

Non-Drug Pain Relief: Heating Pad

Heat is the application of warmth to the skin for the relief of pain. One method of applying heat is by use of a heating pad. The heating pad does not replace your pain medicine. It works with your pain medicine to help you get better pain relief.

How Heat Helps

Heat can relieve pain by reducing inflammation and soreness. Heat also decreases sensitivity to pain, relieves joint stiffness and increases blood flow to the skin.

Special Precautions

- Heat can burn if used improperly. Also, read the manufacturers' directions before using any heating pad. Please follow all precautions listed to avoid electrical shock.
- Do not apply heat to:
 - ▶ Skin being treated with radiation therapy
 - ▶ Any area that is bleeding
 - ▶ Any area with decreased sensation
 - ▶ Any injury within the first 24 hours
- Do not use along with any products that have menthol-containing products such as Vicks, Ben Gay or Icy Hot
- Do not use heat while sleeping.
- Do not use if oxygen is being used.

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Learn more about your health care.

Supplies

- Heating pad
- Manufacturers' cover for the heating pad

Directions:

1. Plug in the heating pad and place the temperature control on low. Adjust it to a higher heat setting, if needed.
2. When the heating pad is warm, put it on the area where you want pain relief.
3. If an area is too painful to have the heating pad directly on it, you can place the pad on the other side of the body that corresponds to the painful area. For example, if your right hip is too painful for the pad, put it on the left hip.
4. Be sure the heating pad has a cover over it to prevent burning the skin.
5. Do not fall asleep on top of the heating pad. Heat increases with pressure, which may cause burns.
6. Keep the heating pad on for as long as possible to get relief, usually 20 to 30 minutes.
7. You may alternate heat and cold to improve comfort (ask for pain control handouts on Cold Methods). You may have to try either heat or cold several times to find the correct area or temperature that give you the most relief.
8. If the heating pad is too warm, decrease the temperature. Adjust the temperature of the heating pad for your comfort. Check your skin frequently to prevent possibility of burning, overheating or swelling of the affected area.
9. Use the heating pad before the pain becomes severe and as often as necessary for pain relief.
10. If you are keeping a Pain Management Log, record the heat method and how it works.

✦ **Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3703 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**