

Appendix 4 (as supplied by the authors): Answer key for understanding (small treatment effects)

In units of the pooled standard deviation of all the pain scores in the experimental and control groups, expressed as a standardized mean difference, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention A vs placebo control for patient-reported pain is 0.20 standard deviation units in favor of intervention A. The magnitude of this difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important**
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important

In minimal important difference (MID) units where 1.0 unit represents the smallest difference in pain that patients, on average, perceive as important, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention B vs placebo control for patient-reported pain to be 0.60 MID units in favor of intervention B. The magnitude of this difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important**
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important

In units of the pain scale, where 0 represents no pain and 10 represents the worst pain ever on numeric rating scale, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention C vs placebo control for patient-reported pain to be 0.60 in favor of intervention C. The magnitude of difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important**
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important

As a relative risk (or risk ratio), where the risk of the event occurring in the treatment group is divided by the risk in the placebo control group, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention D vs placebo control for patient-reported pain to be 0.80 (80%) in favor of intervention D, representing a relative risk reduction of 20% (relative to the control group, 20% fewer patients experience moderate to severe pain). The magnitude of difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important**
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important

As a risk difference, where the risk of in the treatment group is subtracted from the risk in the placebo control group, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention E vs placebo control for patient-reported pain to be 0.04 (4%) in favor of intervention E, representing 4 fewer patients per 100 experiencing moderate to severe pain (which means that one would have to treat 25 patients so that one patient who would otherwise experience moderate to severe pain would not – the NNT). The magnitude of difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important**
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important

As a ratio of means, where the mean in the treatment group is divided by the mean in the placebo control group, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention F vs placebo control for patient-reported pain to be 0.92, representing an 8% reduction in the mean pain score in favor of intervention F. The magnitude of difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important**
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important

Answer key for understanding (large treatment effects)

In units of the pooled standard deviation of all the pain scores in the intervention A and control groups, expressed as a standardized mean difference, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention A vs placebo control for patient-reported pain is 0.80 standard deviation units in favor of intervention A. The magnitude of this difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important**

In minimal important difference (MID) units where 1.0 unit represents the smallest difference in pain that patients, on average, perceive as important, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention B vs placebo control for patient-reported pain to be 2.00 MID units in favor

of intervention B. The magnitude of this difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important

In units of the pain scale, where 0 represents no pain and 10 represents the worst pain ever on the numeric rating scale, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention C vs placebo control for patient-reported pain to be 2.00 in favor of intervention C. The magnitude of difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important

As a relative risk (or risk ratio), where the risk of the event occurring in the treatment group is divided by the risk in the placebo control group, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention D vs placebo control for patient-reported pain to be 0.50 (50%) in favor of intervention D, representing a relative risk reduction of 50% (relative to the control group, 50% fewer patients experience moderate to severe pain). The magnitude of difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important

As a risk difference, where the risk in the treatment group is subtracted from the risk in the placebo control group, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention E vs placebo control for patient-reported pain to be 0.20 (20%) in favor of intervention E, representing 20 fewer patients per 100 experiencing moderate to severe pain (which means that one would have to treat 5 patients so that one patient who would otherwise experience moderate to severe pain would not - the NNT). The magnitude of difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important

As a ratio of means, where the mean in the treatment group is divided by the mean in the placebo control group, a meta-analysis finds the effect of intervention F vs placebo control for patient-reported pain to be 0.63, representing a 37% reduction in the mean pain score in favor of intervention F. The magnitude of difference is:

- trivial difference, probably not important
- small difference, but probably important
- moderate difference, surely important
- large difference, very important