

# Should you use heat or ice for managing pain?



You've injured yourself. It probably doesn't require a trip to the doctor, but you're hurting and want some relief. Should you grab the heating pad or the frozen peas?

## When to use heat therapy

Use of heat opens blood vessels, allowing blood to flow to injured areas while reducing tightness and pain in stiff muscles or joints.

### Good for:



A muscle spasm



An old injury that has flared up



Decreasing joint stiffness



Relaxation

### Not Good for:

- A new injury, as heat can increase inflammation. Wait at least a week before applying heat.
- Active infections.
- Pain associated with multiple sclerosis.
- Children under 6 months.

**How to:** Use a heating pad on medium setting or wet a wash cloth with warm water to make a compress. Monitor closely to ensure pain does not occur, and remove immediately if it does. Apply for no more than 15 minutes per hour.

## When to use ice therapy

Use of cold slows blood flow to an injured area, numbing the region while reducing bleeding, pain and swelling.

### Good for:



A new injury



A new surgical incision



Muscle soreness



Bumps and bruises

### Not Good for:

- Any area in which sensation is impaired.
- Pain associated with diabetic neuropathy or Raynaud's disease.
- Children under 6 months.

**How to:** Cover a bag of ice or a frozen compress in a thin towel, and apply for no more than 20 minutes per hour. Monitor closely for increased redness or loss of sensation, and remove immediately if either symptom occurs.

*Always seek the advice of your doctor or other qualified health care provider with any questions you have regarding a medical condition.*

## Quick tip

Use ice on a new injury (within a week) and use heat on a recurrent injury. Alternate ice and heat therapy after a week to maximize results.



## From the expert

"Staying physically active is important for your health. To prevent injuring yourself, perform a five-minute warm-up that will get your heart pumping (marching in place, jumping jacks, arm circles, etc.), then end your workout with a 30-second stretch of all the muscle groups you used. If a new injury occurs, remember to RICE: rest, ice, compress, elevate. If an old injury flares up, try some heat to relax the muscles."

— Natalie Torre, physical therapist with Sharp Memorial Hospital

