

# ICE OR HEAT?

*Which treatment is best for your injury and how to use it.*

When an injury or chronic pain occurs, the first thing many of us do is reach for an ice or heat pack. But which one should you use for your injury? And how long should you apply the treatment?

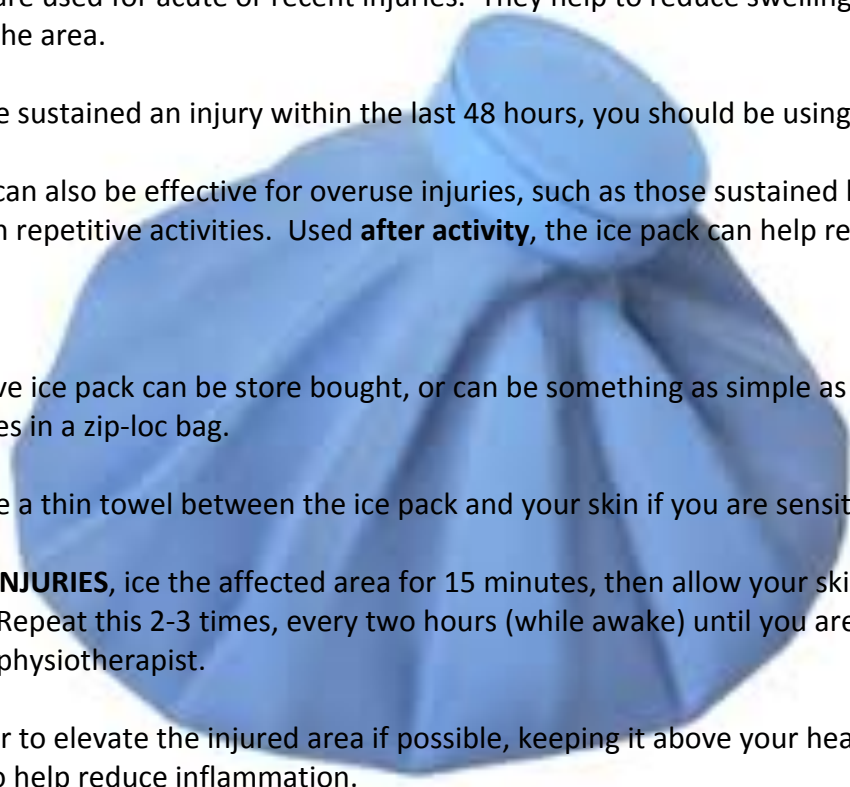
## ICE PACKS

### WHEN TO USE

- Ice packs are used for acute or recent injuries. They help to reduce swelling and relieve pain by numbing the area.
- If you have sustained an injury within the last 48 hours, you should be using an ice pack.
- Ice packs can also be effective for overuse injuries, such as those sustained by athletes and people involved in repetitive activities. Used **after activity**, the ice pack can help reduce inflammation and pain.

### HOW TO USE

- An effective ice pack can be store bought, or can be something as simple as a bag of frozen peas, or ice cubes in a zip-loc bag.
- Always use a thin towel between the ice pack and your skin if you are sensitive to cold.
- For **NEW INJURIES**, ice the affected area for 15 minutes, then allow your skin to warm for 10 minutes. Repeat this 2-3 times, every two hours (while awake) until you are able to consult with a doctor or physiotherapist.
- Remember to elevate the injured area if possible, keeping it above your heart while applying the ice pack to help reduce inflammation.
- For **OVERUSE INJURIES**, ice the affected area for 15-20 minutes, allowing approximately 45 minutes for the skin to warm before applying again (if required).



## **HEAT PACKS**

### ***WHEN TO USE***

- Heat packs are used for chronic, ongoing injuries or pain. The heat helps to stimulate blood flow to the affected area, which aids in the healing process.
- Heat packs should be used before activity to help loosen and relax muscles.
- Never use a heat pack on a new injury (within 48 hours) or after activity.

### ***HOW TO USE***

- Always use moderate heat, or place enough layers between the heat pack and your skin until the warmth is pleasant, not burning.
- You can purchase heat packs, or can improvise by running a towel under warm water. Warm baths can be just as effective, and can soothe many areas at once.
- For best results, apply the heat pack to the affected area for approximately 20 minutes at a time.

***Always seek medical advice when dealing with an injury. If in doubt, consult one of the friendly sports doctors or physiotherapists at Sydney Sports Medicine Centre.***