

Ice or Heat Brian Kenney

We have all experienced swelling, inflammation and general aches and pains in our muscles and joints. There are so many different locations and way's that people hurt themselves, knowing weather to use ice or heat becomes very confusing and turns into a guessing game. The results from guessing incorrectly can spell disaster to your recovery and prolong treatment to injuries. This article focuses on how to treat different injuries and inexpensive ways to make your own heat and ice packs from items you likely have around the house somewhere. My goal is to provide up to date information from medical research and interviews with different folks in the rehabilitation profession. We all have great athletic trainers at practice and we wish we could send them home with our kids when they get hurt in practices or at games. This is not very realistic and instead, we need to take the treatment plans they give us and use some creativity to implement them.

Acute and Chronic Injuries

There are two basic types of injuries: acute and chronic. Acute injuries are sudden, sharp, traumatic injuries that occur immediately (or within hours) and cause pain (possibly severe pain). Most often acute injuries result from some sort of impact or trauma such as a fall, sprain, or collision and it's pretty obvious what caused the injury.

Acute injuries also elicit common signs and symptoms; such as pain, tenderness, redness, skin that is warm to the touch, swelling and inflammation. If you have swelling, you have an acute injury.

Chronic injuries, on the other hand, can be subtle and slow to develop. They sometimes come and go, and may cause dull pain or soreness. They are often the result of overuse, but sometimes

develop when an acute injury is not properly treated and doesn't heal.

Cold Therapy

Cold therapy with ice is the best immediate treatment for acute injuries because it reduces swelling and pain. Ice is a vaso-constrictor (it causes the blood vessels to narrow) and it limits internal bleeding at the injury site. Apply ice (wrapped in a thin towel for comfort) to the affected area for 10 to 15 minutes at a time. Allow the skin temperature to return to normal before icing a second or third time. You can ice an acute injury several times a day for up to three days.

Cold therapy is also helpful in treating some overuse injuries or chronic pain that persists over a longer period of time. An individual, for example who has chronic knee pain that increases after running, may want to ice the injured area after each run to reduce or prevent inflammation. It's not helpful to ice a chronic injury before exercise. The best way to ice an injury is with a high quality ice pack that conforms to the body part being iced.

Heat Therapy

Heat is generally used for chronic injuries or injuries that have no inflammation or swelling. Sore, stiff, nagging muscle or joint pain is ideal for the use of heat therapy. Athletes with chronic pain or injuries may use heat therapy before exercise to increase the elasticity of joint connective tissues and to stimulate blood flow. Heat can also help relax tight or spasmed muscles. Don't apply heat after exercise. After a workout, ice is the better choice on a chronic injury.

Directions to make a gelatin ice pack:

Step 1 – In a zip lock freezer bag mix the following ingredients –

- 3 cups of water
- 1 cup of rubbing alcohol / isopropyl alcohol

Note: for extra protection add an extra zip lock bag

Step 2 – Freeze the bag overnight and when you need an ice bag that feels like a gel pack, you will have one at your fingertips. Repeat the freezing process for additional uses.

When taking ice packs from freezer to use, wrap in towel first before applying to body. If ice packs freeze too hard and aren't slushy, simply allow the ice to melt in bag then add more rubbing alcohol

Directions to make a heating pad out of an old sock:

Step 1 – Find a long pair of old socks (preferably some heavier material)

Step 2 – Fill the sock with white or grain rice – place enough rice in the sock that it is almost full with just enough room to tie it off at the end. You can also use corn in replacement of rice.

Step 3 – After you tie off the end of the sock when it is filled with rice, mark the date you made the sock with a black permanent marker (I do this simply to know when I started to use it). A sock is usually only good for 4-6 months and then it begins to deteriorate.

Step 4 – Place the sock in a microwave oven and you have an instant heat pack for your neck, lower back and several other places on the body that may need heat related therapy.

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