Ice or Heat for an Injury?

What is the difference?

**Ice:**
- Decreases blood flow
- Decreases inflammation
- Blocks pain by numbing

**Heat:**
- Increases blood flow
- Increases the elasticity of tissue
- Decreases stiffness
- Relaxes muscles
- Promotes healing

**When should ice be used?**
- Immediately after an injury
- After competition on an injured area
- After rehabilitation exercises for an injured area
- When there is pain or swelling after activity

**When should heat be used?**
- Before competition for tight muscles, provided the injury is not in the acute stage (first 3 to 4 days) and is not swollen
- Before stretching exercises for tight muscles

Call 330.835.5533 to make an appointment or visit summahealth.org/sportsmedicine for more information.
Ice or Heat for an Injury?

**Ways to ice an injury**

**Ice Bucket/Bath:**
- Use for limbs
- Immerse 10 to 15 minutes, every 2 hours
- Cover fingers/ toes with a curled up sock to insulate

**Ice Cup Massage:**
- Use for muscles, smooth areas
- Apply 5 to 10 minutes, every 2 hours
- Use continuous, circular motion
- Do not hold ice in one place

**Ice Bags:**
- Use for larger or bony areas
- Apply 15 to 20 minutes, every 2 hours
- Can use a bag of frozen vegetables
- Place a damp cloth (not saturated) between body part and the ice
- Use a LIGHTLY wrapped ace wrap to hold the ice bag in place

**Precautions about ice**
- The first time you apply ice it will feel uncomfortable but it will be more tolerable with each use.
- Some gel cold packs get colder than ice and can cause cold burns. Use a protective barrier.
- For sensitive skin, use a cloth between the ice and skin, BUT DO NOT DAMPEN IT.
- NEVER ice directly over the eyes or genitals.
- Stop using ice if you experience tingling or burning in the fingers/ toes that are not in contact with the ice.
  (Example: Icing your elbow and you feel tingling in your fingers.)
- Do not ice over areas that have decreased sensation because of injury/illness.
- Do not use ice if you are allergic to ice (welts, rashes appear).

**Four stages of cold**

1. Cold
2. Burn
3. Ache
4. Numb

**NOTE:** You should try to leave the ice on until you reach stage 4.

**Ways to heat an injury**

- **Heating Pad:** 20 minutes
- **Warm Shower:** 20 minutes
- **Commercial Heat Packs:** 20 minutes, though some commercial heat wraps can be used up to 8 hours
  (Example: Thermacare®)
- **Hot tub:** 20 minutes

**Precautions about heat**
- When heating, you should feel “warmth” not “hot.” If a heating pad or hot packs are too hot, you can get burned.
- Being in a hot shower or hot tub/whirlpool for too long may cause you to become dizzy and/or nauseated and pass out.
- You should never sit in hot tubs/whirlpools without other people being present.

**Note of caution:** People with diabetes, circulation problems, nerve problems and those on certain medications should consult their physician prior to the use of ice or heat.

The information presented should not be considered medical advice or treatment, nor should it replace a physician consultation. For more information about any of our programs or services, or to receive a physician referral, please visit summahealth.org.