

Home Physiotherapy Series

Heat Therapy



Heat therapy can dilate blood vessels under the skin and promote circulation. As a result, it can alleviate symptoms of chronic inflammation, relieve pain, reduce swelling, speed up recovery, ease muscle spasms, soothe the nerves and enhance flexibility of the soft tissues.

Indicated for:

Areas without acute inflammation (i.e. without redness or increased warmth). Examples of conditions suitable for hot therapy include chronic back and neck pain, chronic joint pain, muscle fatigue or muscle spasms.



Method:

1. Prepare the items required: warm water, warm towel, hot water bag, cold/hot compress or electric hot pack. The temperature should be comfortably warm and not too hot, to avoid heat burns.
2. Wrap with towels until suitable warmth and to ensure no direct skin contact with the hot bag, to absorb sweat and reduce the chance of overheating.



Heat with a microwave



Wrap with towels

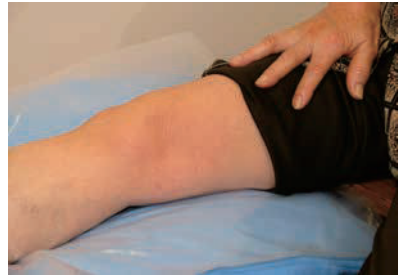
3. Keep the affected area supported and affix the hot pack onto the area. Alternatively, immerse the affected area into warm water.
4. Heat therapy should be applied for about 15 to 20 minutes, at least two hours apart each time or as advised by healthcare professionals.



Keep the affected area supported and affix the hot pack onto the area.

Skin reaction after application

- During heat therapy, there will be warmth and redness to the skin. This is temporary and the redness will gradually subside after the heat therapy.
- If there is persistent rash, pain, worsening of symptoms or other discomfort during or after heat therapy, stop immediately and seek advice from a physiotherapist or other healthcare professionals.



Normal temporary redness to the skin after heat therapy

Contraindications:

Heat application is not suitable for :

- Patients who have fever, malignant tumours, dermatitis, impaired blood circulation (such as thrombophlebitis, peripheral vascular disease), impaired skin sensation, or inability to understand instructions (such as individuals with cognitive impairment). Additionally, extensive heat application is not advisable for patients with heart disease.
- Areas with acute inflammation or sprains (characterized by redness, swelling, pain and heat), recent radiation therapy, infection, open wounds or bleeding, or severe pain or swelling.

Precautions:

- Individuals with cardiac failure, pregnant women and for areas near or around the eyes or neck, please consult a doctor or physiotherapist before using heat therapy.
- As sensation of temperature may be affected by topical ointments, do not apply any ointment to the affected area before using heat therapy so as to prevent heat burns.
- Heat therapy is more effective when combined with suitable care and other treatment methods, such as adequate rest, elevation of the affected area, rehabilitation exercise and massage. For example, to relieve knee joint pain, supplement heat therapy with ankle pump exercises.



- Do not fall asleep, apply heat therapy over extended periods of time, or lie on the heat pack. When using a hot water bag, ensure there is no leakage to prevent heat burns.
- If there is no improvement after undergoing heat therapy for some time, seek advice from a physiotherapist or other healthcare professionals.

If you have any questions regarding this leaflet, please seek advice from a physiotherapist or other healthcare professionals.

