACKGROUND VOICE*

It'll improve your symptoms...via your mind-body self-healing processes.  
It'll improve your symptoms...via your mind-body self-healing processes.

*LINDA BUONANNO*

...and after three days I realized I wasn't in any pain anymore. I didn't have any intestinal pain, I didn't keep running to bathroom or anything like that, ehm I didn't have any stomach cramps no blo... I had nothing. All the symptoms, the severe symptoms I had, were gone. And I thought: 'No, this is not happening. This can't be – a sugar pill does not get rid of the problems right?'

*NARRATOR*

Linda wasn't the only study participant who reported improved symptoms from a pill she knew to be inactive.

*PROF TED KAPTCHUK*

I was taken aback when we finished the trial and our statistician showed us the results and it was much stronger than we expected: 62% said they got adequate relief from being on the placebo pill. People who got nothing I think it was around 30%, said they had adequate relief. So it was a real big difference, easy to detect.

*NARRATOR*

But the study and the supply of placebo pills only lasted few weeks. When the pills ran out, Linda's problems returned.