



Why Ice?

Most people know that when they sprain an ankle, they should apply ice for the first 24 to 36 hours. Why then do people reach for the heat when they hurt their backs?

Ice is very effective in the management of back pain. In fact, ice is the preferred treatment for acute back pain.

Cold produces an initial contraction of the blood vessels, which decreases inflammation and swelling. However, it later produces an increase in blood flow to cleanse the area and restore nutrition to the tissues. Cold minimizes muscle spasm and decreases pain by slowing nerve conduction of pain impulses. The benefits of cold also last longer than those of heat.

Heat, used too soon, actually increases pain because it can increase swelling and pressure on spinal nerves.

In order for ice to be effective in the management of pain, the area must be cold enough to become numb. There are several ways to accomplish this:

1. ICE PACK – place crushed or cubed ice in a plastic bag or ice bag and apply directly over the painful area for approximately 20 to 30 minutes, then remove. Continue to reapply ice to keep the area cold.
2. ICE MASSAGE – keep four 6 oz paper or Styrofoam cups of ice in your freezer. When needed, tear off top of cup and expose 1 to 3 inches of ice and rub this over the painful area with smooth, continuous strokes, preferably in a circular motion. Be sure to place a towel underneath you or in your waistband to absorb the water as the ice melts.

You may use either method up to 3 to 4 times daily as needed. Use the pack when the pain involves a large area. Use the ice massage when there is a small sharp area of pain.

THE NEXT TIME YOUR BACK HURTS, TRY ICE INSTEAD OF HEAT!
YOU MAY BE PLEASANTLY SURPRISED.