

ACTIVE P.T. SOLUTIONS
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SHOULD BE ACTIVE

APTS Monthly



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Heat or Ice?

When to use heat or ice on an injury, ache, or pain is a common question in a healthcare office. While there are generalities that can be followed, it can also be an extremely specific self-treatment. It is very difficult to go wrong with ice. On the contrary, if you put heat on an inflamed body part, there is potential to worsen the condition. A general rule of thumb in our office is to **ice the painful body part for 15-20 minutes with at least 40-45 minutes off before the next ice application.** A thin protective layer should be placed between the ice and the skin, such as a paper towel or t-shirt. Always inspect the skin after the application. It should be pink and cool, returning to normal color and temperature before the next ice application.

The majority of injuries or musculoskeletal ailments will respond to ice. Unfortunately most patients fail to ice frequently enough to be effective. For instance, if you have an ankle sprain, you may need to apply ice to the ankle 4 to 5 times a day for 2 or 3 days for the ice to be effective. If any body part swells, becomes discolored, or causes a loss of function (in this case, the inability to bear weight), you should see a healthcare provider and have an x-ray to rule out a fracture or additional pathology. Applying ice in this case should be for comfort and swelling control while arranging to see a provider.

The best form of cold therapy is ice itself. Your relatives may recommend frozen peas, corn, or other frozen produce. Frozen produce will not supply the same degree of cold as ice itself. Counter irritants such as rubs that produce a cold sensation do not reduce swelling or inflammation. They are designed to relieve pain by tricking your



brain to focus on the cooling or heating sensation produced by the ingredients in the lotion or cream. This is where the term “counter-irritant” comes from. Remember the acronym **PRICE** when applying ice: **Protect, Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation.**

It is also common for patients to bring up the old adage of ice for the first 24-72 hours and then apply heat. This is a poor rule to follow because it negates the presence of pain and loss of function. If the condition is actively swelling or limiting function (weight bearing, sleeping, working, etc.), it is appropriate to apply ice more than 72 hours after the onset of pain or injury.

Living in Central New York, I have come to think it is a natural reaction to prefer heat instead of ice. In general, heat usually feels nice and comforting; unfortunately, it is not the right thing to do when it comes to an injury or painful musculoskeletal condition. If you do apply heat, it should be moist in nature. A hot shower or hot bath is a good form of home heat application. There are special heating pads available that are made with a moist sponge, or there are also several micro-wavable devices available in your local pharmaceutical retailer. You can also make your own moist heat pack (see the APTS Recipe Box). One thing that I

would absolutely recommend you **not** use is a dry heating pad. I tell my patients “if you own a dry heating pad, give it to someone you don’t like”. Dry heat applications usually make the problem worse by creating local dehydration, edema, and inflammation.

So when is the treatment of choice? Moist heat is very helpful when you have a chronic degenerative condition, such as a non-inflammatory arthropathy like degenerative joint disease of the knee or back (i.e. arthritis). Unfortunately these conditions are usually associated with some level of pain. In this case using “contrast therapy” may alleviate the stiffness and the pain. Applying moist heat for 15-20 minutes, followed by an ice application for 15-20 minutes, and then gentle movement or exercise (such as walking) is a form of contrast therapy that works well for patients with arthritis of a non-inflammatory type.

Never go to bed with an ice pack or heating device applied to a body part! There is a risk of falling asleep with the ice or heat in place and this can result in worsening of the condition or causing further injury or tissue damage. There are areas of the body where certain nerves are very superficial and at risk of injury from prolonged ice or heat application. The more common areas are the outside of the knee, inside of the elbow, the groin, and lower abdomen. If you are unsure or have a question about applying heat or ice to an injured area, call a healthcare provider who knows your medical history and whom you trust.

Article by Dale Buchberger, DC, PT, CSCS

Exercise of the Month: Calf Stretches



Calf stretch vs. wall (top), runner's calf stretch (bottom), calf stretch with strap/towel (right)

Here are three different ways to stretch the calf at various levels of difficulty, depending on your symptoms and flexibility.

