

Heat/Cold Applications

There are specific reasons to use heat or cold. Sometimes the decision to use heat or cold is a personal preference. The following guidelines will help you choose what is most appropriate for your condition.

Heat

When to use heat

- To reduce pain and stiffness
- To relax muscles
- To increase flexibility of muscles
- Before exercise or activity

Application time

- 20 to 30 minutes

Cold

When to use cold

- The first 24 hours after an injury or flare up. It is OK to use cold for several days if pain or swelling continues.
- To decrease swelling
- To reduce pain
- To relax muscle spasms
- After exercise or activity

Application time

- 10 to 20 minutes (longer can cause skin damage.)

Precautions

- Never apply heat or ice directly to the skin; cover area with cloth or towel.
- Check skin during treatment; skin should appear pink or light red with heat or ice application. White blotches or bright red color indicate tissue damage.

Do not use heat or cold applications with the following conditions:

- Decreased sensation to temperature
- Skin infections
- Recent large wound, burn or surgical site
- Any area desensitized from radiation or cobalt treatment
- Persons with confusion or inability to communicate
- Cardiovascular conditions such as:
 - Raynaud's phenomenon
 - Vasculitis
 - Peripheral vascular disease
 - Cardiac insufficiency

Do not use heat with the following conditions:

- Acute inflammatory conditions
- Cancer/malignancies
- Regenerating peripheral nerves
- Bleeding conditions