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HEAT AND ICE

By ROXANNE FISHER

It's recommended that you use ice for the first 24 to 72 hours after an injury before switching to heat. In the first couple days, it is good to use ice every two hours while awake. Ice reduces inflammation, muscle pain and spasms. The skin the ice pack is placed on should be red and cold. If the skin starts to turn blue or is excessively numb, immediately remove the ice pack. You should only begin to use heat at least two days after the swelling subsides or after surgery. Heat will deliver more blood to the affected area and soothe the pain. However, if you apply it on a brand new injury it can make the injury worse. Overall thermotherapy (the use of heat) is used more for pain management and cryotherapy (the use of cold) is used to have a protective effect on the healing tissue. A clinical trial study conducted on patients with lower back pain found that patients using thermotherapy and cryotherapy alongside pharmacological treatment reported substantially less pain than patients who were only on pharmacological.

For more information on the use of heat and ice visit Medline Plus or the NHS website.

ASK YOUR PT: HEAT AND ICE

By LISA FISHER

Whether to use heat or ice can be determined by the type of injury. For an acute injury, such as a twisted ankle or bumped knee, or for sudden swelling, ice is best. An acute injury is an injury which happens suddenly and involves pain, swelling and difficulty moving. Heat works better to relax the muscles for a longer term or regular recurring injury such as back pain.

ASK YOUR PT: WHAT SHOULD I DO FOR AN ACUTE INJURY?

By LISA FISHER

Follow the acronym RICE: Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation. The most important part of your healing time is the first 24 to 72 hours. Place the ice on for no more than 10 to 15 minutes at a time. In this initial period of time you should be icing your injury often, about 4 to 5 times a day. After this initial period of time you can back off from the ice, but you may still have swelling which means that you are still in the acute injury period. Compression involves using a wrap to

alleviate the swelling, but make sure that you don't cut off the circulation. Elevation should involve putting your feet up. You may notice as you are healing, the injury starts to swell more towards the end of the day or under heat but this is a normal part of the healing process. However, if something hasn't cleared up within 6 to 8 weeks, that becomes a chronic condition. Additionally, if pain hasn't substantially improved after 3-4 days you should contact your doctor or PT. If your pain or instability has worsened you may need to go to urgent care. Unfortunately, in many cases patients don't see a PT until 8 weeks or longer after their initial injury, at which time they are already in the chronic phase or have developed negative movement patterns causing pain in other areas. One of the most common ways that an injury becomes chronic is by your body over-compensating in an attempt to avoid pain. I'm always an advocate of my patients scheduling a session with their PT if they feel they have tweaked something, even if it hasn't gotten to the point of being chronic, so that we can focus on preventative care together. And usually if I'm able to see an acute injury early, on I'm able to deal with it much more quickly than a chronic condition. After the initial acute phase of healing, swelling may continue for a long time especially at the end of the day or after increased activity in which case, expect to use ice. For long term pain management, heat is usually the best option or try 10 minutes of ice then 10 minutes of heat and see which one works better for you.