The first, and most difficult stretch, is what we call a *calf stretch vs. wall*. To perform, stand facing a wall and lean back to get as much of the ball of your foot of the affected side on the wall. Keep your knee straight and hips square to the wall. You may feel a stretch in this position, but, if able, bring your hips toward the wall until you feel a strong but tolerable stretch in your calf. Be sure not to push into the wall with your foot; this should be a passive stretch.

If this stretch is too difficult for you,

the next easier stretch still involves the wall, but the positioning is slightly different. We call this a *runner's calf stretch*. This time, you will place your symptomatic leg behind you with your knee straight and heel flat on the floor. Keeping this position, lunge forward by bending the opposite knee to feel a stretch in your calf muscle.

If both of these stretches are still too much, the last stretch is the easiest to perform. The only equipment you will need is a strap/belt or towel/sheet. To perform this stretch, place the strap/towel around the ball of your foot. Keeping your knee straight, pull back on the strap/towel until you feel a strong but tolerable stretch in the calf.

With all 3 of these stretches, you want to maintain an "uncomfortable but not painful" stretch. Hold each stretch for 20-30 seconds (or even up to 1 minute as tolerated as symptoms improve). Perform one stretch three different times per day. You could even perform one of each of these stretches once per day. Do whatever feels most comfortable for you at the time.

As always, if you experience pain with this stretch, seek the help of a health care professional!



Heat vs. Ice Quick Reference Chart

| | Heat | Ice |
|--|-------------------------|--|
| Acute Injury (Sprains, Strains, Bumps, Bruises) | | X (24-48 hours or until swelling decreases) |
| Chronic Injury (tendinitis, osteoarthritis) | X | |
| Headache | X Tension (muscular) | X Migraine (vascular) |
| Gout | | X |
| Muscle Spasms | X | X |
| Post-exercise (to decrease pain/inflammation) | | X |

In general, use **heat** to decrease pain, increase blood flow, promote soft tissue healing, and relax tight muscles.
Use **ice** to decrease pain, decrease blood flow, and decrease swelling and inflammation.

By Tom Zirilli, PT

How To Protect Yourself With Winter Running



As the new year is now in full swing, we hope you are sticking by your new year's resolutions. If you are getting back into exercise again and plan to run outside in Central New York, here are a few helpful tips to keep you comfortable and safe while running in cold weather:

1. Start by dressing in layers. This allows you to adapt to the temperature at different times during your training. As you warm up, you may need to remove layers as your core temperature rises. Layers may need to be added with a change in weather conditions, especially wind and precipitation. Clothes that are closest to the body should be made of synthetic material, preferably with "sweat-wicking" properties. Stay dry, as wet clothing chills the body quickly. If you are sweating excessively, you are increasing heat loss, so remove layers when this happens. Make sure your outermost layer is wind resistant and waterproof.
2. Keep exposed areas covered. This includes the extremities, head, and face. A warm hat and gloves are a must in cold weather. You may also want to wear a face mask or scarf to protect your face. A sweat resistant moisturizer and lip balm should be used for added protection. Applying petroleum jelly to areas prone to chapping and chafing may also be helpful. Be aware of the symptoms of frostbite (numbness and pale color to the affected areas of skin) and get out of the cold if you think frostbite is setting in!
3. Consider shortening your stride when running on slick or slippery surfaces. This will allow better control and ability to compensate should you start to slip.
4. Be sure to choose footwear with good insulation, waterproof protection, and a thick, no-slip tread. The amount of insulation you will need will depend on how long you are outdoors and how active you will be. The tread should be made of soft rubber to allow for good traction. If you will be running on more icy terrain you may want to consider an ice gripper device which fits over the sole of the shoe. One example is the Yaktrax brand. These types of devices are only for hard packed or icy surfaces and can be unsafe on smooth surfaces.
5. Don't forget to stay hydrated! This may be an afterthought in the cold weather but you must remember that you are still losing fluids. Hydration before, during, and after a workout will help avoid dehydration.

