



Magnets



Almost everyone has heard by now about the phenomenon of magnets and their effect to relieve pain. They are used for a wide variety of musculoskeletal conditions, but do we know whether they actually work? People who are in pain are willing to try most anything to relieve it, particularly if the treatment is not potentially harmful to them. The problem with magnets is that it is so difficult to subject their use for pain relief to the same rigorous scientific testing that drugs must undergo before they are released for use by the Food and Drug Administration. In addition, it is well known that the placebo affect can reach at least 60% in persons who are hoping and wanting a particular treatment to work. This is found not only in drug trials, but also in the use of other medical devices and even surgery. This lack of scientific study is the reason that mainstream medicine has been slow to get behind magnet therapy.

This is not to say that they do not work in a certain number of patients, however. There are some very well respected physicians around the country who are cautiously advising their patients to try magnet therapy, especially in those people who have a degenerative, painful conditions. If magnet therapy would work for them, it could lessen the amount of narcotic medication that is required.

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not recognize magnetic devices for relief of pain. Therefore, companies which manufacture the magnets are not allowed to claim that they are used as analgesia for pain. The FDA is comfortable with the phrase "rest and relaxation" which could be attributed to magnets, rather than pain relief. But the manufacturers, of course, have no control over how customers use the magnets.

Most doctors don't see any danger in trying a non-invasive device like a magnet and they fully realize that people in pain will try almost anything for relief.

Some doctors point out that a culture seems to have cropped up around magnets that include not only people who use them, but those who have then gone into the business of selling them for large companies.

There have only been a few scientific studies of magnets in which the researchers and subjects had no idea who was getting a real magnet. One use of magnets that has been easier to study than most has been for chronic foot pain. Patients wore the magnetic shoe inserts on one foot. This study was published in 1998 in a pain management journal. Nearly all of the patients had less pain in the foot wearing the magnetic device.

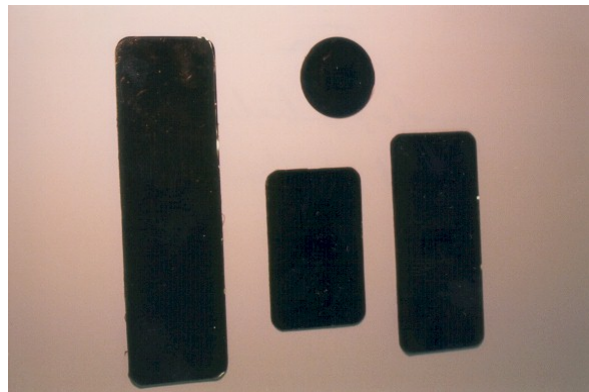


We still don't know how static magnets work. They are being used for everything from headaches to foot pain and everything in between. There are many varieties of magnetic mattresses on which you can sleep. Magnets are used not only by people in the general population, but they are also very popular among professional golfers and professional athletes in general.

It is difficult to know whether the phenomenon will continue. It certainly is a big business, however, since the market in the United States for magnets this year is estimated to be \$300 million and will double to \$600 million by the year 2003. Worldwide, sales of magnets are \$1.5 billion and climbing.

We certainly would not discourage people from trying them. One must consider when using magnets what kind of pain the person is trying to reduce. It is one thing if the pain is chronic and has been diagnosed by a physician. If the pain is more acute, and has not been diagnosed by a physician or trained health care provider, then a condition could exist which, if left untreated, could cause serious consequences for the patient while they are using the magnetic therapy and hoping for relief. Every physician is familiar with situations such as this which have resulted in injury or perhaps disastrous consequences for the patient if diagnosis is delayed.

Magnets as an alternative form of therapy, certainly do help some people, but exactly whom they help and what conditions they will work best in have yet to be adequately determined.





Online Orthopaedics

Thank you for using the Online Orthopaedics Library.

We hope it was useful to you. Please check back frequently because new topics and information are being added continuously by Dr. Haverbush.

Please feel free to print, download, and use/distribute this information (as long as you are not reselling it in any form). Remember, it is the property of Online Orthopaedics and we retain all rights regarding its content. Alteration of this document in any way is a violation of the copyright.

This material does not constitute medical advice. It is intended for informational purposes only. No one associated with Online Orthopaedics will answer medical questions via email.

Please consult Dr. Haverbush or a physician for specific treatment recommendations.

Thomas J. Haverbush, MD. P.C.

Office Address:

315 E. Warwick Dr., Suite A

Alma, Michigan 48801

989-463-6092

Fax 989-463-8914

Website Address:

www.orthopodsurgeon.com