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How to Use Ice and Heat Therapy for Lower Back Pain

Using heat or ice therapy is often used as a preliminary treatment for back pain. By regularly adding heat or ice to the affected area, pain can often be relieved temporarily, and in some cases, for good. The best part of using ice or heat for back pain is that you can often do it with items already in your home. Read on to see why back pain occurs and how these tips can help you use ice or heat for your back pain relief.

How Does Heat Therapy Work?

When placing a heated object on the skin, this starts a process called vasodilation, which enlarges the blood vessels and relaxes the muscles. Healing nutrients and oxygen rush to the affected area to help it heal. This improved blood flow also helps cellular waste exit the area more efficiently, enabling your muscles to do likewise.

Heat therapy can be administered through many forms, such as hot water packs, hot stone, or warm towels. Soaking in hot baths is another popular form of heat therapy that is regularly used by back pain sufferers and anyone looking for relaxation.

How Does Cold Therapy Work?

By contrast, cold therapy works through vasoconstriction, or a narrowing of the blood vessels. When this occurs, it flexes the muscles and reduces the inflammation that is causing the pain. Cold therapy is most commonly done through ice packs or short amounts of time in ice baths.

Heat It

When using heat or ice for back pain, it may help to know that moist heat is more effective for back pain relief than dry heat. This can be achieved through a warm bath or shower. A moist heating pad can also work to provide relief. Other options to warm the lower back include hot water bottles and microwaveable cloth bags filled with rice.

It's important to apply heat for only a limited amount of time. Fifteen to 20 minutes of moist heat can often provide the temporary relief needed at the moment. For chronic lower back pain, all-day heat wraps are available and can be worn and reheated throughout the day for constant relief.

Cool It

For cooling a sore or inflamed area of the back, an ice bag, freezer gel pack, or a bag of frozen vegetables are great ways to use ice for back pain. It is possible to buy an ice bag at most pharmacies. If a special ice bag is not available, put ice cubes in a plastic bag that zips and apply it to the pained area. You may also want to put the ice pack in a cloth pouch or a towel to prevent it from leaking. Towels can also be soaked in cold water, wrung, and placed in the freezer for 15 minutes to produce an ice towel that can be placed anywhere.

Cold packs should be used at least three times a day for 10-15 minutes a time to reduce inflammation, swelling, and pain. It can be used in conjunction with heat therapy for the best possible relaxation of muscles and joints.

Alternating Hot and Cold Therapies

In some cases, choosing either heat or ice for back pain may not provide enough relief. It can be helpful to use heat and ice together. By rotating between each type of temperature therapy, you can increase the likelihood of reducing pain by lowering inflammation and loosening muscles simultaneously.

Most physicians recommend using ice before heat. The ice temporarily shocks the muscles to attention while the heat loosens and relaxes. Pain relief ointments, such as Icy Hot, are found in many pharmacies and use this same concept by cooling the area first before applying heat. This provides the best way for muscles to relax and the pain to subside.

Precautionary Measures

Using ice or heat for back pain is generally a safe, do-it-yourself treatment. However, it shouldn't be considered a treatment method on its own. In most cases, back pain should be paired with medication and exercises to fully relieve the pain.

When using heat, watch for redness and discomfort. Avoid using it for more than 15-20 minutes at a time. You should also place a layer of cloth between the heating pack and the skin to protect it from burning.

The same goes for ice packs; place the ice towel or bag around an absorbent cloth to prevent the condensation from freezing onto your skin. Likewise, refrain from using it for longer than 10-15 minutes.

Heat or ice for back pain relief can help alleviate the pain many adults experience on a regular basis. Using these therapies alongside other treatment methods, as well as consulting with a qualified medical practitioner, are the best ways to get on track with a healthier, pain-free back.

Source:

www.backpainrelief.net/ice-and-heat-therapy/