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The Therapeutic Use of Ice

Why use Ice? - When an area of the body is cooled, within 10-15 minutes the blood vessels constrict. The removal of ice allows the blood vessels to expand protecting the region from freezing (Hunting Effect).

In acute stages of direct injury, dilation of blood vessels release plasma and blood, causing internal bruising. This may lead to additional problems such as limited range of motion, noticeable swelling and pain. This acute phase may last up to 72 hours. Ice used during this period will cause constriction of the blood vessels and limit swelling.

How to use Ice - The best sequence for use, immediately after injury is as follows:

Ice the area for 15 minutes on, and 15 minutes off for the first 1-1/2 hours or so. After the first 1-1/2 hours, ice should be used intermittently, over the following 72 hours. Do not use ice for more than 15 minutes at a time.

Practical Application - Many types of soft tissue injury can be helped by ice application. This includes muscle pulls, joint sprains (e.g., ankle sprains), back pain after a sudden movement, muscle cramping, and direct injury.

Anyone can apply ice. Ice should be used immediately after injury has occurred, even prior to getting attention from a Chiropractor. It will have an immediate pain relieving effect, as well as encourage quicker healing.

Alternating heat with ice outside the acute phase can be beneficial for injuries to the extremities. Alternating 15 minutes of ice with 15 minutes of warm-wet-heat pumps excess fluid from the injured area and supports the healthy effects of the inflammatory process in healing.