



Scotland Massage Therapy

Cold or Heat?

You have sore, aching muscles? What can you do at home to help alleviate them? Do you apply cold or heat to them? Many people use heat because, let's face it, it just feels much better than ice, especially during the freezing winter months! However, heat isn't always the answer and can aggravate the condition in many cases. To determine which to use ask yourself:

Have I injured my body through trauma or repetitive strain or activity today?

YES: Cold Therapy

- **When to use:** Exclusively in first 48-72 hours after an acute injury or after activities that may irritate a chronic injury including massage, to reduce inflammation, swelling and pain.
- **How to do it:** Use a cold gel pack from the freezer that conforms to the body part being iced. Use a tea towel or pillowcase between the cold pack and the skin to help lessen the extreme cold on first application, to prevent frostbite and remember to check skin periodically.
- **For how long:** Apply for 15 minutes maximum, every 1-2 waking hours for the first 48 hours. Allow skin temperature to return to normal (20-30 minutes) before reapplying.



NO: Heat Therapy

- **When to use:** For chronic injuries with no swelling or inflammation such as sore, stiff, nagging muscle or joint pain. Before activities that irritate chronic injuries, to help loosen muscles, joints, tissues and to relax and stimulate blood flow to the injured areas.
- **How to do it:** Apply a heated pack to the area, with layers between skin and heat source to prevent burns. Check under the heat pack periodically to assess skin temperature.
- **For how long:** Apply heat only for 20 minutes maximum at a time. Check skin after 3-5 minutes and adjust with additional layers, if necessary, to avoid skin burns.



To maximize healing after the 72 hour acute phase, alternate cold with heat and repeat (15-20 minutes each during the same session). This is more effective than either one used alone as it flushes the area with the change in temperature by bringing blood and nutrients in and the waste products of inflammation and healing out. Alternate several times, but always end with cold therapy. Once healing has begun and all swelling has subsided, follow with light massage and gentle stretching. There are some conditions that need to be treated with caution while using hydrotherapy (heat or cold application).

These include: haemorrhage, decreased sensation, skin lesions, pregnancy, tuberculosis, anemia, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, vascular disease, skin sensitivity (low blood pressure, Raynaud's disease), hypothyroidism, kidney problems and inflammation in acute conditions (bursitis, arthritis, tendinitis, sprain and strains). Check with your family doctor if any of these apply to you. If in doubt, cold therapy is always a better choice for the first couple of days and can greatly reduce pain. Just bundle up the rest of your body to keep warm and dream of lying on the beach!

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