

THEY

I know what you're thinking. And yes — it is a creepy title. And no — today is not Halloween. This post isn't about a horror movie. Even though (as you would no doubt suspect) there is a horror movie with that title. I haven't seen it. According to IMDb.com it's about "a psychology student who finds all her childhood fears and phobias becoming real after a traumatic event." Yikes! It got 4.8 out of 10 stars.

I'm also not going to be talking about THEY, the R&B duo from Los Angeles.

So (if you're still reading) I know you're just dying to know what I am going to talk about.

Well I'm so glad you asked.

As a physician I've been lately aware of how many times I use the pronoun "they" when referring to recommendations for patients. They say you should have your cholesterol checked starting at such and such and age. They say that a PSA test is no longer recommended. They say that you should have a flu shot. They say that back pain gets better in 80-90% of cases no matter what form of treatment is prescribed.

You get the idea. And I'm sure you've been aware of the phrasing too. But just who are *they*? And should we believe them?

"They" usually refers to recognized experts or committees of experts that make recommendations. Usually the recommendations are well thought out and not made lightly. The problem is that often the various "theys" don't agree.

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Cancer screening guidelines for example differ depending on who you ask. The American Cancer Society will have a different recommendation than the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. The US Preventive Services Task force will have different recommendations than the American Urological Society.

So which "they" do we believe?

There is no straightforward answer. I suggest taking a look at all of the various recommendations and figuring out which make sense to you. With so many recommendations there isn't really a black or white, yes or no answer. Things like family history, lifestyle and personal preferences have to be considered. It's most important to take an individual approach, consider benefits versus risks, and make a decision that feels right.

Because what really matters to your health is not what they say, but what you say.