

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Magnets and Copper and Pain

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

I get asked all the time by my patients if magnets and copper will help relieve pain for conditions I am treating.

Copper bracelets and magnets of various forms have been used for decades in the treatment of osteoarthritis.

Uncertain Origin

The exact origin of their use in treatment of arthritis is lost in the distant past. There are some explanations, but actually no one knows for sure. That really doesn't matter, because use of copper and magnets has grown over time and is firmly set as a treatment for many patients.

Conditions

In my experience over many years, 99% of patients wearing either copper or a magnet are doing so for osteoarthritis or fibromyalgia.

Scientific Studies

There have been many well controlled studies over decades that have not been able to prove that they work. No study has ever concluded that copper or magnets are effective treatment for arthritis.

Supportive Claim

Magnets change the way cells function restoring the balance of growth and cell death. Magnets are supposed to increase oxygen carrying flow of blood to tissues.

Copper is supposed to dissolve and be absorbed into the skin. In addition the skin has electric charges that react to copper and travel along acupuncture pathways.

These are the claims that are made for magnets and copper.

Placebo Effect

It is well known that the placebo response in the treatment of arthritis is frequently noted. Placebo effect occurs if you think the treatment will work. This can modulate (change) the immune response and pain pathways.

Copper

It does not have side effects. It is inexpensive. It is harmless even if it is ineffective in treating arthritis.

Magnets

Magnets are a little different. Evidence that they help arthritis is weak. In certain situations they need to be avoided.

Avoid magnets if -

- you have a pacemaker or defibrillator
- you have an insulin pump
- use a medicated patch
- are pregnant
- had an aneurysm clipped

Magnets also tend to be somewhat expensive compared to copper bracelets.

Bottom Line

If you are looking for help, even in the absence of proof, go ahead and try them. You have about a 50% chance that it will make your pain better. As a physician I recommend evidence based, accepted medical therapies. But, then again.....

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Don't forget to check out the entirely new office website, www.orthopodsurgeon.com, Your Orthopaedic Connection and the Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive of all back articles. It is a wealth of information about all the things I treat in the office and hospital.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush.