

Ice and Heat Therapy for Joints

Ice and heat therapy can be effective ways to alleviate joint pain, swelling, and stiffness, but when should you use ice and/or heat therapy?

Ice therapy can help reduce joint pain, swelling, and inflammation after an injury or vigorous physical activity. When a cold pack or ice is applied to a joint, blood flow to the joint is decreased, which helps to reduce inflammation and swelling. A cold pack can also temporarily reduce pain by distracting the brain with “cold” feelings rather than pain. To safely use cold therapy, place a dry cloth or towel as a barrier between your skin and the cold pack and limit use to 15 minutes. This can be repeated multiple times per day, as needed. For example, apply the cold pack for 15 minutes, then take it off for 15 minutes, then put it back on for 15 minutes (and repeat).

Heat therapy can help warm up joints before activity by reducing muscle and joint stiffness and increasing joint lubrication. When a heat pack is applied to a joint, the increased blood flow to the joint and muscles aids in healing by delivering oxygen and nutrients to the area. The warmth of the heat pack makes the muscles and joints more flexible and helps reduce pain. To safely use heat therapy, place a dry cloth or towel as a barrier between your skin and the heat pack and limit use to 15-20 minutes.

Using ice and heat therapy is an inexpensive way to take action to reduce joint pain!



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