Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Heat Therapy

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

Heat Therapy

Patient Information

Musculoskeletal (MSK) Therapy

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This guide is for use following assessment by your physiotherapist who will decide if it is a suitable treatment for you.

The term heat therapy includes the use of commercially available heat packs, lavender/wheat wraps, and hot water bottles.

Benefits of Using Heat Therapy

- Heat can help reduce pain and muscle spasm.
- Heat can also be useful to relax muscles prior to exercise.

Risks of Using Heat Therapy

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

Alternatives to Heat Therapy

None that is suitable for home use.

When Should I Not Use Heat Therapy?

- If you develop broken skin in the area to be treated.
- If you have an infection in the area to be treated.
- If it increases your pain.
- If you do not fully understand how to apply the treatment.
- If you are unable to distinguish hot from cold on the area of application.
- If you have an acute injury.

How Do I Apply the Treatment?

Commercially available heat packs: Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for heating and application.

Hot water bottle:

- Fill from the hot tap rather than a kettle.
- Wrap it in several layers of towels so that it is just warm to the touch.

Both methods:

- The heat pack/hot water bottle should be warm rather than hot to touch.
- The normal application time is 10 to 15 minutes.
- Do not use with any other treatment at the same time e.g., TENS machine.
- Avoid the full weight of the limb on the heat pack as this may increase the likelihood of a burn.

After Treatment

If you notice blistering or redness which does not go away, please contact your physiotherapist for advice (01257 256305). If it is outside normal working hours, contact your GP or Accident and Emergency.

Wrightington Therapy Department – Monday to Friday

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