

THE “PLACEBO” EFFECT IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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There is no unique definition of placebo (or placebo effect), and the most common is “any effect attributable to a pill, potion, or procedure, but not to its pharmacodynamic or specific properties”. The mechanisms of the placebo effect have not been definitively understood; we are dealing with the intriguing field of mind/brain relationship, psychology and biology. The mechanisms of placebo are related to psychological aspects, as “desire”, “expectation”, or “conditioning”. Of note, recent studies showed that placebo has implications also in the biological field; antidepressants influence both brain structure and function. Placebo is a significant issue in headache disorders. Studies on triptans showed a placebo response from 18% to 35% in adults and from 25% to 61% in children and adolescents [1]. In preventive therapy, response to placebo has been estimated as high as 40%–50% in children [2]; in adults, the placebo effect in preventive therapy is about 50% [3]. While the high placebo response in headache trials is an obstacle, it may yield new insights into understanding the mechanisms involved in triggering and relieving headache.

References

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