



## Why Ice?

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When you hurt yourself, pull a muscle, or receive a massage, you may think that getting in a warm shower or putting a heat pack on will make it feel better. In fact, the best treatment is ice.

When you get injured, several things happen:

- Your body floods the area with extra fluid to start the healing process.
- The extra fluid causes swelling, which makes it difficult to move the affected body parts.
- The injured muscles begin to spasm and release toxins (lactic acid and others), which makes the area sore.
- The toxins build up in the area because the swelling has constricted blood flow.
- This toxic buildup creates a chemical environment that causes the nerves to fire, sending the muscles into more spasm.

Consequently, a vicious cycle of spasm, congestion, and pain evolves.

Even though applying heat feels good in the short run, it exacerbates the problem because the heat brings even more blood to the congested body area and over stimulates the nerves that supply those muscles. When heat is removed, the body cools off the area to return it to normal temperature. The chilled muscles and the over stimulated nerves will often cause the muscles to continue to spasm.

If you apply ice for 20 minutes (with an ice pack), it will numb the area and break the cycle of spasm. The cold sedates the nerves and causes the vessels to constrict, sending fluid and toxins away from the area. When the ice is removed, your body wants to bring the temperature back to normal and so flushes the area with fresh blood, bringing oxygen and nutrients that aid the healing process. The injured muscles are less likely to continue to spasm in the changed chemical environment.

In sum, the application of ice:

- Numbs the area and eases the pain.
- Sedates the nerves to decrease the spasm.
- Allows fresh blood to return to the area.

Prescribed muscle relaxers are anti-inflammatories should not be stopped in place of ice but rather in conjunction with. Ice helps change the metabolism of the injured area, so you can heal faster. It is a powerful modality that is cheap, effective, safe (when done properly) and readily available. So remember, if it hurts, ICE IT!!

**~ See the reverse side for tips on how to ice properly ~**

# How to Ice

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There are several methods that can achieve the desired effects. If you have questions or concerns, always call first.

## 1. Ice Massage

This method works best for an area you can reach yourself, a knee, elbow, etc. If your back is injured, you would have to have someone else do this for you.

Fill small Dixie cups with water and freeze them. Take one and tear away a small portion of the top so the ice is exposed. The paper cup will allow you to hold the ice while you work on the area. Place a towel under the body part to be iced to catch the meltdown.

Rub the ice over the afflicted area in a circular motion for 5-10 minutes. Use discretion. If the area becomes painful, stop. You have iced long enough. Keep tearing away the paper of the cup as the ice melts to expose more ice.

## 2. Ice Packs

Place ice cubes or chopped ice in zip lock bags appropriate to the size of the area you will be icing. Double bagging helps assure no leakage. Place the ice bag directly on the area for 20 minutes. Any layer of towel or paper between you and the ice prevents the ice from getting the tissue cold enough to achieve the desired effect. This is the major mistake people make with icing. They cool the area, but they don't make it cold enough to reduce the inflammation.

You may find that the ice feels like it's burning for the first few minutes, but then the numbing effects take place and the ice is tolerable. If you find you just can't stand the direct contact, place a wet layer of T-shirt weight material between your skin and the ice. Paper or cloth towels are just too insulating to let the ice do its job.

After you finish icing, you can put the ice bag back in the freezer and can use it again later. After a few uses the ice will custom-melt to fit the area you are treating.

If you don't want to deal with bags of ice, I recommend a physical therapy type ice pack at the local drug store. They come in many sizes made specifically for many injuries (body parts). They can be directly applied to the skin (with good awareness) and maintain their cold for the recommended 20 minute period.

## 3. What *Not* to Do

- Not icing is an option, but if you feel the area that was massaged increasing in heat or tension, you should ice it!
- Frozen bags of peas just don't get the tissue cold enough.
- Warning: The blue gel packs get too cold to apply directly to the skin and can burn you. If you use a paper towel or some other insulation, they probably won't get the tissue close enough, unless you use a wet barrier.