

Ice vs. Heat Therapy

When to use these modalities for sports injuries

ICE

Ice is used after an injury to reduce swelling and decrease pain. Ice decreases blood flow to the injured tissue and reduces inflammation.

When to use ice...

- After an acute injury for the first 72 hours or longer, until the swelling goes down.
- For chronic or overuse injuries such as tendonitis you should ice after doing activity.

Ice should be used for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours, try to avoid direct contact with skin to avoid frostbite. After several minutes of icing you will feel numbness.

HEAT

Heat reduces muscle spasm, improves joint stiffness and makes soft tissue more limber. Heat may be used to help loosen tight muscles and joints during a warm-up period.

When to use heat...

- Use for stiff muscles and joints before activity and stretching.
- Avoid heat the first few days after an injury or while there is any swelling.

Moist heat is more effective than dry heat, it penetrates deeper and has a better effect on muscles, joints, and soft tissue. Use heat for 15-20 minutes at a time.

To apply moist heat you may soak towels in hot water and warm them in the microwave. Commercial moist heat packs are available and provide longer therapy. Hot tubs or whirlpools are also useful.

