

Dogs who suffer chronic arthritis are being helped by magnetism, a therapy usually associated with New-Age medicine.

**KATE REW** reports

# Walkies without the pain

**A**S a treatment for arthritis and chronic pain, magnet therapy is one of those New-Age treatments that sounds like wishful nonsense. Sceptics may mutter about the influence of mind over matter, but its latest fans are immune to the placebo effect — cats and dogs. They are unlikely to rise from their baskets and start bounding round parks as a result of the power of suggestion.

Magnets have a small but loyal following the world over, even if the manufacturers themselves are not quite sure how they work. One explanation is that magnetism encourages blood circulation, reducing inflammation and decreasing joint pain. Another is that it stimulates the brain directly, or works on the pineal gland and changes the ability to sense pain. Whatever the reason, many report good results.

Mike Turner, a vet in Edgware, says: "I used magnetic pet chains on 10 dogs with chronic arthritis and found the majority of them improved. They were mainly old dogs who had been on painkillers and anti-inflammatories for some time, and their owners found that the animals moved more freely while wearing the chain. The effect seems to take about a month to kick in, which indicates the owners are being objective. After a month, their dogs started to do things like climb stairs and get into cars unassisted. We want to avoid long-term use of drugs like anti-inflammatories because they have damaging side-effects, so I am always keen to use alternative treatments that help animals more gently."

"I can see how they might work. Osteoarthritis causes the formation of excess bone in and around the joint, which creates pain and restricts movement. It could be that magnets change the ionic structure within the blood, slowing the build-up of calcium and bone and the breakdown of cartilage in the joint — this is effectively what anti-inflammatories do."

Magnetic pet chains are widely endorsed by vets in the US, who mostly use them as a complement to existing treatments. In Britain, the lack of scientific backing for the magnets' claims make traditional vets sceptical.

Charles Papapetrou, a qualified osteopath and acupuncturist who uses complementary treatments on animals, shares this reserve. "Physiologically, dogs and humans are very similar," he says. "Dogs' anatomical structure is different but their bones, tissues and energy fields are the same. Now we know from extensive clinical trials that osteopathy and acupuncture are effective on humans, and they are recognised by the British Medical Association as such. But magnets are



much more fringe, and there's no scientific evidence that they work for either species."

We spoke to the owners of two dogs who have benefited from magnet treatment.

## **NATTIE, a three-year-old Cavalier King Charles Spaniel**

Medical history: "Nattie ran into a rotary clothes pole and jarred her shoulder when she was two," says her owner, Tina Holmes in Essex. "After that, she was in a lot of pain. X-rays didn't show any damage, but she could hardly move. We took her to a chiropractor who said her neck and one part of her vertebrae were out of line. He treated her a few times but she appeared to be worse. Painkillers helped but we didn't want her on them for the rest of her life. We saw the Magna pet chain at Crufts. I was sceptical. I don't believe in alternative treatments, but we'd spent so much money already and she was still in pain, so we thought, why not? We stopped the painkillers and after two or three weeks she started getting better. She started running around like a maniac, playing with the other dogs. She still has the limp — I think she has cartilage damage — but she doesn't appear to be in pain. I tried a bracelet myself because I have damage to two discs in my back. I don't think it works for me, but on her it's been fantastic."

## **PEDDLE, an eight-year-old male terrier**

Medical History: "When we got Peddle (left) three years ago he was very thin and very stiff," says his owner, Jane Buck from St John's Wood. "I take Peddle on long walks and one day he came back crippled. The vet took an X-ray of him and found he had hip displacement — where the ball and socket of his hip don't fit properly. He couldn't get up the stairs and would yelp with pain. The vet prescribed anti-inflammatory tablets and gave him a course of injections to strengthen the joint. He told me

that this would probably need repeating because it is a degenerative disease. He got a little better as long as he didn't overdo it when outside. Peddle loves to run around and jump, and while out he could do so without pain, but afterwards he wouldn't be able to stand up. He would lie down and make a yelping noise. He would get really distressed and his tail would be tucked between his legs. I heard about the magnetic chains by word of mouth and I am open-minded about these things. I got one for him 18 months ago and gradually he started doing everything he used to — now he runs fast and jumps ... and he doesn't seize up afterwards. He seems a much younger dog — better than when we first got him — he's more lively. And we've not had to see the vet again."

● Mike Turner, Turner and Cheal, 252 Whitchurch Lane, Edgware HA8 6QH 020 8952 4881.

Charles Papapetrou: Primrose Hill Pet Clinic, 138 Gloucester Avenue, London NW1 1JA 0207 586 8806.

Magna Therapy dog chains cost £51.99, including p&p. For further details, write to Magna Jewellery Ltd, Department ES, PO Box 338, Edgware, Middlesex HA8 8HZ.



A new spring in her step: Nattie with owner Tina Holmes