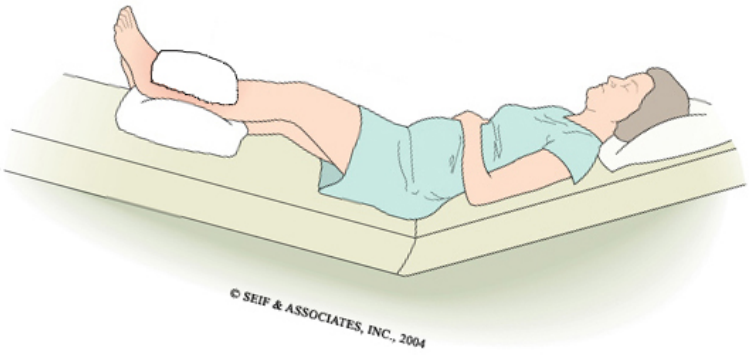
Cold Therapy

Your caregiver advises cold therapy for your injury. This is a good starting treatment for sprains, muscle strains, and bruises (*contusions*). Cold treatment helps reduce pain, swelling and bleeding into injured tissues. It may also decrease muscle spasm. Pain relief from cold applications is probably due to a "counter-irritant" effect. This means at first the pain increases with the cold pack, then it becomes slightly numb with less discomfort.



The best way to apply cold treatments is with a plastic bag full of crushed ice, or a frozen gel pack. Chemical cold packs are not recommend. They keep their cool for just a few minutes. Place the cold pack over the injury for 30 minutes. Repeat the treatment every 2-3 hours for 2-3 days. Use a dry towel or washcloth between the cold pack and your skin. This avoids injury to the skin. An elastic bandage can be applied over the ice pack for compression. This is very effective in cooling injured tissues.

Do not leave the pack on for too long. It can cause frostbite. **If you have circulation problems or a skin disease, you should not use ice packs. This increases the risk of frostbite.**

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