Don't let the cold weather be an excuse for not running outdoors. With proper preparation, you can be safe and comfortable. After all, it can be very quiet and calming in the winter, and the frozen white scenery can be quite breathtaking. If you do not feel safe running outside because of the cold, you may consider running inside on a treadmill. There may be some days where this is the best option for you. Stick with those resolutions and remember to train safely!

Article by Tom Zirilli, PT

Be aware of the symptoms of frostbite: numbness and pale color to the affected areas of skin. Get out of the cold if you think frostbite is setting in!

APTS Recipe Box: Homemade Heat or Ice Pack

These are two cost-effective ways to manage your pain at home with heat or ice.

Moist Heat Pack

Moist heat packs are less dehydrating to the skin than dry heat packs (i.e. an electric heating pad) and they allow heat to absorb better into the skin, thus relieving pain faster.

What you need: some kind of cloth pouch (sock, fabric), 4-6 cups of filling (uncooked rice, flax seed, buckwheat, oatmeal), needle and thread (if needed).

Instructions: Fill the pouch with the filling of your choice. Tie or sew the pouch shut.

Microwave pouch for 1-3 minutes to produce a moist heat.

Another option is to take a towel or washcloth and run it under warm water until thoroughly soaked. You may also microwave for increased warmth. Place inside a bag and wrap the bag inside another dry towel. Never lie directly on a heat source.

Do not use over areas that are swollen, and check with a health care professional if you have poor circulation or diabetes.

Gel Ice Pack

What you need: (2) 1-quart or 1-gallon plastic freezer bags, 2 cups water, 1 cup rubbing alcohol.

Instructions: Fill the plastic freezer bag with water and rubbing alcohol. Try to get as much air out of the freezer bag before sealing it shut. Place the bag and its contents inside a second freezer bag to contain any leakage. Leave the bag in the freezer overnight.

Another option is to freeze water in a paper cup, peel back the top of the cup, and rub it directly on the affected area.

Do not use if you have hypersensitivity to cold, poor circulation, or peripheral vascular disease.

Other tips: Whether you're using cold or heat therapy, do not apply for more than 15 minutes at a time. Avoid direct contact with the skin; always be sure to have a layer of toweling or fabric between the cold or heat and your skin. Do not use cold or heat therapy over an open wound. Never go to bed with cold or heat, which could cause further tissue damage.

By Tom Zirilli, PT, & Carolyn Collier, PTA



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Get Well...Get Active...Be Active

Newsletter Edited by Carolyn B. Collier, PTA

**At Active Physical Therapy Solutions,
we utilize the most cutting edge
treatment and management
techniques available. Our goal is to
deliver the best possible healthcare in
a friendly, caring, and well-organized
environment. Our staff is here to
provide active solutions to achieving
your personal goals!**

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Finding the Right Winter Footwear



After the latest snow storm, you may have realized your winter footwear may not be ideal. We often forget about winter footwear as we try to prolong the start of the winter season. Here are a few tips to consider when shopping for winter footwear to keep you comfortable and safe.

There are a few basic features that are important to consider when buying winter footwear. This includes good insulation, waterproof protection, and a thick, no-slip tread. The amount of insulation you will need will depend on how long you are outdoors and how active you

will be. The tread should be made of soft rubber to allow for good traction. If you will be walking on more icy terrain you may want to consider an ice gripper device which fits over the sole of the shoe. One example is the Yaktrax brand. These types of devices are only for hard packed or icy surfaces and can be unsafe on smooth surfaces.

When buying winter footwear, its important to make sure it fits properly. Shop near the end of the day, when your feet are at their largest. If you will be wearing heavy socks in the boots, make sure to bring them to the store with you when trying

them on. A quick way to check the fitting is to use the "finger test". You should be able to put your index finger between the heel of your foot and the heel of the shoe, as well as the top of your foot and the tongue of the shoe. Make sure to break in new footwear slowly starting with 1-2 hours/day.

If you can, start shopping early in the season before the first winter storm. Treat yourself and your feet will be grateful to you.

Article by Tom Zirilli, PT