

Heat and Cold Treatments Information Sheet

The application of both ice and heat can be very helpful to relieve pain and tension in the muscles associated with a variety of arm/hand pain including frozen shoulder, bursitis, arthritis, tennis elbow, and carpal tunnel syndrome. Some general tips for the use of cold and heat are:

- Applying a cold compress or ice pack to the affected area has a numbing effect which may dull the pain. This is best when pain is acute, or directly after exercise or using the affected muscles.
- Apply cold therapy for 15-20 minutes over or around the area of pain.
- Always place a cloth between the ice pack and the skin.
- Heating is best when pain feels mild, specific, and muscular in nature.
- Apply a warm moist towel or heat wrap on or around the affected area to relax tense muscles
- Apply heat therapy for 20 minutes and repeat every few hours until tension is reduced or gone.
- Wrap the heat pack in a cloth or towel for protection of the skin if needed.

Various cooling and heating tools can be found in stores and online. General cold and ice packs are fine, but gel based packs are most effective because they will retain the cold for longer. Heating tools may be referred to as heat packs, heat wraps, or a bed buddy. They are typically filled with gels or beads, scented or unscented, and can be warmed in the microwave then applied to the area of pain. Moist heat therapy is penetrates to the deeper muscles for a more productive healing effect. Avoid electrical heating pads if possible, because they employ dry heat. Dry heat may feel good, but it only reaches the surface and does not penetrate to the deeper muscles, thus reducing the therapeutic benefit. Some products that we recommend come from the Elasto-Gel line from Southwest Technologies Inc. These products are well made and can be both cooled in the freezer and heated in the microwave. Their full product line is available on their website at <https://www.elastogels.com> and select products can be found on Amazon.