

Non-Drug Pain Relief: Ice Massage

Pain may be relieved by applying cold to the painful area. One method of applying cold is to rub ice on the painful area. Ice massages do not replace your pain medicine. It works with your pain medicine to help you get better pain relief.

How Ice Massage Helps Your Pain

When you apply cold to the skin, it decreases skin sensations by numbing the nerve endings. Cold also may reduce muscle spasms, inflammation and help stop the desire to scratch areas that itch.

Special Precautions

- Do not apply ice massages to:
 - ▶ Skin being treated with radiation therapy
 - ▶ Severe injury
 - ▶ A wound in the healing phase
 - ▶ Areas that have poor circulation
- Do not use cold if pain increases.

Supplies

- Ice
- Towel or bath towel and washcloth
- Plastic bag or trash bag
- Paper cups (bathroom size)
- Popsicle sticks

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Directions

1. Fill a paper cup halfway with water. Place the cup in the freezer until the water is frozen solid. You may put a popsicle stick in the water for a handle.
2. Peel the paper partly away from the cup to expose the ice. Place the ice cup under cold running water to remove any rough surfaces on the ice.
3. Remove any clothing covering the painful area.
4. Place a plastic bag covered by a bath towel under the area to be massaged. This will help absorb any water that may run off and will help dry the skin as the ice melts.
5. Get into a comfortable position.
6. Wrap a washcloth around the paper cup to prevent your hand from getting cold or use the stick as a handle.
7. Rub the ice over the painful area using a circular motion. Dry your skin with a towel as the ice melts.
8. Massage the area for 5 to 7 minutes. You should feel four sensations during ice massage:

Cold: Cold is felt when the ice is first applied.

Burning: After a few minutes, you will feel some burning.

Ache: After about 5 minutes, aching is felt. Your skin may become red at this time.

Numbness: Continue the ice massage until all of the burning disappears and the area feels numb.

You may repeat the ice massage three or four times a day. You may alternate cold with heat. Try either heat or cold several times to find the correct area or temperature that gives you the most relief.

9. Keep a supply of paper cups with ice in them in the freezer so they will be ready when you need them.
10. If you are keeping a Pain Management Log, record the ice massage 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.**