



Tips from the Specialists

When to use ICE vs. HEAT

By Karen Campion, DC

ICE is always used for any ACUTE (new) injury. There is normally lots of swelling initially, and it can continue for days or weeks following the injury. ICE is always the first choice and usually extends for more than 24hrs after the injury.

Frequency of ICE should be 20min./hour for the 1ST three days. Following the initial 3 days, ICE 20min. at least 4 to 5 times a day. This is especially important if your injury is to the lower extremity (Knees, Ankles, Feet). These are weight bearing joints, and they can swell much quicker and longer. Ice is sometimes used for several weeks. ALWAYS WRAP THE ICE PACK IN A TOWEL BEFORE APPLYING IT TO THE AREA OF INJURY.

HEAT is used for CHRONIC conditions like some forms of arthritis, joint stiffness, and general muscle soreness NOT related to a NEW injury or SPRAIN/STRAIN. MOIST HEAT is better than a DRY HEATING pad. Soaking the area in a Whirlpool tub or hot tub for 15min is usually just right. An electric moist heating pad is another option, and they can usually be found at any local drug store.

Frequency of MOIST HEAT should NOT exceed 15 min. per application NEVER USE ANY ELECTRICAL HEATING PAD IN BED. Use of an electric heating pad in bed can cause tissue burns or EXCESS INFLAMMATION of the area being treated. Excess Inflammation can occur because the circulation of blood and other nutrients to an already swollen area is INCREASED. This can make you very very STIFF, and it can cause your range of motion to be greatly decreased. REMEMBER, WHEN IN DOUBT, ICE IS ALWAYS SAFER THAN ANY HEAT APPLICATION FOR A NEW INJURY OR PROBLEM.

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