# The Placebo Syndrome

*by Paul Donner*

The Placebo Syndrome is about living in your relationship past consciously or unconsciously. In medicine, a placebo looks, tastes and appears to be the same as the original, but it is not. In relationships a placebo is recreation of a past mate by using another person. Many times this is done unconsciously. A person who is engaged in the placebo syndrome chooses new partners who look, act or display the exact same qualities as the person he or she never got over.

If your friends or family ever comment to you upon meeting your new love interest, "*He/she looks just like* _____." You are probably stuck in the placebo syndrome. Stating that he/she is "your type" as a defense is a good indication you are also still in denial. When people define their type as being a certain way, this indicates someone with ridged expectations who tends to value others by *what* they are rather than *who* they are.

Type is different than preferences and non-negotiables. **Type** is based upon superficial characteristics such as looks, career or social status. **Preferences**, like type are usually are superficial too. The difference is preferences are not deal breakers. Every person has a wish list for his or her perfect mate. These are the traits you'd like the person to have but you won't discount them if some are not there. A **non-negotiable** is a value's requirement such as Christian, non-alcoholic, wants children or educated. Most people have 3-5 of these and can dismiss someone based upon a non-negotiable because these indicate incompatibility in intellectual, spiritual or emotional intimacy. More than five and the person is beginning to typecast. People caught in the placebo syndrome typecast the people they date and will discount a person if they do not have every required trait.

Placebo relationships are always doomed. As the replacer you are dating a facade. Your placebo mate now has to live up to the person he or she is replacing. This will never happen because the placebo is not the original. For the placebo, this is degrading and demoralizing. If you are the replacer, taking on placebo allows you to think you're moving on. In actuality all you're doing is postponing the grieving process and regurgitating your past mistakes on a new man or woman. By doing this you don't grow and eventually you find yourself in yet another unfulfilling relationship. The good news is the Placebo Syndrome is a behavior. It’s not deadly and most people do not require professional help to fix the problem. All it requires is honesty with yourself, the ability to laugh at yourself when you find yourself relapsing and a willingness to put your dating and relationship life on hold for a year or two while you change the behavior and determine why you’re stuck in this pattern.


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## How do you recognize a placebo relationship?

### If You Are the Replacer:

- The relationship starts **fast and furious**. This is because you need the excitement to override the negative feelings you have about the past relationship. You also need another relationship to prove to yourself you are still attractive, desirable and wonderful.
- About six to eight weeks into your relationship you begins **trying to mold, (change)** the placebo into what you want. Remember the movie "Vertigo" with Jimmy Stewart? His attempt to remold the brunette into the blond right down to her hairstyle and clothing is the extreme of this behavior.
- **Something feels missing**. What is missing is intimacy. A placebo relationship cannot become too intimate. If it does, the replacer begins to realize this is not the same person. To avoid this, he/she begins to focus on what is wrong with replacement rather than looking for ways to enjoy his or her uniqueness.
- As the replacer, you **can't stop thinking about your ex.** The longer the relationship goes on, the more you romanticize how good it use to be and the less satisfactory the man/woman in your life becomes.
- When your friends or family talk about the people you date they use comments like, "Oh, Marge only has one type," or "Which doctor was she, the red head, the blond or the one with the green eyes?" Meaning all **your dates were the same** except a few minor differences.

### If You Are the Placebo

- If you are the placebo, conversations are rarely about you. Why would they be? It's not you he/she is dating. It's someone else. Conversations focus on the replacer's wants and needs, experienced and thoughts. **You feel like window dressing.**
- If you are the person being used as the placebo, you feel under-appreciated, criticized and **like a guest** (rather than the boy or girlfriend) in the other's home. There always seems to be an invisible barrier between you and him/her. This barrier is intimacy. He/she will never allow you to get to close because this requires reciprocity.
- As the placebo, you feel like you can **never do anything right** because all he or she does is criticize and complain about you.
- When you **think about the person** you are in a relationship with, happiness, satisfaction, excitement or love are not words that come to mind. Worry about his/her mood, anxiety and uncertainty better describe your feelings.


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- **You don't know where you stand** and they won't tell you. Rather he/she will deflect your question with *"You stand where you stand,"* or another non-answer.
- **Gifts** if any **are an afterthought** and generally given to you out of guilt rather than endearment (this is part of sexual intimacy and another reason why the relationship can't become too intimate). You don't really feel like going out of your way for this person or the other extreme, you **bend over backwards** with little or no appreciation.
- When the relationship ends, you are surprised that you do not grieve long (maybe a week). Rather you feel a **tremendous sense of relief** and a return of vitality and vigor.

## The Danger Signs: Behaviors to Avoid

When a person fails to complete his or her grieving of a past relationship destructive and counter-productive behaviors surface. You have probably witnessed them in either yourself or people around you. People who never progress from one stage to another generally display traits of the stage they are stuck in through unconscious habits, actions and remarks. Below are some classic behaviors of person's whom never completed the grieving process of a past relationship.

- Have you ever met a person who just seemed **angry all the time** even though they always have a smile on their face?
- Have you ever dated someone who spends the entire date **talking about** how wonderful his/**her ex** is? This person is looking for a placebo. Pay the check and get out.
- Do you know someone whom has become so exasperated with dating they either **hate** anything to do with **romance**? Do you know people on the other extreme who **turn to homosexuality** because they cannot relate successfully with the opposite sex? They are not homosexual; they just choose the lifestyle. (According to programs that successfully treat this behavior, approximately 20-30% of practicing homosexuals fall into this category. Through therapy they are able to return to regular, normal and fulfilling heterosexual relationships and lives).
- Do you know a serial-wedder or serial-dater? Hollywood's talent has provided several examples of this behavior. A **serial-wedder** is someone who meets someone, gets married in a short period of time, divorces within 5 years[1] and then in a short period of time meets someone new. This is basically the same person he/she just

[1] Five years is a significant number. If a relationship is based upon limerence and not on true intimacy (safety, connectedness and 7 of the 8 levels), it will self-destruct within five years when the luster and excitement wear off.


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divorced. This person gets married again quickly, divorces within 5 years and repeats this over and over and over again. A **serial-dater** is similar without the vows. A serial dater goes for the thrill and never has a relationship over 3-months[2] in length.

- You refer to your date as the King or **Queen of passive-aggressive behavior**: You know the smiling person who undermines your reputation, efforts and credibility by sabotaging you behind your back or always performing favors with ulterior motives. Basically you feel like you've been stabbed in the back and F--- at the same time, with a plastic knife covered in molasses.

These traits can be indicators of severe mental or emotional problems, low self-esteem or narcissism. They can also be symptoms of unrequited grief. Rather than deal with grief, each of these behaviors smothers it with a new distraction and allows a person to stay stuck in the past and never grow or move on. Because this person never grows, they continue to make the same relationship mistakes over and over again. Some call these behaviors rebounding; most call it relationship insanity.

**If you suspect you are the placebo** in a relationship, the only thing you can do is get out. You deserve to be loved for who you are, not what someone wants you to be.

**If you suspect you are the replace** in the relationship, you owe it to your future to be honest with yourself and your current interest. Take a relationship time-out and work on your issues. It's painful and you will be "alone" for a while. What you will gain in the end is so much more than you ever dreamed: happiness, security and true love. CC

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[2] Three months is significant in dating because this is the end of the first phase where everything is perfect. During months 4-6, most relationships will fall apart. It is during months 4-6 you discover each other's faults and imperfections.


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