

Heat and Cold

Everyone in sports gets a strained or sore muscle or joint from time to time, and needs to know how to minimize the damage, pain and recovery time. Here are some points to remember:

Consult sensei immediately following the injury. Through the prompt application of *shiatsu* techniques (Oriental pressure-point massage) he can often stop or greatly reduce the pain, and can advise you further. If there is any indication that the problem is serious (a possible fracture, for instance), see a physician immediately.

Apply cold immediately following the injury. Swelling and inflammation can actually increase the amount of damage, after the fact, and need to be suppressed. Application of cold compresses, plus a non-prescription, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory such as Advil (ibuprofen) will help a great deal.

Apply heat later, to reduce muscle cramps and spasms, and to help the damaged muscles stay relaxed. Spasms and tightness can cause additional damage and prevent healing. (Advil also has an anti-spasmodic effect and will help at this stage too.) Electric heating pads work well, as do commercial hot packs.

Recently *Consumer Reports* magazine (April 1996) reviewed commercially available hot and cold compresses and found a multitude of them on the market, priced at from \$2 to more than \$20. Some must first be placed in the freezer or microwave oven; others must be filled with ice or hot water. Some products will deliver either warmth or cooling. The *Ice-N-Heat Gel Pack* (\$20) comes with a wrap to hold it in place, after being frozen or microwaved, and will stay cold or hot for about an hour. The *Body Glove Neoprene Ice Pack Wrap* (\$23) is an elastic support wrap which must be filled with ice or hot water (it can't be microwaved), and lasts for one or two hours. The *3M Heat Comfort Pack* (microwavable and reusable) lasts for about 45 minutes of dry heat; the *Cara Micro-Heat* (\$13) provides moist heat which works better, but not as long. The *Ace Reusable Cold Compress* (\$4) works well, they say, but a bag of frozen peas works just as well and costs only \$1.

Whichever product you choose, be certain to follow the package instructions carefully, and give the injury sufficient time to heal before getting back to your training. Even if all pain disappears as a result of immediate treatment, there may still be some healing time needed.

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