

NEWS & NOTES

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between sessions: using ice and heat

There are several things you can do to treat your aches, pains, and injuries between sessions of massage therapy. This includes regular stretching and finding ways to modify the activities that make you feel worse. Another thing you can do is use ice packs and heating pads – the subject of this edition of *News & Notes*.

Many of us use “icy-hot” topical ointments, such as Biofreeze or Tiger Balm. These can be very effective at reducing your painful symptoms. If you find them helpful, please use them! But know that they do not cause any beneficial physiological change in your tissues, while a hot or cold application can.

Throughout much of the day, applying a heating pad to your low back is

simply not a practical option. So use the icy-hot ointment at work, at bedtime, and in other situations where you can't use actual hot or cold applications to ease your discomfort. But when you can, I'd like you to try them. I believe you'll find these treatments very effective.

Hot and cold treatments have been around for (at least) all of recorded history. They are great tools for you to use at home to manage pain, stiffness, spasm, and inflammation.

Effects of Heat Treatments

- Muscle tone and spasm are decreased because heat lowers the sensitivity and rate of firing of the receptors which regulate this (muscle spindle fibers)
- Heat makes joints more flexible by increasing the stretchiness of connective tissue (specifically, collagen)
- Pain perception is decreased because heat reduces the speed of nerve conduction
- Heat dilates blood vessels, increasing blood flow to the skin and muscles
- The increased circulation leads to an increase in metabolism, oxygen and nutrient supply
- Heat is also very relaxing, even sedating

Using Heat Treatments

Heat should be used for chronic conditions, to soften connective tissue,

and after treating trigger points. Do not use heat during the first 48 hours after injury, for acutely inflamed joints, if you have an acute infection, circulatory problems, or decreased skin sensitivity to temperature.

There are many different shapes and sizes of heating pads for use at home. Some are heated in the microwave, so you don't have to be tethered to the electric outlet. Be sure to use a towel as a buffer between the heat source and your skin – don't burn yourself! Take a hot bath for more generalized effects. Use the heating pad for 10 minutes, or sit in the tub for 15 minutes.

Effects of Cold Treatments

- Cold application, like heat, will reduce pain and decrease muscle spasm
- Cold causes blood vessels to constrict and increases blood viscosity, which reduces inflammation and swelling

Using Cold Treatments

Use cold for acute pain or injury to decrease pain, inflammation, and swelling. It can be used as a brief distraction before self-treating trigger points. Cold is helpful after exercise to decrease inflammation. Do not use cold if you have circulatory problems or decreased skin sensitivity to temperature.

(Continued on page 2)

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Physical Therapy

**Great Lakes Institute of
Manual Therapy**
GreatLakesInstitute.net
(734) 913-0300

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one another!

(Continued from page 1)

Gel packs conform nicely to the area being treated and they can be kept in the freezer, always ready to use. Your other options include putting ice water in a plastic bag or, in a pinch, using a bag of frozen vegetables. Never put a prolonged cold application directly on your skin. Use a towel as a buffer between your skin and the cold treatment. Note that you may initially feel tingling, aching, or burning. A 20 to 30 minute application is recommended to reduce inflammation and pain.

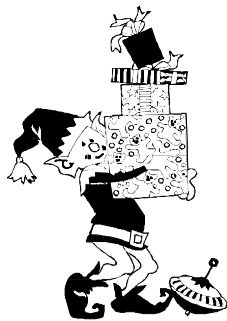
Using hot and cold treatments are another tool you can use to take good care of yourself. You can get the most out of them by combining them with other self-care, such as regular stretching and other exercise, good stress management and, of course, regular massage therapy.

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