

Ice & Heat Therapy

Ice & heat can be used to ease pain, reduce swelling & relax muscles

Ice and heat work by increasing the body's circulation but both need to be used with caution as they can cause burns to the skin.

DO NOT use heat or ice if you have:

- Blood/circulation problems
- A heart condition & you are applying the heat/ice to the upper part of your body
- Broken/thin skin or an unhealed wound in the area where you are applying the heat/ice.
- Reduced skin sensation.
- A patch which delivers drugs into your system in the area you are applying heat/ice
- Unstable medical conditions e.g. diabetes, epilepsy
- If you are unsure if it is safe to apply this treatment please seek the advice of your physiotherapist/doctor.

Caution:- if you have diabetes take extra care when applying heat or ice especially to your legs, monitor your skin during treatment on a frequent basis

ICE

Can be beneficial for recent injuries or hot and swollen joints. Gel ice packs, crushed ice (packs of frozen peas) an ice bath (ice in water), or direct ice massage are good ways to apply ice treatment. Do not apply hard inflexible freezer packs as they increase the risk of ice burns

Ice packs

- When applying ice packs, a wet thin cloth should always be applied over the area or around the ice pack to prevent ice burns.
- Apply the ice over the area for 10-15 minutes, checking the skin colour under the ice pack at least once during that time. The area should feel very cold and may feel numb / uncomfortable. The area should be very pink when checked, and should never have a bluish tinge.
- The ice pack can be re-applied every 2 hours.

Ice baths can be used for hands and feet.

- Place ice cubes into a bowl of cold water & place your hand or foot into the water for 1 minute if possible.
- Remove your limb from the water for 1 minute & then place into the water again.
- Repeat up to 10 times.
- This whole process can be repeated every 2 hours

Ice massage may be performed over smaller areas of discomfort.

- Prepare the skin by applying a small amount of oil e.g. olive/vegetable oil on the area first to prevent the ice sticking.
- Hold an ice cube in a cloth or handkerchief, rub the ice over the area for up to two minutes at a time. After a one or two minute rest period, this can then be repeated again.
- You may need an extra towel to keep surrounding clothes dry as the ice will melt during this process.
- This whole process can be repeated every 2 hours

HEAT

Heat can be beneficial for joints which are stiff & painful or muscles which feel tight & cramped. Hot water bottles and wheat bags are good ways to apply heat.

Heat pack - Hot water bottles and wheat bags

- **Hot water bottles should never be applied directly to the skin.** These should be wrapped in a towel. When filling the hot water bottle **DO NOT** overfill or use boiling water
- **Wheat bags** follow the manufacturers instructions for heating
- Place the heat pack over the area to be treated. **DO NOT** lie, sit or sleep on the heat pack, this will increase the risk of a burn.
- Heat should be applied for a period of 15 to 30 minutes and can be re-applied every 2 hours.
- If the area starts to feel too warm place an extra towel between the heat pack and your skin to reduce the temperature.

CONTRAST BATHING

Can be particularly useful for treating pain and swelling

For use on hands and feet:-

- Fill one deep bowl with warm water (bath temperature) & one with cold water (do not add ice).
- Put the affected limb in warm water for one minute then remove and place into cold water for one minute.
- Repeat this for 10 minutes (5 times into WARM water & 5 times into COLD water).
- This can be repeated every 2 hours

For all other Joints :- follow the same time scales as above, but use Ice packs and Heat packs as described previously