

TIPS FOR USING COLD AND HEAT THERAPY AT HOME

Whether you've sprained your ankle in a triathlon or pulled a muscle playing touch football with your kids, effective pain relief is as near as your freezer or microwave. Your doctor may prescribe cold and/or heat therapy as part of your treatment plan. Here are some convenient ways to follow your doctor's plan at home.

KEEPING IT COOL

-- Wrap a bag of frozen vegetables or crushed ice in a washcloth or plastic bag. Do not apply this directly to your skin, or frostbite may occur. Always place a thin towel, such as a gym or dish towel, between the "ice pack" and your skin.

-- Use caution when applying the ice pack to the elbow, the wrist, or the outer side of the knee. These areas are vulnerable to cold-related nerve injury.

-- Keep the ice pack on the painful area for 20 to 30 minutes. Stop the treatment if at any point the area being cooled feels "hot." Be sure to wait at least 2 hours between treatments to allow adequate time for rewarming.

--For maximum relief, apply the ice pack at least 3 or 4 times a day. You may use it as often as you wish provided you observe the time limit of 2 hours between treatments.

PUTTING ON THE HEAT

-- To avoid burns, use a moist heating pad with an activation switch, which delivers heat only when the switch is depressed. Keep the heating pad on the painful area for 20 to 30 minutes. Repeat the treatment no more often than once every 2 hours.

-- Avoid lying directly on the heating pad. Also, do not use a rubber band or other device to depress the activation switch. This is to reduce the risk of burn injury if you fall asleep with the pad on.

-- If you do not have a moist heating pad at home, here is a safe, effective alternative. Heat a damp towel in a microwave oven for 1 to 2 minutes. Watch the "cooking" towel carefully to make sure it does not catch fire. Remove the towel from the oven carefully to avoid steam burns.

-- Wrap the damp, heated towel in a dry towel, and place it on the painful area for about 20 minutes. Since the heated towel cools off with time, you do not have to worry about being burned—even if you fall asleep during the treatment.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOU:
