

ARTHRITIS & MAGNETIC THERAPY

USES OF MAGNETIC THERAPY

How have physicians used magnetic therapy? One orthopaedic surgeon has used magnetic technology in combination with traditional surgical intervention. The rates of healing for bone fracture (particularly those that are not well connected) have been greater than 80 percent, while traditional rates are much lower without magnetic therapy

There is not a single physician practicing today who does not value the benefits of magnetic science, although he or she may discount magnetic therapy for arthritis pain. Magnetic resonance imaging scanners (MRIs) are providing diagnostic information daily on a wide variety of illnesses. MRIs are very important for assessing joints and cartilage, and are particularly effective for assessing the nervous system, such as the brain and the spinal cord. However, we find it interesting that when the topic comes up of adjusting magnetic polarity for healing purposes for our bodies, many doctors are extremely skeptical.

As this is "a new field," actually a rediscovered field of medical science, at this time anecdotal stories abound. Some stories describe athletes who have increased their stamina, exercise endurance, and even weight lifting or weight training ability through the use of magnets. A recent article in American Pain journal described how magnet therapy may be helpful for neuropathy, inflammation of the nerve twigs, most often found in the lower extremities.

ANECDOTAL STORIES

We are traditional physicians, and understand that these anecdotal stories are not the same as scientific research. But we certainly do not deny the claim that many people have improved, and often dramatically, with the assistance of magnetic therapy

Stan, a patient of Dr. Kandel, was bed-ridden for five days because of acute joint pain in the low back and sacroiliac region. He was unable to sit or stand, and had to stay in bed. Upon hearing this, a neighbor provided him with magnetic pads: a bed pad, a low back magnetic pad, and two magnetic rollers to be used over the low back region.

Stan contacted our office, stating he did not need an emergent follow-up visit, as he was doing "great, just great." Apparently, by sleeping on the magnetic mattress, using the magnetic pads and the rollers, he had improved his symptom complex. How this works is uncertain, at least to

us, despite extensive review of the literature. There are many theories, but clearly the fact remains, that our patients have been helped by the use of magnetic therapy

One version of magnetic therapy is to alternate the pressure points of the body using the magnets. In this way, possibly, we are dealing with magnetic acupuncture or a variant of magnetic acupuncture. A number of human and animal studies show that this procedure seems to provide a great deal of pain relief, particularly in various animal models, for the muscles and ligaments as well as for the joints.

Articles in clinical orthopaedic journals describe patients with failed low back fusions who experience chronic pain. A number of these individuals have tried magnet therapy, and actually have experienced increased fusion benefits and reduced pain. Further studies are warranted to follow up on this very exciting field of magnetic therapy.

Neurologists also treat a number of individuals with facial pain. Many of these have tried various types of treatment, including pain medicines, antidepressant medicines, and electric stimulation. A number of our patients treated with magnetic therapy combined with electric stimulation therapy seemed to have improved dramatically, as compared to those who have been treated only with medications.

Magnets have been studied for their effects on various areas of the body, including neck and shoulder stiffness, low back pain, muscle pain, and for our purposes, joint and arthritic conditions. Individual results have varied; based on the location where the magnets have been applied, the length of time that they were used, and the patient's initial attitude (those with positive attitudes seemed to do better than those who were doubtful). The patients' subjective rating of pain reduction ranged from 56 percent to 98 percent improvement with the use of magnetic therapy. The magnetic matress was reported to be particularly effective, and no negative side effects were found.

TYPES OF MAGNETS

Magnets come in all strengths and are marketed by many different companies. We are not distributors, and we have no financial interest in any of these products, but we have had our greatest success with Nikken magnetic pads. The pads can come as small strips, pads, or larger strips to be placed on the low back region.

Magnetic balls can be used for hand therapy, very much like traditional hand therapy for arthritis

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joint pain. However, with the additional healing power of the magnets, people seem to have increased function, increased sense of warmth, and more rapid reduction of their pain. Their pain relief also seems to last for longer periods of times, even after brief sessions of therapy.

We were quite impressed by one study that tested the effectiveness of magnetic belts. This study used subjects suffering from low back pain and was a double-blind study (the patients and the doctors were both unaware of who was receiving the treatment or the placebo). The patients who had either no magnets or weak magnets failed to show any significant benefit. Those however who did receive the high field magnetic belt reported dramatic improvement in their low back pain.

Is it expensive? As health care expenses go, magnetic therapy can run from the gamut from relatively inexpensive to relatively expensive. One of our favorite forms of magnetic treatment are "mag steps," a relatively lowcost item. These are large, oversized shoe inserts, with bumps on one side and indentations on the other.

When they are used, they need to be trimmed to your foot's natural dimension. Some people prefer wearing these with the bumps up, others with the bumps down. There is neither a right nor wrong way to wear these inserts. Individuals who use them seem to report less leg cramping, more stability of gait and balance, less frequent falls, less unsteadiness. They also state that they have increased stamina and are able to perform activities for longer periods of time.

At the other end of the cost spectrum, there are magnetic bed pads, ranging between \$450 and \$600. These seem to help when there are multiple areas that need to be addressed, not just individual joints. Another very popular item with our patients are "mag boys," small handheld magnetic balls that can be very effective for hand pain or joint pain in the fingers. A holder offered by some vendors can turn these two magnetic balls into a type of rolling massager, to be used over other parts of the body

THE BOTTOM LINE

When all is said and done, we must admit we still don't fully understand the mechanism of magnetic therapy, how it works, or even why it works. We simply see the results.

When we discuss this with our traditional colleagues, many belittle magnetic therapy as nothing more than sham or placebo treatment. However, we point out that the proof is in the results, and our patients do well. We feel that we are treating a person with an illness rather than an illness in a person.

Because this is one more type of therapy that enlists the patient's cooperation, it allows the patients to become partners in their health care, and we think this is very important. Your doctor can't always be there when you suffer a pain spasm. In addition, having the patient as an ally, rather than a passive observer in their health care is something of great value, whether it is an arthritis pain or any other medical illness.

We have often found one additional and very important benefit of magnetic therapy. If the patients are willing to go through the routine and even the bother of putting on magnetic pads, or placing a magnetic belt in place, they often are reminded to take the time to use proper body mechanics, to be aware of their joint pain, and actually to follow through on their additional physician instructions, such as stretching and flexibility. Most important it helps them see that they are in control of their pain syndrome. This itself might be worth the cost of a magnetic pad.

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(Note: These statements and testimonials are the personal experiences / opinions of the people who gave them. We neither make nor imply any medical claims whatsoever. We suggest you use the products and experience their benefits for yourself. For medical help and information, see your healthcare professional.)

¹ Joseph Kandel, M.D., and David Sudderth, M.D. The Anti-Arthritis Diet (Rocklin CA: Prima Health) pp. 255-259