Chill Out! The Ice Report

How to Use

Ice & Heat to Get Rid of the

Knots in Your Back

By

Kathryn Merrow

Mind Touch Communications LLC

http://www.SimplePainRelief.com
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OVERVIEW:

Muscles can respond very well to both heat and ice therapy.

Applications of heat fill the tissues with blood and increase circulation. Short applications of ice also increase circulation. This is all good!

Longer applications of cold by itself reduce the flow of blood to the area so some experts advise keeping application of cold in an area to less than one minute. (Water Therapy, Leon Chaitow MD)

The common advice when you have an injury with swelling or bruising is to use ice on for 20 minutes and off for 20 minutes.

You can do “ice massage” using an ice cube (hold it in a wash cloth) or a paper cup filled with water and frozen. You can tear the paper away as you need to. There are also ice bags and packs. You can make your own ice pack using a ziplock bag filled part way with water and ice. You can even use a bag of frozen peas or corn.

There are a lot of different heat packs, too. You can also use a hot (not too hot) shower as a heating tool but don’t just blast the water on your knot—aim it at the areas that are CAUSING your knot.

If you just keep heating the knotted area on your back, the muscles will get more and more relaxed and your knot will get worse and worse. Why? Because you’re allowing your tighter front muscles (which are quite possibly the CAUSE of your knot) to stay tight. Aim the hot water on your ribs and chest and abdomen and the front of your back.
arms. Let those muscles relax so they can stop pulling on your back and causing your spasm.

**BENEFITS OF ICE:**

Does ice therapy help more than heat?

This is what Bette Dowdell from TooPoopedToParticipate.com has to say about ice. (She’s an endocrine system/vitamin/mineral expert.) She has grown to love ice and here’s why:

“Muscle problems tend to accompany endocrine issues, especially adrenal glands that can’t or won’t keep up.

Our muscles get inflamed and “knotted up,” worse on some days than others.

Accupressure massage helps, but few therapists do it right. Several therapists have had at my back. Some felt like they were tickling me; some bruised my muscles and left me sore for days. Only one, Glenn Kippes, the physical therapist who treated me when I lived in Tucson, made a real difference. He’s a magician, but most aren’t.

Doctors usually advise hot baths—the exact wrong thing to do. Heat just inflames muscles all the more.

I know, I know. Heat feels really good. Problem is, all the while it’s feeling good, it’s making things worse.

Answer me this: A half hour or so after you get out of a hot bath or the Jacuzzi, are your muscles better or worse? And how much progress have you made with your muscle pain since you started treating yourself with heat?
A lot of people, especially men and senior citizens for some reason, won’t even consider giving up hot soaks, fully persuaded that some day they’ll work, and all the pain will disappear. It reminds me of when my kid brother was very young and liked to watch the same movie over and over—in case the ending changed.

The answer? Ice. Sheesh! Even in the Phoenix summer, lying on ice packs doesn’t make me burst into song. It’s more in the a-girl’s-gotta-do-what-a-girl’s-gotta-do category than the oh-yippee-it’s-time-for-my-ice category.

Several years ago, a man veered out of his lane and hit my car—right next to where I sat—at about 50 mph. Seat belt or no, my body parts flew in all directions, most of which God never intended. Besides a concussion and whiplash, I hurt in places I didn’t know I had places.

Doctors poked, prodded and x-rayed, then pronounced me fit as a fiddle. Good as new. And every muscle in my body said, “You’re kidding, right?” Well, no, they weren’t.

But I could hardly move. And wincing from the pain was giving me crow’s feet, which isn’t a look to which I aspired.

So Glenn went to work. He told me I would get better, faster results if I went to bed each night on ice packs. He gave me three 10" X 13" packs so I could start right away.

So every night for months, I lined up my three ice packs—which went from my neck to my tukus—covered them with a towel, and eased into bed. Ever so slowly, my muscles healed.

I keep my ice packs in the freezer, ready for duty, to this day. If I’ve overdone it, or twisted something—somehow done something to make my muscles unhappy, out come the ice packs.
I'm not a jock, but a do-it-yourselfer. Sometimes do-it-yourself ends up meaning hurting yourself in new and imaginative ways.

