



Hot and Cold Therapy

By Cheryl Clark, LMT

The application of heat or cold to injury sites or areas of pain is an ancient, extremely helpful practice. Application methods are many and may include ice/cold packs, heating pads, microwaveable hot packs, soaking in a tub of hot water, application of wet towels, hydroculator packs, etc. Application devices are available at your local drug store, online and in medical supply stores or other retail locations. Some of the most helpful are home made, sealed cloth bags or athletic socks containing rice or other seeds. In a pinch, I've used a bag of frozen peas.

A word of caution: Use a layer of towel over your skin. Make sure you do not burn or freeze your skin.

Cold Therapy constricts blood vessels, decreases swelling and “numbs-out” pain. This is the method of choice immediately after injury or anytime inflammation is present. Apply for 10 to 15 minutes. Application can be repeated as needed.

Heat Therapy is soothing, dilates blood, increases blood flow to the area, and softens muscles, fascia and connective tissue. Heat therapy is ideal when you are “tight” and is a stress reducer due to its comforting nature. Apply for 20 minutes. Application can be repeated as needed.

Contrast Therapy is a powerful combination of heat and cold. It creates a mechanical action by bringing fresh blood to the application site with the use of heat. The application of cold flushes blood and lymphatic fluid from the application area. Apply heat for 20 minutes followed by cold for 10 minutes. This can be repeated as often as desired, but you should always end with cold.