

The Science of Sport
Scientific comment and analysis of sporting performance
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[Power balance bracelets: "No credible scientific evidence"](#)

Power balance: "We admit that there is no credible scientific evidence that supports our claims"

The truth is, if you're reading this site, and do so regularly, then the above statement will come as no surprise. It shouldn't, given what history has shown us about companies that make such claims about products ranging from supplements to holographic stickers.



What is different is that the above quote comes directly from Power Balance, who are responsible for making the now ubiquitous holographic bracelets that are worn by celebrities, sports stars, and members of the public in such huge numbers that if you go down to your local gym and you DON'T have one, you feel like the odd one out.

Somebody is making a fortune of what is basically a placebo effect, a psychological benefit of wearing a bracelet that initially claimed to harness the body's natural energy field to improve. From their website, it "optimizes the body's natural energy flow", which improves strength, endurance and flexibility. All without evidence of course. And I would be the first to point out that the absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of the absence of an effect.

However, in this case, the fact that not a single study exists is very telling. Why? Because proving whether these gimmicks work is so simple that a high-school student could conduct the study. Yet nothing has emerged. And that's because there is no incentive to provide the science - the science does not matter, the marketing does, and so Power Balance has invested into celebrity endorsement and viral marketing, not research. With good reason - research destroys their credibility. I'll discuss this in much more detail in a post early next week.

For today, just the report on the findings of the Commission. Below is the statement they issued in response to an investigation from Australia's Competition and Consumer Commission, which exposed them as a sham. The huge verdict resulted in Power Balance admitting that they had no evidence, that they had misled consumers, and promising to refund customers who feel misled by the advertising claims. The statement below will appear in 20 magazines in Australia. I hope that this is the catalyst for more of the same around the world.

Many of you will no doubt be thinking "so what. If it's a placebo effect, it doesn't matter, as long as it works". And this is a topic certainly worth discussing. But that's for another time, so join me next week when I'll look a little more closely at Power Balance bracelets, some of the claims they made, and how the lack of science was part of the strategy. It's a great case study in the clash of incentives between marketing and credibility, and should stimulate some good discussion.

And finally, I have no objection to members of the public, celebrities and even individual sportspeople wearing the bracelet. However, if you are a sports scientist, a personal trainer or biokineticist/strength and conditioning coach who works with athletes and sports teams, and you wear this bracelet, then you are unwittingly (or perhaps knowingly) endorsing the sham "science". After all, all you have is your scientific "credibility" - it is your value to your athletes and clients. So rather than simply following the herd, think that perhaps your endorsement strips away your own credibility.