

Soothe pain and tension with hot and cold therapy
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Spring gardening, cleaning and new exercise routines can cause strain and pain in the body. Are you feeling muscle strain or recovering from injury or surgery? Use cold therapy ASAP. Immediate ice to an injury or strain dramatically helps prevent swelling and pain.

When an area is strained or injured, it heats up and fluid collects. Cooling helps to reduce this inflammation. To use heat to treat inflammation would be like putting a hot compress on a burn.

However, cold therapy is not for everyone. Elderly people often do better with heat, especially if they have poor circulation. Fibromyalgia patients usually respond best to heat.

If you would like to try using ice as a therapeutic tool:

- ◆ Gel ice packs are ideal. (Available in any pharmacy and most Chiropractic and Physical Therapy offices; often your medical insurance will cover the cost.)
- ◆ For carpal tunnel syndrome, a wrist brace which holds a small ice pack is available. Elbow, shoulder and knee ice packs with Velcro/elastic straps stay in place and work wonders.
- ◆ After surgery, cold therapy can reduce scar tissue.
- ◆ Even several months after a broken bone, an ice pack can still relieve pain and swelling.
- ◆ Cool low back or neck pain as you drive by taking an ice pack when you leave home. It fits perfectly against the low back, with the seat holding it in place.

If you have tried ice and it feels too cold, the following ideas may help:

- ◆ Be sure you are warm. Try placing a heat pack on your chest or feet when you apply cold to neck or low back.
- ◆ Insulate from the cold. Wrap ice pack in a towel to apply it without the shock of "ice". As the cold penetrates gradually and the muscle pain recedes, place the ice pack in a pillow case to further cool the area.
- ◆ Try to look beyond how the ice feels right now and instead, judge how the affected area feels one or two hours later.

After inflammation is reduced, use contrast therapy to promote circulation and blood flow. Contrast therapy uses both ice and heat alternately. At least 48 hours after injury and regular use of ice, contrast therapy is effective for many sprains, strains and rehab needs. Begin with three to ten minutes of heat and follow with equal time of ice. Repeat three times. Always end contrast therapy with cold. Since hot and cold can have a

numbing effect, check the treating area with a hand or elbow to be sure you are not over heating or cooling the area.

A great time to use ice or heat is during your commute. Make a simple heat pack by filling a tube sock with approx. two cups dry (raw) white rice. Tie the end, microwave for about two minutes and place on neck or shoulders while you drive. Warm rice packs feel heavenly and stay warm for 15 to 20 minutes.

Both heat and ice packs can be placed in freezer or microwave at work and reused during your work day or when you drive home.

Traveling? Carry zip lock bags and ask for a glass of ice at a drive through or dig into your cooler or your hotel ice machine. Double the zip locks. Fill with ice and water. Decrease pain and tension on long drives or flights.

Using hot and cold therapy can help you recover quickly, giving you more time and energy for the springtime activities you enjoy most.

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Kay Wagner LMP has a special talent for helping people relax and improve their health. Kay offers "R &R" private sessions, coaching breathing, stretching and relaxation. She is a Licensed Massage Therapist and Certified Yoga and Pilates instructor. Learn to relax and rejuvenate in Kay's studio overlooking the mountains and water at 828 2nd St. Mukilteo WA 98275.

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