

Trial raises doubts over alternative pain therapy for arthritis

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Copper bracelets and magnetic wrist straps are ineffective in relieving arthritis pain, according to a new study led by a University of York academic.

Researchers conducted the first randomised placebo-controlled trial on the use of both copper bracelets and magnetic wrist straps for [pain management](#) in [osteoarthritis](#) -- the most common form of the condition.

The devices are used worldwide for helping to manage pain associated with chronic musculoskeletal disorders. The results of this trial conflict with those from previous studies, by showing that both magnetic and copper bracelets were ineffective for managing pain, stiffness and physical function in osteoarthritis. The research is published in the latest issue of the journal *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*.

The trial was led by Stewart Richmond, a Research Fellow in the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York, who said: "This is the first randomised controlled trial to indicate that copper bracelets are ineffective for relieving [arthritis](#) pain."

"It appears that any perceived benefit obtained from wearing a magnetic or copper bracelet can be attributed to psychological placebo effects. People tend to buy them when they are in a lot of pain, then when the pain eases off over time they attribute this to the device. However, our findings suggest that such devices have no real advantage over placebo wrist straps that are not magnetic and do not contain copper.

"Although their use is generally harmless, people with osteoarthritis should be especially cautious about spending large sums of money on magnet therapy. Magnets removed from disused speakers are much cheaper, but you would first have to believe that they could work."

The trial involved 45 people aged 50 or over, who were all diagnosed as suffering from osteoarthritis. Each participant wore four devices in a random order over a 16-week period - two wrist straps with differing levels of magnetism, a demagnetised wrist strap and a copper bracelet.

The study revealed no meaningful difference between the devices in terms of their effects on [pain](#), stiffness and physical function.

Magnet therapy is a rapidly growing industry, with annual worldwide sales of therapeutic devices incorporating permanent magnets worth up to \$4 billion US.

The trial also involved researchers from the universities of Hull, Durham, and the NHS.

Source: University of York

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