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Orthopedic, Sports & Manual Therapy

Heat VS. Cold

EFFECTS OF HEAT:

- Improves blood flow promoting the healing process, however this increased blood flow can also result in increased inflammation and swelling, which can be perceived as increased pain, and for this reason, NEVER apply heat or use a hot tub within the first 72 hours of an acute injury.
- Relaxes muscle spasm
- Reduces pain

WHEN TO USE HEAT:

- Wait at least 72 hours following an injury. To be safe, wait until day #4.
- Heat is usually beneficial BEFORE an activity or EARLY in the day to warm up the muscle and joints allowing improved flexibility. Apply no longer than 20 minutes per hour.

EFFECTS OF COLD:

- Reduces blood flow which reduces inflammation and swelling.
- Relaxes muscle spasm
- Reduces pain due to the numbing of nerve endings.
- ***If used greater than 20 minutes, the body can go thru a reflexive reaction to warm up the chilled area, resulting in increased blood flow and subsequently increasing heat, swelling and inflammation to the area, negating the benefits of the cold.***

WHEN TO USE COLD:

- You can almost never go wrong with applying cold to an injured area, but no longer than 20 minutes per application per hour.
- Cold is usually beneficial AFTER an activity, or LATER in the day to reduce the inflammation caused from the activities of the day.
- Cold can be used following the application of heat.