

Heat or Ice

An easy way to remember how to self-treat a sprain, strain, pull, tear or other muscle or joint injury is to remember

RICE:

1. Rest
2. Ice
3. Compression and
4. Elevation

- **Rest** – Resting is important immediately after an injury to protect from further injury. Also, your body needs to rest so it has the energy it needs to heal itself most effectively.

- **Ice** – Ice can provide short-term pain relief. It also limits swelling by reducing blood flow to the injured area.

- **Compression** – Compression helps limit swelling, which slows down healing. Wrap the injured area—not too tightly—with an

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



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Specializing in Shoulder, Elbow, Wrist and Hand Therapy

Self Treating Injuries



Heat or Ice

*Which is right
for self treating
injuries*

Tel: 408-268-8536



Self Treating Injuries

ACE bandage.

- **Elevation** – Elevation also helps reduce swelling. Raise the injured area above heart level for best results.

Consult with your Hand and Upper Extremity Therapist for more information.

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.

Ice is often the better immediate response. Ice is a vasoconstrictor; it constricts blood vessels. Icing damaged tendons or muscles that are inflamed will minimize the swelling of torn vessels and reduce excessive 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 injured area as well as wrapping for compression will also help prevent swelling.

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 therapist might recommend using this contrast method as an immediate treatment.

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

If you press on the area, and it indents the skin, then apply heat in elevation. The swelling has now become sticky and needs to be drained. Heat will help at this stage by liquefying the fluid and help it drain out. During this time light movements can be initiated if advised by your health care provider to remove swelling.