



When To Treat Your Pain With Heat or Ice

Heat and cold are used frequently to relieve pain in people who have arthritis or musculoskeletal injuries. Heat produces many benefits including an increase in blood flow, a sedative effect on pain nerve endings, and the relaxation of muscles around a joint. Heating pads, hot showers, warm tub baths, or whirlpools (98 to 102 degrees F) are good sources of heat.

Using cold helps to control inflammation and swelling, relieve pain, and reduce muscle spasm. A crushed ice pack, commercial cold pack, or a bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in a paper towel are good sources of cold. You can make a cold pack at home by filling a one gallon, heavy-duty, zip-lock plastic bag with 2-1/4 cups water and 3/4 cup rubbing alcohol (also called 70% isopropyl alcohol), enclosing that bag in another bag to guard against leaks, and putting it in the freezer for 4 to 6 hours. Cold applications should be used for 10 to 20 minutes.

When To Use Heat:

1. For joints or muscles that are stiff.
2. For relief of pain or muscle spasm.
3. Prior to an exercise session.

When To Use Cold:

1. In acute inflammation (noted by heat, redness, and swelling).
2. For relief of pain and muscle spasm.
3. After an exercise session.
4. If the addition of heat to a joint or muscle increases pain or swelling.

Whether you use heat or cold, always protect the skin. Always place adequate toweling between your skin and a heating pad or cold pack. Do not apply heat or cold for longer than 20 minutes at a time. Never fall asleep while lying on a heating pad or using an ice pack. Tissue damage (i.e. burns or frostbite) can result. Wait at least one hour before reapplying heat or cold.

If you have questions about whether you should use heat or cold, simply call us at (561) 733 7677 to speak with a therapist