

Non-Drug Pain Relief: Moist Heat / Heating Pad

Heat is the application of warmth to the skin for the relief of pain. One method of applying heat is to use of a heating pad that supplies moisture. Moist heat / heating pads are not intended to replace your pain medicine. They work with your pain medicine to help you get better pain relief.

How Heat Helps

Heat can relieve pain by improving circulation to the muscles, which decreases spasms, and by reducing inflammation. Heat also decreases sensitivity to pain, relieves joint stiffness and increases blood flow to the skin. Moisture with heat may provide a means of getting heat below the skin surface.

Special Precautions

- Use heat with caution when feeling to an area is decreased or there is any other irritation to the skin surface.
- Do not apply to:
 - ▶ Skin being treated with radiation therapy
 - ▶ Any area that is bleeding
 - ▶ A painful area that has been injured
- Do not use this method if oxygen is being used.
- Do not use heat while sleeping.

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Supplies

- Specially-designed heating pad, such as the Sunbeam Automatic Heating Pad
- Manufacturer's foam rubber sheet
- Manufacturer's protective 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 painful area.
3. If an area is too painful to have the moist heat / 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 the pad on the left hip.
4. Keep the moist heat/heating pad on for as long as possible to get relief, usually 20 to 30 minutes.
5. You may alternate heat and cold to improve comfort. (Refer to handouts on Cold Methods.) You may have to try either heat or cold several times to find the correct area or temperature that gives you the most relief.
6. 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 the possibility of a burn, or the overheating or swelling of the affected area.
7. You may use the moist heat / heating pad 3 or 4 times a day. Try to use this method before the pain becomes severe.
8. If you are keeping a Pain Management Log, record the heat method and how it works.

❖ **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**