

Ice or Heat?

When to apply ice to an injury and when to apply heat is confusing for some people. Since the application of heat in the early stages of injury can actually cause more swelling, it is important to know the appropriate time to use heat and ice to help recover.

ICE

- Causes blood vessels to constrict, reducing swelling in an acute injury thus decreasing pain and speeding up the healing process.
- Reduces the sensation of pain.
- Reduces muscle spasm.
- Application of ice directly to the skin can be uncomfortable at first.
- After about 7 minutes the area becomes numb and pain is reduced.
- Apply directly to the skin or over a wet towel if too cold.
- Elevate the injured body part above the heart.
- Leave in place for 20 minutes.
- Repeat application of ice every one and a half to two hours for the first couple of days following injury or as long as swelling, redness or heat/warmth are present around the injured area

Do not use ice for people with sensitive skin or those with known skin allergies. When using frozen gel packs, place over a wet elastic wrap or wet towel. Never apply directly to the skin which may be damaged due to the extremely low temperature of the packs.

HEAT

- Can be used on chronic injuries when there is no swelling present.
- May aid healing process in chronic injuries by increasing the amount of blood to the area.
- Causes blood vessels to enlarge, increasing swelling in an acute injury thus increasing pain and lengthening the healing process
- Best treatment for injuries without swelling, redness, warmth, and acute pain.
- This could be as long as a few days to several weeks after injury, depending on injury severity.
- Reduces muscle spasm.

- Heat should be left in place for only 15-20 minutes.
- Apply injured area with a heating pad, including cover or liquid heated pad with cover.

Courtesy of the National Center for Sports Safety (NCSS). NCSS was founded to promote the importance of injury prevention and safety on all levels of youth sports through education and research. The NCSS focuses on decreasing the number and/or severity of injuries through developing and teaching sports safety courses and collecting, analyzing and researching injury data. For more visit, <http://www.sportssafety.org/>