

Should I Use Ice Or Heat?

The Surprisingly Simple Strategy To Manage Pain

We know we don't need to tell you but... Pain is NO FUN.

Whether you had a recent accident or fall that caused an injury or you simply woke up one day with pain and have no idea what happened... If you're human, then you are trying to figure what you can do to STOP IT!

You want to feel better but you don't know what to do and probably one of the questions you are considering is... *"Should I use ice or heat?"*

If you had asked us 10 years ago, the answer would have been an easy one: for an acute injury use ICE, for a chronic/ongoing injury use HEAT.

Ask us today? Well... the answer is quite different as you will see.

In order to get into the answer we need to first teach you how your body deals with an injury (whether new or old)... Don't worry though, we'll save you the immunology lecture and stick to the take home points so that in the future **you'll ALWAYS know what to do.**

First things first... **The pain that you are feeling is caused by inflammation.**

So, this begs the question ‘What’s the purpose of inflammation?’

I won’t bore you with all the details, but inflammation is your body’s natural response when there’s damage to any tissue in the body. And every step in the inflammatory process is essential to efficiently heal the damaged tissue.

When there is damaged tissue (like a muscle, ligament or joint) the body immediately increases blood flow to the area and contained within the blood are a bunch of different types of immune cells that purposefully create the state we call inflammation.

Think of these like the first-responders of your body... They are:

- White blood cells to clean up any damaged cells
- Platelets which help clog your blood in case there’s bleeding
- Other white blood cells that help protect against any infection

Yes, your body is very smart, and it is the ONLY thing that knows how to heal itself.

The end result is that inflammation (and the resulting swelling) actually stimulates the pain-sensitive nerves in and around the injured tissue and this is what ultimately makes it so painful...

So, what do you do?

Ice

Ice or cold temperatures constrict the body's blood vessels which:

- Decreases the amount of inflammation in the area
- Reduces swelling
- Reduces pain

Only problem is that If you are stopping your body from a natural response to injury (inflammation production) you are:

1. Increasing the likelihood that you could reinjure that area.

Think about it. The ice numbs the nerves that are telling you that you have pain. This means that you still have pain you just don't feel it. Now that you don't feel it you try to treat your body (putting too much pressure on your leg or doing too much) like it was never injured.

2. Increases the healing the time.

If the purpose of swelling and inflammation is to heal the area and you are using ice to stop swelling and inflammation, then it would make sense that if you continue to use ice it is going to take you MUCH longer to get well.

Heat

Heat is the exact opposite of ice because it opens up blood vessels and brings a whole bunch of inflammation and swelling to the area. It also helps to loosen tight muscles and ligaments.

The nice elements of heat are that it is soothing and relaxing.

Your body has a tendency to tighten up during injury (which can be tight and painful) and placing heat on the painful area can help loosen things up.

But again, when using heat, you are changing your body's natural response to an injury, and much like the case for ice, heat produces:

1. Too much inflammation which the body could have a hard time clearing.

Listen, we totally understand: You are tight and tired, and you want to relax and get some relief, so you put heat on the injury. Only to find out that when the heat goes away you are left with more swelling, more fluid, less movement and more pain.

2. Increases the healing time.

Much like ice, using heat also increases the time your body takes to heal and fix itself. The excess swelling that is created is harder for the body to clear from the site

of injury

So, what do we recommend?

If you're goal is to heal the injury as quickly as possible, **then we recommend NOT using ice OR heat.**

I know that can be hard to consider, especially when you are in pain, but hear us out for a second.

Your body is smart, very smart, and it knows how to fix itself.

We just finished talking about how ice and heat, both slow the healing process down. They slow the process down because they change what the body is trying to do.

What if we just let the body do what it needs to do without getting in the way?

The major benefit to this is that your body will heal the FASTEST, and in the BEST way so that you don't keep reinjuring yourself over and over.

Now don't get us wrong, we understand that sometimes the pain is so bad that you want to take action right away... we get that.

Or maybe you are an athlete and you can't wait, you want to get back into the game ASAP, and you don't care as much about making the injured tissue worse in the long

term... In that case you might choose other methods.

However, if you want to recover in the FASTEST, most COMPLETE way and have the lowest chance for RE-INJURY, then there's really only 1 thing that you can do:

Do as much pain free movement as you can.

That's right, not only is movement a great way to decrease the actual pain signals coming from the body, it's also a great way to speed up the natural healing processes we discussed above.

In fact, we know that much like ice and heat interfere with the healing process, **complete rest has been shown to increase healing time.**

Now let's be clear: when we say 'pain free movement' we need to distinguish between pain and discomfort. In this situation, 'pain free' means no sharp or shooting pain. Discomfort is ok, as long as it's not getting worse during the movement.

Let's say you have acute back pain and it gets worse when you sit for more than 15 minutes. When you get up and move it's probably going to be sore. But we know that for most back pain, the best thing you can do is go for a nice walk.

Here's the problem: most people are so used to the old 'RICE' adage (Rest, Ice, Compress, Elevate) that they don't know where to start... We've got you covered.

Check out our simple Joint to Joint Mobility Program – this is the first video of our Move By Design Mobility Series that all of our clients get and it's the first step in regaining your mobility.

Not only will this simple series of movements help you to diminish the amount of pain you feel, it may help you to uncover other areas of your body that lack proper movement so you can even prevent injuries in the future!

<https://beverlychiropractic.com/video/joint-to-joint-mobility-exercises/>

Keep in mind that if any of these movements cause pain, then you should stop immediately and seek help from a health professional trained to determine the underlying problem.

And if you're looking for further recommendations let us know, we work with a large team of health professionals all over the city who would be happy to help you figure out what's causing your problem.

In health,



Dr. Derek Gallant

Beverly Family Chiropractic

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