

Patient Information

Physiotherapy

Heat and cold therapy

Your physiotherapist has advised you to use heat and cold therapy at home. This information explains the benefits of this treatment and how to apply it safely.

This therapy may not be suitable for you. Tell your therapist if you have any of the following:

- A heart condition, such as angina
- Peripheral vascular disease
- Scar tissue
- High temperature / acute infection
- Heart disease
- Insensitivity to hot / cold
- Deep X-ray therapy as treatment
- Skin conditions such as: Dermatitis, eczema, broken skin.
- Cold sensitivity (rash / itching)
- Poor circulation
- History of cancer or tumour



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Benefits of therapy

Heat therapy can

- Reduce pain
- Ease stiffness
- Warm up the muscles, for example before exercise
- Increase muscle relaxation / decrease in muscle spasm
- Ease stiffness
- Increase circulation

Cold Therapy can

- Reduce swelling
- Reduce pain
- Decrease bleeding

How to make ice packs

Ice packs can be made from ice cubes in a plastic bag wrapped in a towel or pillowcase. You can also use a packet of frozen peas, wrapped in a towel or pillowcase to protect your skin.

How to apply safely

Heat therapy

- **Never use boiling water**
- Make sure the hot water bottle / wheat pack is wrapped in towelling and has enough layers to avoid burns
- If using hot water in a bowl, the temperature should be between 40 and 45°C
- Do not go to sleep whilst using heat treatment.
- Leave on for 10 to 15 minutes and then remove.
- This treatment may be repeated up to 3 times a day

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Ice therapy

- Wrap the ice pack in a damp towel, towel or pillowcase to avoid ice burns to the skin
- Place the pack over the injured area. Leave it on for 10 – 15 minutes until the ice starts to melt, and then remove.
- Never leave the pack on for more than 20 minutes.
- This treatment may be repeated every 2 to 3 hours, as long as your skin temperature has returned to normal.

Ice massage

An ice massage is used to decrease pain over a small area. It can be used to treat an area of 10cm x 15 cm.

To avoid ice burn, wet an ice cube under the tap before applying to the skin. Hold the cube in a piece of kitchen towel.

Apply the ice cube to the area using a slow circular motion for 10 minutes or less if relief is gained sooner.

Hot and cold contrast bathing

This is used to improve circulation and decrease swelling in an injured area. It can be effective in reducing pain.

You need:

- 1 tub of hotter water (40 - 42°C)
 - 1 tub of cold (iced) water (15 - 20°C)
1. Begin with hotter bath for 3 - 4 minutes
 2. Then use the colder bath for 1 minute
 3. Alternate between the hotter and cold bath. Finish with the hotter bath.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us on 01788 663 257 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

Patient Information

The Trust operates a smoke-free policy.

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