

# Hot & Cold Therapies

## HOT THERAPY

### What does it do?

Hot therapy opens blood vessels, which increases blood flow, cuts down pain and relaxes muscles.

### What are the types?

Heat can be applied by an electric heating pad, hot water bottle, gel packs heated in water or microwaves, or hot water baths. If an electric heating pad is used, be sure it is OK to use with moisture before using a moist towel. The manufacturer's instructions will let you know if a moist towel can be used or not. Talk with your primary care provider to see what heat therapy is good for you.

### When do you use it?

Hot therapy is good for stiffness and ongoing pain.

### Safety Tips

- Treatment should not last more than 30 minutes.
- During treatment, check skin every 5 minutes to make sure it is not too hot.
- Do not lie on a hot pack to avoid falling asleep and potentially burning yourself.
- Do not use heat if you have no feeling in the affected body part.
- Do not use an electric heating pad in bed because you may fall asleep and get a burn.
- Do not use heat if there is swelling.
- Do not apply heat directly to the skin.
- Do not use heat if you have poor circulation, such as if you have diabetes.
- Do not use heat if you are a hemophiliac.
- Do not use heat on open wounds or over stitches.
- Avoid heat treatment on eyes, abdomen and genitalia.

## COLD THERAPY

### What does it do?

Cold therapy slows down the blood flow to an injury, which cuts down the swelling and pain.

### What are the types?

Cold therapy can be an ice pack, gel pack or cold water from the faucet.

### When do you use it?

Any cold treatment should be used right after the injury. Cold therapy is good for bumps, sprains and strains that may occur with sports or lifting. Also, cold therapy is good for nosebleeds. Ice can be wrapped in a washcloth and placed over the nose while the head is kept upright.

Lastly, cold is beneficial for minor burns by applying cold water from the faucet immediately following the injury.

### Safety Tips

- Treatment should not last more than 20 minutes.
- During treatment, check skin every 5 minutes to make sure there is no damage, such as a freeze burn (skin would become reddened or blistered, just as when burned with heat).
- Do not place ice directly on the skin.
- Wait 1 hour between cold treatments.



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The purpose of this patient education handout is to further explain or remind you about a medical condition. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, be sure to discuss them with your healthcare provider. This handout may be reproduced for distribution to patients.

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