

# Ice V's Heat for Injuries

It is often difficult for patients to determine whether ice or heat treatment is appropriate for an injury. Whilst heat often provides immediate comfort and relief, it may actually be causing more harm than good. Likewise, incorrect use of ice may also prolong injury recovery.

If used correctly, however, appropriate ice and heat treatment can help to reduce bleeding, inflammation, swelling, muscle spasm and pain following injury. Ice and heat treatment can also accelerate healing and hasten injury recovery.

## ***How is ice treatment beneficial?***

Ice treatment for injuries helps to reduce blood flow to the affected region. This is beneficial in the inflammatory phase of an injury (the first 72 hours following injury or injury aggravation) as it helps to reduce the amount of inflammation and swelling that accumulates in the injured region. Ice treatment may also help to reduce pain and muscle spasm.

In addition to ice treatment, further measures to reduce blood flow to the affected region are indicated in the first 72 hours following injury and should comprise: Rest from aggravating activities, elevation of the injured part above the level of your heart and the use of a compression bandage (R.I.C.E.).

## ***When should I use ice?***

Ice treatment should be used for 20 minutes every 2 hours during the inflammatory phase of an injury (first 72 hours following injury or injury aggravation). Since inflammation normally presents as a pain or ache that increases with rest (especially first thing in the morning) and reduces with movement or a hot shower, we can use these symptoms as a guide for the indication of ice treatment.

Therefore, ice should be used for a minimum of 72 hours following injury AND until you have no achiness upon waking in the morning.



### ***How is heat treatment beneficial?***

Heat treatment increases blood flow to the affected region. This is beneficial after the inflammatory phase of an injury, since more blood flow means more nutrients and oxygen are transported to damaged tissue, therefore speeding healing. Heat can also help to reduce pain and muscle spasm as well as reduce muscle tightness and joint stiffness.

If used during the inflammatory phase (first three days), heat treatment may increase inflammation and swelling, and can prolong injury recovery.



Fig. 2(a) Wheat Heat pack



Fig. 2(b) Instant Heat Pack

### ***When should I use heat?***

Heat can be used to speed injury healing once the injury has completed the inflammatory phase. This is usually three days following injury, however, if the injured region is re-aggravated, further inflammation may occur.

As a general rule, heat treatment should only be used after the initial 72 hour period following an injury. In addition, heat should only be used provided there are no inflammatory symptoms (such as pain at rest and achiness upon waking in the morning that eases with movement).

### ***How do I use heat?***

Apply a heat pack for 10 – 30 minutes at a comfortable warmth to the injured area.

It is recommended that this treatment is repeated 2 – 5 times daily or as required and should ideally be used before exercise.

Ensure your heat pack is not hot enough to cause a burn. Wrapping your heat pack in towels can help to reduce the temperature.

***For further information or to purchase a contoured heat pack contact Bodysmart.***