

Televised Medical Talk Shows—What They Recommend and the Evidence to Support Their Recommendations: A Prospective Observational Study.
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Did you hear about the new miracle weight loss supplement that Dr. Oz recommended? This is a question that I'm often asked in my practice. Patients, desperately chasing weight loss dreams, tend to gleam on to words like "miracle" and "weight loss." This is especially true when the promise involves a simple solution, such as taking a pill or using a cream. But is there any science behind the recommendations that TV doctors make?

A group of researchers from the University of Alberta, Canada investigated this question. They examined 40 episodes of *The Dr. Oz Show* and 40 episodes of *The Doctors* that aired in 2013 to determine the quality of the health recommendations made on these popular daytime medical talk shows. Specifically, they wanted to know what percentage of recommendations and claims are supported by scientific evidence. They used a team of experienced evidence reviewers to search the medical, academic, and scientific databases looking for evidence to support the recommendations made on the TV shows.

On average, each episode included 11-12 recommendations. The most common recommendation on Dr. Oz was dietary information. Approximately 58% of the time, the recommendations made were non-specific (ie. not measurable because the claims were too general). In fact, a specific benefit was only mentioned for ~40% of the recommendations. The magnitude of benefit, potential harms, and costs were rarely mentioned (less than 20% of recommendations) and the shows almost never mentioned conflicts of interest (<less than 1%) which may bias the show's recommendations based on financial or other types of personal gain from promoting certain products.

The researchers found that 54% of the recommendations had some published evidence to support them. Believable or somewhat believable evidence supported 33% of the recommendations on The Dr. Oz show and 53% of the recommendations on The Doctors show. The researchers also found believable evidence *against* 11% of the recommendations on Dr. Oz and 13% of the recommendations on The Doctors. Approximately 1 in 3 of the recommendations on Dr. Oz and 1 in 4 of the recommendations on The Doctors could not be supported with any published evidence.

The authors of the study conclude that consumers should be skeptical of any recommendations provided on medical talk shows because details are limited and only one-third to one-half of all recommendations are based on believable or somewhat believable evidence.

Reference: Korownyk Christina, Kolber Michael R, McCormack James, Lam Vanessa, Overbo Kate, Cotton Candra et al. Televised medical talk shows—what they

recommend and the evidence to support their recommendations: a prospective observational study *BMJ* 2014; 349 :g7346