

Copper bracelets and magnetic wrist straps fail to help rheumatoid arthritis, research says

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Copper bracelets and magnet wrist straps have no real effect on pain, swelling, or disease progression in rheumatoid arthritis, according to new findings from a study conducted at the University of York.

In the first [randomised controlled trial](#) to study the effects of copper bracelets and magnetic [wrist straps](#) on [rheumatoid arthritis](#), 70 patients with active symptoms each wore four different devices over a five-month period, reporting on their pain, disability, and medication use throughout the study. Participants also provided blood samples, after wearing each device for five weeks, in order to monitor changes in inflammation.

The research published in *PLOS ONE*, show that both the standard magnetic wrist strap and the copper bracelet provided no meaningful therapeutic effects beyond those of a placebo, which was not magnetic and did not contain copper.

Dr Stewart Richmond, a Research Fellow in the Department of Health Sciences at York, who led the study, said: "It's a shame that these devices don't seem to have any genuine benefit. They're so simple and generally safe to use. But what these findings do tell us is that people who suffer with rheumatoid arthritis may be better off saving their money, or spending it on other complementary interventions, such as dietary fish oils for example, which have far better evidence for effectiveness. Warning people who suspect they may have rheumatoid arthritis to consult their GP and seek early medical treatment, rather than placing faith in such devices, is also important in helping to avoid long-term joint damage resulting from uncontrolled inflammation."

Dr Richmond suggests there are two main reasons

why wearers sometimes report benefit: "Firstly, devices such as these provide a [placebo effect](#) for users who believe in them; secondly, people normally begin wearing them during a flare up period and then as their symptoms subside naturally over time they confuse this with a [therapeutic effect](#). Pain varies greatly over time in conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, and the way we perceive pain can be altered significantly by the power of the mind".

Magnet therapy is often privately used for the management of chronic pain, with estimated worldwide annual sales of devices exceeding one billion US dollars. The practice of wearing copper bracelets to combat rheumatism has been popular since the 1970s. An earlier study by Dr Richmond and his colleagues, published in 2009, threw doubt on the effectiveness of such devices for osteoarthritis. The present study builds on and extends these findings.

More information: The paper 'Copper bracelets and magnetic wrist straps for rheumatoid arthritis – analgesic and anti-inflammatory effects: a randomised double-blind placebo controlled crossover trial' is published in *PLOS ONE* at dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0071529

Provided by University of York

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