

ICE PACKS AND HEATING PADS: WHEN, WHY, WHAT AND HOW!

Heat increases circulation, relaxes muscles and softens tissue. **Heat is most useful for strained muscles, chronic stiffness, softening scar tissue and before stretching.** Do not use heat on injuries less than three days old or if the area is painful to pressure. Heat increases swelling and, although it feels good while on, it will make acute injuries more painful in the long run and delay healing.

Heat can be used in many forms. Hot baths, electric heating pads, hot water bottle, hot shower, heat lamp...etc. are all useful ways of using heat. Apply heat to any one area for no more than 15 minutes each hour.

Cold decreases circulation, constricts blood vessels and makes tissues more solid. **Cold is used primarily to reduce swelling and pain.** When in doubt whether to use heat or cold **try cold first.** The rule of thumb is to use cold therapy the first three days following an injury. Another rule of thumb is to use it whenever an area is tender to touch.

Crushed ice in a baggy, a soft reusable ice pack, frozen vegetables in a bag or just a cool damp cloth can be used to apply cold therapy. For maximum effect wrap the ice pack in a damp towel before applying. Apply cold to the painful area for ten to fifteen minutes per hour. If the area becomes numb remove the cold immediately even if the time is not up. Over chilling can lead to frostbite and increased swelling.