

In 2010, famous athletes Shaquille O’Neal and David Beckham took part in a new fad for boosting athletic performance. They wore the Power Balance bracelet. Kate Middleton, now the wife of Prince William, also wore the bracelet. The makers claimed that the bracelet improved energy and balance. However, an **investigation** of the product revealed that it did not have any real effect. In 2011, the company had to pay millions of dollars in a settlement with unhappy customers.

### Snake Oil Salesman

In the 1800s, railroad workers from China used oil made from Chinese water snakes to relieve pain. This remedy may have brought some relief to the sore muscles of railroad workers.

As a result, hundreds of “snake oil salesmen”

displayed their version of snake oil throughout the country. The claims of these products were not **testable** at the time. There was no way for people to **determine** whether they contained any oil from the Chinese water snake. By the time their customers realized that the product was a scam, the snake oil salesman was on his way to a new town!



In 1906, the government passed a law to protect people from ineffective or dangerous products. Businesses must now **conduct** multiple trials on certain health products to demonstrate that they are safe and effective. This law improved safety initially, but now businesses have figured out ways to evade the law by relabeling products without health claims.

### Buyer Beware

Some companies still take advantage of people. They know that many people will spend money on products that promise to make them look and feel better. From **devices** for flatter stomachs to cures for acne, many of these advertised products are no more effective than the Power Balance bracelet. People continue to get scammed by modern-day snake oil salesmen. Some people think that the government needs to take a larger role in protecting people from these “miracle cures.”

Others think that companies should be able to do what they want in order to sell their products. They think that consumers are responsible for **determining** if a product’s claim is realistic. They believe that people are to blame if they buy a product that claims to be a miracle cure.

What do you think? Do you believe that the government needs to take a larger role in protecting people from modern-day snake oil salesmen? Or do you think that businesses should be able to make money by selling “miracle cures”?