



Wellness Minute

Health Information You Can Use On Your Path To Wellness

Shockingly Deceptive Drug Ads

Patients Need To
Know This

Relative Risk

vs.

Absolute Risk



The “Relative Risk of Drugs”

“It is ludicrous to think that we were born and made to have our enzyme systems poisoned and our receptors blocked long term and expect a good result.”

Have you ever seen those beautifully produced drug commercials on TV with statistics like... this amazing drug reduces symptoms by 40%? This is what the TV commercials claim. Where does that number 40% come from? My thanks to Dr. David Brownstein who stunned me with the information I am about to share. To get started, here's what Dr. Brownstein said about prescription drugs, “It is ludicrous to think that we were born and made to have our enzyme systems poisoned and our receptors blocked long term and expect a good result.”

Drugs work by blocking or poisoning an enzyme to get a specific result, or they block a receptor again to get a specific result. Let me read that quote

again because it's kind of shocking if we let it sink in. “It is ludicrous to think that we were born and made to have our enzyme systems poisoned and our receptors blocked long term and expect a good result.”

Here's another mind blowing concept. Studies show that 75% of all Americans over the age of 65 took an average of 4 prescription drugs on a daily basis, yet not one study has ever been done to document the safety of those random 4 drug combination cocktails, not one.

Drugs may work, but they have side effects. In other words, they should be used short term as we work together with our wellness clinician to find the solution to the problem. If we

look at drug ads, you'll often see a percentage that promotes how effective a drug may be. It's usually pretty impressive. The problem is that what's advertised is called “Relative Risk” and very deceptive. Look next to that percentage, and you will see a little asterisk. Always follow the asterisk for the rest of the story.

Let's see how they calculate that number. Take the percentage of people achieving success on the drug and then divide that number by the percentage of people taking the control. Now, take that number and subtract it from the number one, and we get a percentage.

This can be a little confusing, so let's look at a real study and real numbers to make it clear.

This is a transcript from a “video magazine” we send out each week called the Wellness Minute.
If you're not getting our Wellness Minute videos each week, sign up at the front desk.

Several people in a study were taking a drug for 3.3 years, and they had a 2% incidence of a nonfatal heart attack. That sounds impressive doesn't it? The control group taking a placebo had a 3% incidence of a nonfatal heart attack. To get the Relative Risk, divide the treatment group, 2%, by the control group, 3%, and get .66. If we subtract .66 from the number one, we get a percentage, 34%. 34% is the relative reduction in nonfatal heart attacks. That is the number that shows up in the direct-to-consumer ads. And who wouldn't want to have a 34% risk reduction in nonfatal heart attacks? Sign me up.

However, let's look at the calculation that the *New England Journal of Medicine*, in their 2008 edition, suggests physicians use. It's called the "Absolute Risk Reduction." Let's use the same numbers. First, take the percentage of incidence of nonfatal heart attacks from the control or placebo group, 3% and subtract the percentage of incidence in the treatment group, 2%. We get a difference of 1%. So, by taking this drug we have a 1% reduction in nonfatal heart attacks. Wow, 34% is a lot different than 1%.

Now, let me stretch you a little further because we want to make one more calculation called the Number Needed to Treat (NNT). We want to calculate the percentage from the Absolute

Risk to a number to apply to make a real-life decision. We do that by taking our 1% and divide it by .01 to give us a whole number and our answer is 100. What does this mean? It would take 100 people to take this drug for 3.3 years to prevent one nonfatal heart attack.

The cost of that drug for 3.3 years is over \$550,000. Is that a good investment? This study was done with a major cholesterol lowering medication over a 3.3 year period. It's unnecessary to say the name of the company because most cholesterol lowering medications have the same or worse numbers.

Here's the point. There is no question that drugs have a place in medicine, but we can't rely on drugs to solve our problems. It takes a commitment to change the factors that bring disease and increase the factors that bring life. Sadly, the companies that make drugs are not interested in curing your condition. They are interested in repeat business to satisfy their stockholders. I know that sounds cold. Living a committed wellness lifestyle is the future of true health care. Please talk with your wellness clinician about the drugs you are taking and how you can modify your lifestyle to stimulate natural healing from within.