Using Ice vs. Heat for an Injury

What is the difference between ice and heat?

- **Ice** decreases blood flow
- **Ice** decreases inflammation
- **Ice** blocks pain by numbing
- **Heat** increases blood flow
- **Heat** increases the elasticity of tissue
- **Heat** decreases stiffness
- **Heat** relaxes muscles
- **Heat** promotes healing

When should ice be used?

- Immediately after an injury
- After competition on an injured area
- After rehabilitation exercises for an injured area
- When there is pain or swelling after activity

When should heat be used?

- Before competition for tight muscles, provided the injury is not in the acute stage (first 3-4 days) and is not swollen
- Before stretching exercises for tight muscles

Ways to ice an injury:

**Ice Bucket/Bath:**
- Use for limbs
- Immerse 10-15 minutes, every 2 hours
- Cover digits with a curled up sock to insulate them

**Ice Cup Massage:**
- Use for muscles, smooth areas
- Apply 5-10 minutes, every 2 hours
- Use continuous, circular motion
- Do not hold ice stationary in one place

**Ice Bags:**
- Use for larger or bony areas
- Apply 15-20 minutes, every two hours
- Can use a bag of frozen vegetables
- Place a damp cloth (not saturated) between body part and the ice
- Use a LIGHTLY wrapped ace wrap to hold the ice bag in place

Continued on reverse side
Precautions about ice:
• The first time that you ice it will feel uncomfortable, but each time you ice it will become more tolerable.
• Some gel cold packs get colder than ice and can cause cold burns. Use a protective barrier.
• For cold sensitive skin use a cloth between the ice and skin, BUT DO NOT DAMPEN IT.
• NEVER ice directly over the eyes or genitals.
• Stop using ice if you experience tingling or burning radiating to the digits that are not in contact with the ice. (ie: icing your elbow and you feel tingling in your fingers)
• Do not ice over areas that have decreased sensation due injury/illness.
• Do not use ice if you are allergic to ice (welts, rashes appear).

Four stages of cold:
1. Cold
2. Burn
3. Ache
4. Numb

Note: You should try and leave the ice on until you reach stage 4.

Ways to heat an injury:
• Heating Pad: 20 minutes
• Warm Shower: 20 minutes
• Commercial Heat Packs: 20 minutes, though some commercial heat wraps can be used up to 8 hours (i.e. Thermacare®)
• Hot Tubs: 20 minutes

Precautions about heat:
• When heating, you should feel “warmth” not “hot”. If a heating pad or hot packs are too hot, you can get burned.
• Being in a hot shower or hot tub/whirlpool for too long may cause you to become dizzy and/or nauseated and pass out.
• You should never sit in hot tubs/whirlpools without other people being present.

Note of caution: People with diabetes, circulation problems, nerve problems and those on certain medications should consult their physician prior to the use of ice or heat.

The information presented should not be considered medical advice or treatment, nor should it replace a physician consultation. For more information about any of our programs or services, or to receive a physician referral, please visit www.summahealth.org.

For an appointment with one of our sports health physicians, please call 1-888-7-SUMMA-SPORT (888-778-6627)

Same day/next day physician appointments offered:
• Summa Physicians Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine
  Summa St. Thomas Hospital
  20 Olive St. #201
• Summa Health Center at Western Reserve
  5655 Hudson Dr. #200
• Tuscora Professional Medical Building
  Summa Barberton Hospital
  201 5th St. NE, Suite 14
• Robinson Health Center at Streetsboro
  9318 State Rt. 14
• Summa Health Center at Green
  3838 Massillon Rd., Suite 350A

Sports rehab and physical therapy:
• Summa St. Thomas Hospital:
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• Summa Rehab Services at White Pond:
  (330) 836-9023
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