

self-treating injuries: heat or ice which is right for self-treating injuries?

When self-treating injuries, the question of using ice versus applying heat to treat a soft tissue injury — ligaments and muscles — is a point of confusion. Compounding this confusion is the theory that icing an injury is effective only during the first 24 hours.

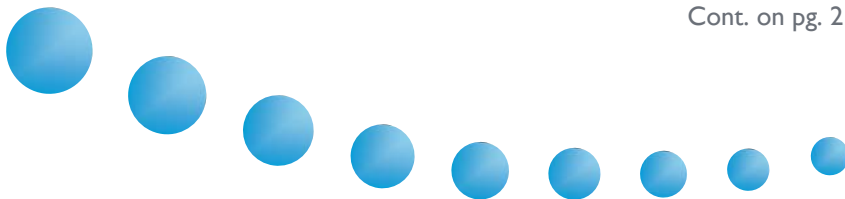
Runners, cyclists and other athletes with injury pain often find that applying a heating pad or taking a hot shower will minimize pain, but this method usually only provides temporary relief. When the pain returns, it can often feel even more intense.

- **Heat can be an important factor in rehabilitating injuries, but usually only after the initial inflammation has subsided.**

Ice is a vasoconstrictor; it constricts blood vessels. Icing damaged tendons or muscles that are inflamed will prevent torn open vessels from swelling so much and from further compressing normal blood flow to body parts. Cooling the injured area reduces inflammation and helps the healing process.

- **Use ice as soon as possible after an injury, or when you feel pain starting.**
- **Elevating the injury, as well as wrapping for compression, will also help prevent swelling.**

Cont. on pg. 2



How long you should ice the injury depends on the size and type of injury. The opinion that icing is only effective during the first 24 hours is an outdated approach.

- **There are times when the injury is still bleeding for two or three days, and ice should be used every 20 minutes with no heat on the affected area.**

A simple way to judge the self-treatment is to touch the area. If it feels warm, no heat should be used.

When inflammation has settled, heat can be used with quick contrasts of icing. For example, 5 minutes of heat, 2 minutes of ice, and another 5-7 minutes of heat. The contrast treatment should be repeated 3-5 times.

In more acute cases, such as chronic swelling or chronic tendonitis, a physical therapist might recommend using the contrast as an immediate treatment.

By carefully treating your injury and using discretion, you will get better quicker, instead of prolonging the agony. Check with your physical therapist for any special instructions for your particular injury.

The material and information contained in this article is for information only and is not intended to serve as medical advice or consultation. Consult your personal physician before beginning any exercise program or self-treatment.

