

Hydrotherapy Techniques to Reduce Inflammation and Decrease Pain

By Lisa Guadamuz PFT, RMT

Hydrotherapy - the use of water at various temperatures to help reduce inflammation, decrease pain, increase range of motion and increase function.

Hydrotherapy can be one of the most useful and inexpensive methods to manage your pain. The use of cold water/ice can decrease inflammation. Hot water can increase blood flow, bring nutrient rich blood and relax muscles. Both heat and cold have the ability to decrease pain if used at the appropriate time and for the appropriate duration.

Acute Injuries: something new or a flare-up of a chronic condition. Cold hydro therapy is normally the first step. ICE 10/hour until swelling diminishes. Usually for joints after repetitive movements.

Chronic injuries normally respond better to warm or hot hydrotherapy. When there is less inflammation, heat can be used to bring new, nutrient rich blood to an injured area to help with the healing process. HEAT 10-20min/hour until pain diminishes. Usually used for painful or stiff muscles

Flush - ICE/HEAT: ICE 2 min/ HEAT 10 min/ ICE 2 min. After the acute phase of injury, once the swelling has diminished. You can try a FLUSH. Flushing the area of injury can help speed up the healing process by decreasing inflammation then bringing nutrient rich blood then flushing it away again. The process can be repeated a few times while resting the affected area.

HEAT THEN ICE: HEAT 10 min then stretch then ICE 2 min then rest. This method can be used on chronic stiff muscles. The heat helps increase playability of muscles before the gentle stretch is applied. Once the stretch is completed, the ice is then applied to reduce any inflammation. this process is most effective if followed by rest.

HEAT AND ICE: When ice and heat are applied at the same time they can be used to move inflammation and/or block inflammation. One application would be used to reduce painful headaches caused by shoulder stress. Heat is applied to the shoulders and ice to the base of neck. The Second application would be to reduce inflammation by activating the lymphatic system. IE. Cold is applied to inflamed/swollen ankles while heat is applied to back of knee and front of hip. The cold pushes the fluid away from the ankle and the heat draws the fluid up towards the lymph nodes to be flushed out of the body. The affected limb should be elevated during this process.

ICE CUBE MASSAGE: can be used to reduce severe acute inflammation due to trauma i.e. sprained ankle, goose egg. Hold the ice cube with a paper towel and make circular motions over affected area to reduce swelling and numb area. The area will begin by feeling cold, then stinging, burning then turn numb. If there is significant bruising, pain or malfunction then a Dr. should be consulted.

A few things to remember.

1. Do NOT use HEAT on any new or acute stage injuries. The increased temperature and flow of blood will increase the inflammation/pressure and increase the pain by irritating damaged tissue.
2. Do NOT STRETCH after ICE.
3. Always HEAT first - then stretch - then ICE - then REST

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