

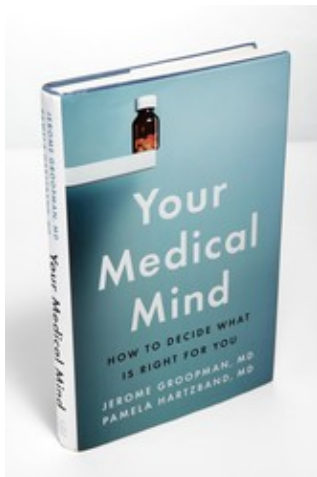
Healing Reads: The Year's Five Best Books

Health and medicine books tend to be long on advice and how-to, and short on compelling narrative and literary merit.

But several new books this year proved to be welcome exceptions, from a lyrical history of the human heart to an absorbing tale of one of the country's toughest inner-city hospitals. Here are my top-five picks.

Your Medical Mind: How to Decide What Is Right for You

by Jerome Groopman and
Pamela Hartzband



F. Martin Ramin for The Wall Street Journal

'The unsettling reality is that much of medicine still exists in a gray zone, where there is no black or white answer about when to treat or how to treat. The best doctors practice "judgment-based medicine," meaning they consider the available evidence and then assess how it applies to the individual patient.'

This book by physicians who happen to be married uses compelling patient stories to show how people make treatment decisions when evidence and advice is often-conflicting.

The authors suggest strategies for calculating one's own priorities. They advocate shared medical decision-making, in which doctor and patient review information about the risks and benefits of any given treatment and then customize care according to the patient's values and preferences.

The best choice, of course, may differ from patient to patient. Someone who worries about a heart attack may decide to take a statin for high cholesterol, while another who is concerned about side effects of the medication may opt to improve diet and exercise and forego the drug.

The most important thing, the doctors conclude, is to understand your own approach to health before entering a doctor's office or a hospital so you can choose the right treatment for the right reasons.