When to Use Cold or Heat Therapy

Instructions for Cold Therapy, also known as Cryotherapy

For Acute Injuries, when you have sharp, stabbing or shooting pain, swelling and joint pain, start with only using cold, not heat, to decrease your pain and speed up your recovery.

Do not use heat for the 1st 24 hours because even though heat may feel good, it may significantly worsen your swelling + will not decrease the inflammation.

As above, Cold is a better choice when acute pain and muscle spasm are severe.

- Apply your Cold Pack for 20 minutes, then do not apply more cold to that area for 40 minutes.
- Repeat every hour for 3 more hours.
- Then take a 2-hour break. You may repeat this cold therapy as needed.
- DO NOT apply ice directly to the skin, as this could damage your skin and deeper tissues. A reusable cold pack is recommended. If you don’t have a reusable ice pack, you can use a zippered bag with a
A mix of ice cubes and water. You may want to put a thin, moist towel between the ice pack and your skin.

**CAUTION:** Using ice constantly for hours may cause decreased blood flow to the area and may result in skin sloughing, sores, worsening symptoms, and adverse reactions. You should not apply cold to a joint that is not moving well and stiff.

**Avoid cold therapy if you have:**

**Skin Issues or Open wounds.** Heat may increase the risk of infection, especially if one has a sunburn, scrapes, cuts, burns, cysts, boils, and cause bleeding.

**Heart and Circulatory Conditions.** Those with poor circulation, low blood pressure, or cardiac conditions may not respond well to extreme cold.

**Cold urticaria.** After cold exposure, hives may appear with this condition.

**Peripheral and Diabetic Neuropathy.** People with neuropathy can’t feel pain as well as others, so they could injure their skin by the application of cold without knowing it.

**Cryoglobulinemia, Hemoglobinuria and Raynaud’s Syndrome.** Cold therapy can affect these conditions adversely. With colder temperatures, these conditions frequently result in constricted blood vessels.

**Instructions for Heat Therapy**

You can apply heat after 24 hours of acute pain or injury and for ongoing + chronic pain, muscle spasms + poor circulation.

- Apply heat for 20 minutes at a time, then not for the next 40 minutes.

- You may continue this every hour for 3 more hours.
• Then take a 2-hour break. Repeat as needed.

• Use a reusable microwavable hot pack. Follow the manufacturer’s recommended heating instructions (microwave intensity may vary). If moist heat is recommended or preferred, 1st heat your pack, then wet the plush side with warm water before applying.

CAUTION: Be very careful if you choose to use an electric heating pad, as they commonly cause burns when set too high and applied too long. Do not ever go to sleep with an electric heating pad on your skin, as it can cause severe burns, skin ulcers, infection and other adverse reactions.

You should not apply heat to a joint that is already hot, red, and/or irritated.

There are some situations when heat therapy is not recommended. Avoid if you have:

Acute Injuries. Injuries that have occurred recently, within the last day, should not be treated with heat therapy, because of heat swelling and inflammation. Ice is best the 1st day after injury, after which time heat or contrast therapy can be used.

Skin issues or Open wounds. Heat may increase the risk of infection, especially if one has a sunburn, scrapes, cuts, burns, cysts, boils, and cause bleeding.

Circulatory and Heart Conditions. Those with poor circulation, low blood pressure, or heart conditions may not respond well to extreme heat.

Alternating Cold and Hot Therapy, also known as Contrast Therapy
You can alternate cold and hot therapy 24 hours after an injury, and for ongoing and chronic pain, tense and tight muscles with spasm as well as for swelling and joint pain. Studies have shown the initial cold, followed by heat therapy was more beneficial on pain associated with delayed onset muscle soreness with loss off motion than using only using superficial heat.

Lots of situations can benefit from Contrast therapy, including:
• Sprains and strains of the neck, back, shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand, hip, thigh, knee, calf, ankle and foot
• Swelling- after the 1st 24-hour, acute stage
• Spasms of the muscles
• Achy Joints
• Strain injuries that are repetitive, such as tennis elbow or tendonitis
• Injuries that are Sports or work related
• Chronic conditions that flare-up, such as fibromyalgia or arthritis
• Cancer related pain
• Any swelling or aching related to injuries

Contrast therapy may or may not help relieve chronic lower back pain. Many sufferers find they enjoy greater relief from heat pack and wraps.

Alternating Hot and Cold therapy can be done easily and inexpensively at home.

• As above, apply your cold pack for 20 minutes, then follow that with a heat pack as instructed above for 20 minutes.
• Take a 30-minute break without ice or heat.
• Repeat for 3 hours in a row
• Then, take a 2-hour break.

CAUTION: Contrast therapy should be avoided in the following situations:

Acute Injuries. In the 1st day after injury, Cold therapy is optimal. Then after the 1st day, Contrast therapy may be preferred.
Because heat can increase swelling and inflammation, with injuries within the previous 24 hours, you don’t want to use contrast therapy, where heat and cold are both used, for recent injuries.

**Skin issues such as an open wound.** Heat may increase the risk of infection, especially if one has a sunburn, scrapes, cuts, burns, cysts, boils, or conditions that cause bleeding.

**Heart and Circulatory conditions.** Those with poor circulation, low blood pressure, or heart conditions may not respond well to extreme cold or heat.

**Cold urticaria.** After cold exposure, hives may appear with this condition.

**Infection or Fever.** Don’t use heat therapy for patients who have a fever, feel warm, or have other signs of infection.

**Diabetic and Peripheral Neuropathy.** People with neuropathy can’t feel pain as well as others, so they could injure their skin by the application of cold and/or heat without knowing it.

**Cryoglobulinemia, Hemoglobinuria + Raynaud’s syndrome.** Cold therapy can affect these conditions adversely. With colder temperatures, these conditions frequently result in constricted blood vessels.

This is not a complete list of medical conditions that may cause concerns. Consult your physician before using cold and heat therapy to determine the best course of treatment for you. Combining exercises, medication and this therapy may be advisable to help give you get faster and better pain relief.

The risk of freezing or burning yourself is the main concern. Always test the temperature briefly before applying a hot or cold pack, and only use cold and hot temperatures that are tolerable to you.

Be aware of changes in skin color. Cold or warm temperatures may turn your skin bright red. Skin that is being burned may show up as a dark red color.