

Orthopaedic Connection

Hot or Cold or Both?

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

The majority of people are confused about which to use and when. I'll try not to add to the confusion. OK let's go.

Heat Can Help

Heat works by increasing blood flow to the painful area. Increased blood flow helps relax tight muscles in the painful, possibly cramping muscles.

Heat helps with arthritis pain that is pain not accompanied by swelling. In other words, the area "just hurts". Heat can aggravate an acute injury by increasing the swelling.

- Apply heat up to 15 minutes at a time
- Use 2 or 3 times per day
- Not too hot and don't lie on the heating pad
- Place it over the area to be heated

Ice For Swelling, Inflammation

Cold works to treat the inflammation caused by acute injuries – sprains, muscle strains.

Applying cold will help reduce swelling by constricting the blood vessels. Ice the affected area as soon as you can and elevate it as well.

- Apply cold for 15 minutes at least 4 times per day for the first 48 hours
- Cold used too long causes tissue damage
- Don't apply ice directly to the skin. Cover skin first with a dry wash cloth.

When to Alternate

If 48 hours has passed and swelling has decreased, either therapy may be helpful to you and alternating heat and cold has the most effect. Heat first. Then ice if you are alternating. You can do this 4 or more times per day.

Added Relief

Using heat or cold or alternating them is effective in relieving pain. You can also pair heat and cold with nonprescription pain relievers for greater pain relief if necessary.

Heat Patches Or Wraps

There are specially designed heat patches or wraps that can be applied to reduce pain and stiffness.

These products create a chemical reaction to produce heat. I think they work best on the back or knee, but could be used anywhere.

They provide low level of heat so they can be used for an extended time – up to 8 hours. Heat patches can cause skin irritation in some patients and they are expensive.

Headaches

Apply a warm pack to the neck and back of the head for 5 minutes. Then use a cold compress on the forehead and temples for a few minutes. OK to repeat as needed.

My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website.

I sincerely appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients present and future and welcome all newcomers!

Besides what you read today there is a huge treasure trove of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information at www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It contains the Website Library, Your Orthopaedic Connection and complete archive of every GCH article I have written.

I specialize in you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush