

Magnet Therapy

**An information sheet from the Kentucky Council Against Health Fraud
www.kcahf.org**

Overview

Magnets are being marketed in various forms (including mattress pads) for relief of pain. There is no scientific basis for such effects.

Scientific assessment

There are some legitimate medical applications of magnetic fields. But these are strong, *oscillating* fields (they rapidly change direction), produced by electrical devices. The products discussed here are much different: they are *static* magnets, which do not change direction (like bar magnets or refrigerator magnets), and which do not require any power source.

There are strong scientific reasons why such magnets could not produce any health benefits:

- They are too weak to have any effect on cells. Much stronger magnets are needed to produce biological effects. MRI, which uses magnetic fields much stronger than those in the over the counter magnets, produces no noticeable effects on the body.
- The nerves and blood vessels have many different directions. It would be impossible for the magnets to produce changes only in certain directions.
- It is claimed that the magnets can help the circulation of blood due to the iron in hemoglobin, but this is scientifically impossible.
- If the magnets work as claimed, it should be possible to show effects on the blood and nerves in animal or laboratory experiments, but this has not been done. Several animal studies show no effects on circulation.

But aren't there research studies showing that magnets works?

There are several studies reporting beneficial effects of static magnets. However, these were small, preliminary studies. They were not all blinded. They reported subjective results, which are more prone to errors and placebo effects. The results have not yet been reproduced by independent investigators. In fact, some studies have found *no* benefit from magnets.

A health benefit from magnets of this type represents an *extraordinary claim*, inconsistent with major findings in science. Before it can be accepted we would need evidence of very high quality, repeated independently in different laboratories. No such findings have been reported.

But don't some people feel better after using magnets?

Yes, but this does not mean the magnets were useful. Part of the explanation is the *placebo effect*. People tend to feel better if they think they are receiving an effective treatment, even if it does nothing. Also, many conditions (such as pain) improve on their own, or the symptoms may come and go. If people use a treatment (such as a magnet) and then feel better, they may feel that the treatment was responsible, even though the improvement would have happened anyway. For these reasons only controlled scientific studies can determine the usefulness of medical therapies, and such studies have not found benefits for magnets.

Potential dangers: magnetic devices could interfere with pacemakers or implantable defibrillators unless these are sufficiently shielded.

For further information, see:

<http://www.quackwatch.org/04ConsumerEducation/QA/magnet.html>

Recommendations

Magnet therapy is simply a placebo treatment; it cannot produce any true healing or pain relief. We recommend against the purchase of magnetic devices.

Recommendations of KCAHF are based on our assessments of the scientific literature concerning unconventional approaches to health care. For specific recommendations concerning your medical condition, consult your physician.

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