What makes patients say yes?

A study in the June 19 *Annals of Internal Medicine* suggests that the type of statistics a physician uses to explain a drug's ability to prevent disease may affect patient willingness to consent. Researchers randomized 1,754 participants in a general community health survey to be presented one of three hypothetical scenarios about a drug that could prevent heart attacks, and another thousand to scenarios about a medication that reduced the risk of osteoporosis. Here is how the various methods of presenting the numbers compare:

SURVEY SITUATION 1: If a doctor says —	**SURVEY SITUATION 2: If a doctor says —**
— "For one heart attack to be prevented, 13 patients have to take this drug for five years." **76%** *of patients would "certainly" or "probably" consent.* **55%** *thought these numbers were understandable.*	— "For one hip fracture to be prevented, 57 patients have to take the drug for five years." **63%** *of patients would "certainly" or "probably" consent.* **35%** *thought these numbers were understandable.*
— "The drug may not completely prevent heart attacks. It postpones heart attacks for a while, and all who take it for five years will live about two months longer before having one." **54%** *would "certainly" or "probably" consent.* **47%** *thought these numbers were understandable.*	— "The drug may not completely prevent hip fractures. It postpones them for a while, and all who take it for five years will live 16 days longer before they have one." **29%** *would "certainly" or "probably" consent.* **40%** *thought these numbers were understandable.*
— "The drug may not completely prevent heart attacks. It postpones heart attacks for a while. One of four patients who take the drug for five years will live about eight months longer before having one. Others will have no benefit." **63%** *would "certainly" or "probably" consent.* **51%** *thought these numbers were understandable.*	— "The drug may not completely prevent hip fractures. It postpones them for a while. Three out of a hundred patients who take the drug for five years will live about 16 months longer before they have one. Others will have no benefit." **44%** *would "certainly" or "probably" consent.* **39%** *thought these numbers were understandable.*

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