If my arms hurt, I ice the area where my neck meets my spine. If my legs hurt, I ice my lower back. If the pain is general, I line up the three amigos and park myself on them.

Life goes better with ice packs.

A closing word: Muscles that scream at top volume can't always take the full power and glory of ice packs at first. Cover the packs with two or three towels to tone down the effect. You'll build tolerance for full power over time--as you heal.”

“P.S. Remember. I'm not a doctor, just a patient like you. Luckily for both of us, I’ve been studying this stuff for years. Knowledge is power.” ~ Bette Dowdell

**BENEFITS OF HEAT:**

I'll bet there’s a very good chance that you've been trying to use heat to get rid of your knots.

If you apply heat to an area, it increases blood flow. This can be a good thing, because tight muscles cause pain. The increased blood flow relaxes those muscles.

There is just one thing to know: While the increased blood flow is good for healing, sometimes it can cause additional swelling. That isn't so good.

As a rule, you can tell yourself whether applying heat is making you feel better or worse.
If your muscle spasm or knot feels worse after using heat, or at least no better, then it is not the appropriate treatment for your pain. Instead, switch to ice or cold therapy.

If your symptoms are less, and you feel better after using heat, then it is a good therapy for you to use.

How do you apply heat for your muscle spasms?

There are several ways. Moist heat is one.

Moist heat seems to go more deeply into your muscles than dry heat.

Soak a towel in very hot water and wring it out. Or, wet, wring out and heat a towel in a microwave oven (be careful--the towel can get really, really hot in a microwave.) If you wrap the hot towel in plastic, it will stay hot longer because air can't get to it.

Moist heating pads that use electricity are available at stores.

Apply the heat directly to your skin or place a cloth between your skin and the heated towel or heating pad (make the cloth whatever thickness you can still feel the heat through.)

*You don't want to burn yourself!*

If it feels too hot, place another towel between your skin and the heat source.

You can tell the heat is working when your skin gets bright pink. This means your circulation has increased and your muscles are relaxing.

The length of time to leave your heating pad in place is 5 to 30 minutes.

Where do you apply the heat to relieve your muscle spasms?
You might think the logical place to work on your knot is in the area where you have the most pain. That's not necessarily true.

Remember what I said earlier? In reality, the CAUSES of your symptoms are most likely where you are NOT hurting.

What this means is: Use heat therapy on the areas that are causing your muscle spasm or knot.

The muscles that are causing your knot could be lower on your back, on the side of your ribs, on your arm and shoulder, the front of your body or even your neck.

Feel around, press into your muscles and find out what's tender. That's one way to find the muscles that are causing your knots. There are areas which are tight and need to be released or relaxed. They aren't complaining—you can find them when you touch them, though, because they will be tender. They are the cause of your knot or spasms. They are the areas where you should apply heat.

Remember, if you feel worse, even a little bit, after using heat, it is probably not the best treatment for your pain. Instead, switch to ice therapy.

CONTRAST THERAPY:

Using both heat and cold is called "contrast therapy."

Alternating heat/hot and cold/ice applications helps increase circulation, increases oxygen supply to the soft tissues and improves drainage to reduce inflammation (swelling.) Dr. Chaitow suggests finishing with cold in most instances.
Heat increases blood flow to tight muscles and cold reduces inflammation (swelling.) But sometimes you don't have to decide which to use. Sometimes you can use both!

**Here's how to use contrast therapy:**

You can alternate hot packs and cold packs. You might use ice massage (actual massage with an ice cube) and alternate it with hot towels or hot packs.

Pay attention to your body. You may get some unusual sensations because your body isn't used to processing the two different sensory inputs at the same time.

Lots of times people think of heat as being more soothing and therapeutic. If you apply heat and feel slightly worse, that means that ice/cold will benefit you more. Even though ice can be very uncomfortable, it is often the treatment of choice.

Contrast therapy (also called contrast hydrotherapy), using both ice and heat, can help your muscles feel better. Muscle tissue can relax and soften, it becomes easier to stretch, and pain is lessened.

You can still use ice or heat by themselves but now you have another choice: contrast therapy for muscle pain relief.

You can use the contrast therapy on the tight muscles that are CAUSING your knot to help them relax so your knot can go away.