Heat Therapy

Your caregiver advises heat therapy for your condition. Heat applications help reduce pain and muscle spasm around injuries or areas of inflammation. They also increase blood flow to the area which can speed healing. Moist heat is commonly used to help heal skin infections. Heat treatments should be used for about 30-40 minutes every 2-4 hours. Shorter treatments should be used if there is discomfort. Different forms of heat therapy are:

1. **Warm water** - Use a basin or tub filled with heated water; change it often to keep the water hot. The water temperature should not be uncomfortable to the skin.
2. **Hot packs** - Use several bath towels soaked in hot water and lightly wrung out. These should be changed every 5-10 minutes. You can buy commercially-available packs that provide more sustained heat. Hot water bottles are not recommended because they give only a small amount of heat.
3. **Electric heating pads** - These may be used for dry heat only. Do not use wet material around a regular heating pad because of the risk of electrical shock. Do not leave heating pads on for long periods as they can burn the skin or cause permanent discoloration. Do not lie on top of a heating pad because, again, this can cause a burn.
4. **Heat lamps** - Use an infrared light. Keep the bulb 15-25 inches from the skin. Watch for signs of excessive heat (blotchy areas will appear).

Be cautious with heat therapy to avoid burning the skin. You should not use heat therapy without careful medical supervision if you have: circulation problems, numbness or unusual swelling in the area to be treated.

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