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Meta Title (under 70 characters): When to Use Heat or Ice for Injuries | IMPACT Physical Therapy and Sports Recovery

Meta Description: Ice and heat are effective for treating injuries new and old, but when should you be using moist heat or cold therapy? Learn more about when to use ice vs. heat with IMPACT Physical Therapy and Sports Recovery.

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When to Use Heat or Ice for Injuries

Whether you feel the strain from lifting a heavy object or you've sprained your ankle during vigorous exercise around Chicago, the sudden pain requires some urgent first aid. However, now you're left questioning when to use heat or ice for an injury. At IMPACT Physical Therapy and Sports Recovery, we have some quick tips to keep in mind when treating an injury to help promote healing and relieve pain. If you're suffering from reoccurring conditions that ice or heat can't fix, be sure to [schedule a service](#) for individualized treatments.

Ice vs. Heat Therapy: When to Use Ice

The rule of thumb for when to use heat or ice is as follows: **ice is for acute or recent injuries, while heat is for muscular or chronic pain.** Applying ice may be uncomfortable, but for injuries less than 6 weeks old, ice can help numb the pain, relieve inflammation, and reduce bruising. Ice therapy is particularly effective for relieving inflammation in the joints caused by tendinitis or gout flare-ups.

In the consideration of when to use ice vs. heat, think "Ice first, heat later." There are conditions where it's recommended that ice and heat are effective solutions, but they should not be used in tandem unless recommended by a medical professional. While muscle strains and sprains can benefit from both ice and heat, it's only ideal to use ice to relieve the inflammation first and then switch to heat once the inflammation has resolved. After that, heat does a great job of relieving any lingering muscle stiffness.

Ice vs. Heat Therapy: When to Use Heat

After any swelling in an injured area has dissipated, heat therapy is especially helpful for soft tissues and muscles. Think about ice vs. heat for back pain. If you've finished a long day of lifting at your Champaign-area job, the cold of ice therapy isn't going to do much for the stiff muscles of your back. Applying heat to the affected areas helps warm up the muscles and promote blood flow to get you moving again.

Many patients also ask, “Does heat help inflammation?” Since heat opens the small blood vessels and promotes blood flow, applying heat to an area with inflammation can stimulate swelling and have the opposite effect intended.

Safe Practices with Ice and Heat Therapy

Heating pads, moist heat from a bath or shower, ice packs, and cold masks are all common methods to apply ice and heat therapy. However, direct application of ice or heat to the skin should be used in moderation. It’s recommended that you practice the 20 minutes on/20 minutes off routine since too much exposure can cause burns to the skin.

Return to Your Activities with IMPACT Physical Therapy and Sports Recovery!

It’s a good idea to keep when to use ice vs. heat in mind, but they aren’t the cure for any injury. Be sure to consult your doctor when acquiring a new injury. They can help evaluate the severity of the injury and recommend other solutions when ice or heat aren’t enough. You can also consult our clinicians at IMPACT Physical Therapy and Sports Recovery for manual therapy practices that [help relieve your pain](#) and get you back to your everyday activities around Oak Lawn. [Request an appointment](#) today.

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