

Heat and Cold Treatments

Heat and cold treatments are cost-effective ways to reduce pain after surgery.

- Right after surgery, cold is usually the best choice.
- For the first 2 weeks after surgery, heat should not be applied on or near your surgical site. However, you may use heat at any time for muscle and joint aches that are far from your surgical site. For example, appropriate heat can be used safely on neck muscles or your lower back if you've had knee-replacement or abdominal surgery.

PLAN AHEAD

Before surgery, locate your heat and cold resources. Inexpensive options are available at most local and online pharmacies, as well as at medical supply stores.

COLD TREATMENTS

Ice Packs

Ice packs are the most common cold treatments. If you don't have an ice pack, a bag of frozen peas also works well.

How to Use Ice Packs

- 1 Place a towel over the affected area.
- 2 Put the ice pack on the towel. Cover the ice pack with several layers of dry towels or a blanket for insulation.
- 3 Leave the ice pack in place for 15 to 20 minutes.
- 4 Check your skin every 5 minutes. Remove the ice pack immediately if your skin in the area you are treating begins to lose its natural redness. This color loss may indicate frostbite
- 5 Place the ice pack in a freezer after each use.

If needed, you can make your own ice pack. Combine $\frac{1}{3}$ cup rubbing alcohol with $\frac{2}{3}$ cup water. Pour this mixture into

a sealable freezer bag. Get as much air out of the bag as possible before sealing the bag. Put that bag into another sealable freezer bag. Place the bag in the freezer. The bag is ready to use when the contents are slushy. These can be refrozen and reused.

Ice Massage

Ice massage may be helpful if your post-surgical pain and inflammation are in a small area of your body, such as the elbow.

How to Use Ice Massage

- 1 Pour water in a paper or foam cup. Set in a freezer.
- 2 When the water is frozen, peel away the top edge of the cup to expose some of the ice.
- 3 Undress the painful area of your body and place a towel on the skin. This will capture water from the melting ice cup.
- 4 Massage the frozen ice on the area. Continually move the ice pack in a circular motion using mild pressure. You may feel cold, burning and/or numbness while you massage the area. It usually takes 1 to 2 minutes until the uncomfortable sensations end.
- 5 Do not perform an ice massage for more than 5 to 7 minutes.
- 6 Put the ice massage cup in a freezer after each use.



Caution About Cold Treatments

Do not use cold treatment on skin that:

- Is numb.
- Has reduced feeling.
- Has poor blood supply, or potential pressure injuries, such as may occur with diabetes.

HEAT TREATMENTS

Microwavable hot packs, hot water bottles and heat lamps are available at reasonable prices. If you choose to purchase such a product, follow the instructions included with the product.

Hot Packs and Water Bottles

- 1 Hot packs and water bottles should be wrapped in a layer or two of towels before being placed on the body. You may need to use additional layers over bony areas.
- 2 Leave the hot pack in place for about 20 minutes. Your skin should feel comfortably warm but not hot.

Check your skin every 5 minutes or so until you are sure that it is not being heated too much. Look for signs of overheating and stop treatment immediately if you notice red blotches or patches where your skin is being heated. Continued heating could cause a burn or blister.



Caution About Heat Treatments

- Never lie directly on a heat pack or hot water bottle.
- Do not use heat treatment on:
 - Skin that is red, irritated, infected or recently traumatized.
 - Open wounds, directly over a surgical incision, scar tissue or skin that is numb or medicated.
 - An area that has poor blood supply or potential pressure injuries. This may happen when a person has diabetes, for example.