

# Heat or Ice for Your Pain?

Both heat (dry or wet) and ice are commonly used to treat a variety of musculoskeletal issues. But do you know when, and how, to use each therapy? Follow these basic rules of thumb.



## ICE

**Use for acute injuries, inflammation, and swelling**

### Tips:

- Start ice therapy as soon as possible after an injury.
- Apply for no more than 20 minutes at a time, several times daily.
- Use a towel, cloth, bag, or ice pack to limit direct contact of ice with skin.
- Don't use if you have poor circulation, or for stiff muscles or joints.



## HEAT

**Use for muscle pain or stiffness**

### Tips:

- Aim for warm temperatures, not hot temperatures, to avoid burns.
- More severe pain may benefit from longer-duration heat therapy.
- Do not apply to areas that are swollen, bruised, or have an open wound.
- Do not use if you have a health condition that affects your sensitivity to temperatures.



**Learn more about treatment for musculoskeletal conditions and injuries at OrthoInfo.**