Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Cold Therapy

Version number: **8**
Last modified date: **12th November 2026**

Cold Therapy

Patient Information

MSK Therapy

- Author ID: MP / CM
- Leaflet Ref: Phy 048
- Version: 8
- Leaflet title: Cold Therapy
- Last review: February 2026
- Expiry Date: February 2028

This leaflet is to be used following assessment by a Chartered Physiotherapist who will determine if this treatment is appropriate and safe for you to use. The term cold therapy includes the use of ice packs or cold compresses.

Benefits of using cold therapy

- Cold therapy can help reduce swelling following an injury or after surgery.
- It can also help reduce pain.

Risks of cold therapy

- Tissue damage due to ice burns.
- Alteration in blood pressure.
- Infection if skin is broken.
- Increase in pain.
- Inhibit muscle activity.

Alternatives to cold therapy

None that is suitable for home use.

Why use cold therapy?

- To reduce swelling following an injury or surgery.
- To help reduce pain.

When should I not use cold therapy?

- If you develop any broken skin in the area to be treated.
- If it increases your pain.
- If you do not fully understand how to apply the treatment.
- If you have a circulatory or sensory problem.

How do I apply the treatment?

Ice Packs

- Use a bag of frozen peas or a flexible ice pack wrapped in a damp towel.
- Make sure the skin is free from oils or creams.
- Apply to the affected area as directed by your physiotherapist.
- Leave in situ for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Avoid the full weight of the limb on the cold pack as this may increase the likelihood of a burn.

Cold Compress

Occasionally your physiotherapist may advise this as an alternative to ice packs. The same precautions and procedures apply as for the use of ice packs:

- Fill a bucket/bowl with a mixture of water and ice cubes.
- Use a small, folded towel or facecloth (depending on the area) submerge it in the ice water mixture and apply to the affected area.

Other cold therapy options

- Cryotherapy cuff/sleeve: follow the manufacturer's instructions for application.

After application of ice/cold compresses

If you notice blistering or redness which does not go away, please contact your physiotherapist for advice. If it is outside normal working hours contact your GP or Accident and Emergency.

Contacts

Physiotherapy Department
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