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BEING NEGATIVE

When Eduardo Romero --*"El Gato"* – recently prevailed at the Champions Tour's Jeld-Wen Tradition, it was his first victory on American soil and his first major. Though he'd been playing well, he had qualified for the event based solely on a runner-up finish at the Senior British Open. Most people probably didn't predict he'd be hoisting the winner's trophy come Sunday afternoon -- except for Romero himself, that is.

"*Today before I start, I said, 'This is my tournament,"* he said in a post-round interview. After charging into a tie for the lead from five shots back, he sank a birdie putt on the first hole of a sudden-death playoff with Lonnie Nielson to seal the victory. Even Nielson noted Romero's confidence, saying, "*He's got it all and he's got no fear. He shoots at every pin. He doesn't care if there's water next to it."*

And while Romero was raising that trophy, the bright blue and white bracelet he was sporting on his right wrist was very noticeable. The bracelet, called the *Trion:Z®*, according to its manufacturer, enhances the release of *negative ions* and is worn by more than 170 players on all professional golf tours. Launched at the PGA Merchandise show earlier this year, it was actually named one of the top-ten products at the show.

With so much physical skill at the professional level of golf, every player is constantly looking for an advantage, an edge that will improve performance in order to shave a stroke or two from their score. This can easily be the difference between winning and finishing back in the pack. Whether it's a strange putting grip such as the "claw", a new swing thought, or a negatively charged ionic bracelet, touring pros will seemingly try almost anything to get the ball into the hole in fewer strokes.

Indeed, these body adornments have become an extremely common sight on all the professional golf tours, as well as in other professional sports. In addition to the *Trion:Z®,* which also incorporates magnets into its bracelets, some other popular brands of ionic jewelry on tour are the *Q-Link®*, a necklace endorsed by such players as Mark Calcavecchia, Bruce Fleisher, Charles Howell III, and Ted Purdy, as well as the *Q-Ray®*, which makes bracelets and necklaces, and *Titan Rules®,* makers of bracelets and necklaces – even putter grips!

The theory behind these products is based on the presence of negative (*yin*) and positive (*yang*) ions in and around our bodies that exist in a *biofield* and are in a continuous state of flow. This energy field, or *chi*, can become unbalanced, causing interrupted flow, due to the incessant bombardment of our bodies by *positive ions* around us. These positive ions apparently can emanate from computer monitors, cell phones, and other electronic equipment, as well as physical and emotional stress -- even UV radiation. As a result, believers say, we suffer from fatigue, headaches, anxiety, lack of focus, and muscle and joint aches.

Conversely, *negative ions* are found naturally in waterfalls, rainstorms, plants, and forests – things that generally make us feel calm and relaxed. Largely depleted in modern urban areas, makers of these negatively charged ionic bracelets and necklaces claim that, by variable methods, they will increase the level of negative ions in and around your body, resulting in improved bioelectrical balance between the negative and positive ions. This will allow your body to perform to its fullest potential, and is similar to the theory behind the ancient Eastern practice of *acupuncture*.

But, do these devices actually work, as their manufacturers claim? The answer, unfortunately, is not clear-cut. First of all, these biomagnetic energy fields are difficult, if not impossible, to detect and measure, making objective comparisons before and after wearing them quite challenging Second, there has been *very* little scientific evidence-based research of human subjects testing either the theory behind or the effectiveness of these items.

The only medical study to date is from the Mayo Clinic in 2002, entitled the *"Effect of 'Ionized' Wrist Bracelets on Musculoskeletal Pain: A Randomized, Double-Blind, Placebo-Controlled Trial."* In comparing pain levels using a numerical pain scale among participants before and after wearing a *Q-Ray®* brand bracelet for four weeks, there was no significant difference found between its wearers and those wearing a *placebo*, or similar looking plain bracelet not "ionically charged." Interestingly, though, nearly *all* people, including placebo wearers, experienced improvement in their pain!

People wanting to dispute the results of this study would point out that it wasn't carried out for a long enough period of time, and/or that it didn't test a sufficiently large number of subjects. What's more, it only assessed "pain reduction," not any of the other reported beneficial effects, such as fatigue or stress reduction. Finally, they would point out that the ionic bracelets, in the final analysis, *were* actually shown to work!

So what's the verdict? Though there are many skeptics, many people believe the claims made by the companies who manufacture these ionic bracelets and necklaces, reporting a decrease in chronic pain and stress, as well as improved concentration, focus, and energy. Whether this is really a direct effect of these products or placebo is difficult to know. Many would say it doesn't matter.

The fact is that treatment of chronic medical issues such as pain and fatigue, as well as emotional issues such as stress and poor focus, are often complex. Their treatment commonly requires a multifaceted approach, addressing the problem using several different methods. And importantly, the public's interest in and use of alternative/complimentary medicine and "unconventional" treatments continues to skyrocket, despite the fact that many of these methods have not been adequately tested.

It's not traditional "medicine," but talk to your doctor if you're contemplating using these items. Ionic therapy *alone* probably poses no harmful risks. And, if it doesn't help you sink that three footer, it *may* make it less painful, physically and emotionally, when you miss!