INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE OF ICE PACK

There are varying options as to the use of ice/heat amongst health care practitioners. In my years of experience, I have learned that the application of ice during the acute (initial, severe pain) phase of pain is best until an individual's pain level is significantly decreased. The logic behind this is simple. When an area is injured or inflamed, fluids are drawn to that area, which result in swelling. An increase in swelling results in an increase in pain.

Our bodies are like everything else in nature; we expand with heat, and contract with cold. The old rule of thumb was ice for the first 24-48 hours, alternating ice/heat for the next 48 hours, and the use of heat was recommended for anything beyond 96 hours in duration. Many practitioners adhere to this today.

The application of heat will usually give at least a temporary feeling of improvement. Muscles are known to have more elasticity when they are warm period that's why it is important to warm up before an athletic event. On a physiological level, the application of heat opens the blood vessels which carry “fresh” blood to the area. That blood is rich in oxygen and nutrients. Within a small amount of time, however, the oxygen and nutrients are used. Within a few hours after the hot pack is removed, stiffness and pain will often return, due to the increased fluid and waste product accumulation in the area. Many times, the pain may actually even be worse after the application of heat. More blood in the area means more fluid volume, which means more swelling, resulting in more pain.

The application of ice over the inflamed area will cause the surrounding blood vessels to contract and swelling to be shunted away from the area of inflammation. Less fluid volume means less swelling, which typically means less pain. When your condition warrants, you may be instructed to alternate between moist heat eyes (always ending with ice) to create a “pumping action” in the area of inflammation.

The best position for symptoms in the neck, shoulders, arms, or upper back is to lie on your back and place the pack on the neck and upper back junction. Your neck should be slightly extended, with your chin lifted slightly toward the ceiling. Essentially, you're in a seated posture while lying on your back and your legs elevated by pillows.

For an individual with low back pain, lie on your back with the icepack covering two to three inches below the dimples (just above your buttocks) to 4-6 inches above them in the low back area. Elevate your legs with your knees bent (basically in a seated position lying on your back). You may want to alternate positions; including lying on either side or lying face down with a pillow underneath pelvis to slightly raise the buttock area.

**Make sure you wrap your ice pack well.** I recommend placing the pack into a pillowcase and wrapping the pillowcase twice around the pack. Take care if you have especially sensitive skin. Do not just place a towel, for example, between you and the pack. Once you become numb, you won't be aware of if what you placed between you and the ice pack moves. If the ice pack comes into contact with your skin, it may result in an ice burn. Ice burns can be significant, and you won't be able to ice again until after your skin heals.

If your ice pack is sufficient, you should experience the following: a sensation of cool, to cold, to an uncomfortable cold (lasting 3 to 4 minutes), to numb. Please ice 20 minutes out of every hour for optimum results. TIP: to avoid getting the entire body chilled while you ice, placing something warm over your heart and even your throat will usually keep your core warm so you that you may ice comfortably.