

THERMAL THERAPY HOME CARE

HEAT PACK (muscle pain)

- Apply a heat pack to the painful site for 20 minutes up to 3 times a day: The heat will increase circulation and remove pain-inducing metabolites from the muscles and fascia sites.

You can have your moist heat prepared one of the following ways:

- **Electric heating pad:** An electric heating pad is convenient for this purpose but make sure to not leave it unattended, so you avoid surface burns. If you buy an electric heating pad, keep in mind that a “moist heat” electric heating pad is more effective than “dry heat” and less likely to produce a skin burn.
- **Hydrocollator heating unit and canvas bag:** one way to have a heat pack ready whenever you want is to get a large coffee maker at a discount store. Use it to heat the water for the hydrocollator bags you keep inside. The hydrocollator bags are canvas bags filled with very small heat retaining rocks. This bag will hold heat for at least 15 to 20 minutes. The canvas bag is removed from the hot water and wrapped in cloth and applied to the pain site. The hydrocollator bags can be purchased at a medical supply store or pharmacy (special order).
- **Microwave heat pack:** Roll a small towel lengthwise, wet it, fold it and place in a plastic bag, put in a microwave and heat on high for 5minutes. Carefully remove towel from plastic bag with tongs, cover with an additional dry towel to prevent burning yourself, and put around back of neck and sides of face.

ICE PACK (muscle pain or nerve pain)

- Apply an iced gel pack to the painful site for 20 minutes up to 3 times a day. There are many gel packs that can be purchased at a pharmacy. These packs are kept in a freezer and then wrapped in a towel before applying to the painful area.

Admittedly, some patients do better with heat and others with ice. This is determined by trial and error and to some degree patient’s preference. Like heat, ice packs applied to a local area of the body will also increase regional circulation. This occurs since, while you obviously cool the skin under the ice, the tissue beneath the cooled areas have reactive vasodilatation to attempt to warm the site back to body temperature. In either case, increased circulation results. One distinct advantage of ice is that it will decrease nerve activity in the area being cooled, so if the pain is more of a nerve irritation and on the surface, ice packs are preferred.

ICE CUBE (TMJ pain or nerve pain)

- Apply ice to the painful site for 10 minutes up to 6 times a day. If you feel your skin burning, remove the ice for a couple of seconds and reapply.

You can have your ice prepared in one of the following ways:

- **Ice cube:** Done with a squared ice cube with a thin cloth.
- **Ice in a paper cup:** Put water in a small paper cup, freeze it and use the cup to apply the ice.
- **Can of cold soda:** If you aren’t home, buy a cold soda and hold the can on the painful area.