

# Take Home Instructions: Cold Therapy

## What is cold therapy?

Cold therapy is the application of cold to reduce swelling and relieve pain.

## Why is cold therapy prescribed?

Cold therapy is used to reduce damage in the muscles immediately after injury or to reduce swelling after exercise.<sup>1</sup> It also increases range of motion during physical activity and helps reduce pain your pet may feel.

## Where should I apply cold therapy?

Cold therapy, such as the use of ice packs (see below), can be applied to any location on your pet's body. It is most commonly used on joints, such as the shoulders, elbows, hips, or knees.

## What can I use for cold therapy?

A variety of items are available, including include vinyl cold packs, gel packs, ice packs, or bags of frozen vegetables, such as peas or corn. Vinyl cold packs and gel packs can be purchased from local sporting goods stores. Ice packs can be made at home. Frozen vegetables can be purchased at local grocery store.

## When do I apply cold therapy?

Cold therapy is applied for the first 24 to 72 hours after injury.<sup>1</sup> Cold therapy is also applied if the skin becomes warm to the touch, such as during exercise, or if your dog shows signs of pain or swelling.

## How do I prepare the cold pack?

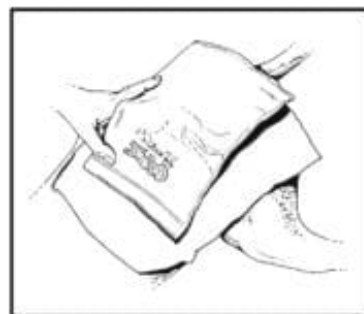
For vinyl cold packs or gel packs, follow the manufacturer's instructions on the package. To make an ice pack, place crushed ice in a plastic bag, remove all excess air from the bag, and seal the bag.<sup>3</sup> For frozen vegetables, place the bag in the freezer for two hours. Remove the bag from the freezer immediately before therapy because the bag will only stay cold for about 20-30 minutes.

## What are the treatment guidelines?

Place a thin cloth, such as a pillowcase, on your pet's skin and then place the cold pack on top of the cloth. This helps prevent frostbite and reduces the cold shock to your pet. Hold the pack in place with your hand. Leave the pack in place for 10-15 minutes or until the skin feels cool to the touch.<sup>1</sup> You may notice your dog fall asleep; this is okay and demonstrates your pet's comfort with the therapy.

## What are the safety considerations?

Never leave your pet unattended with cold packs to prevent accidental ingestion of the cold pack. Stop treatment immediately if your pet shows signs of severe discomfort, such as growling, snapping, or yelping.



Cold packs can be used on a variety of joints, such as seen here on the hip joint, to reduce pain and swelling.



Bags of frozen vegetables, such as peas, can be used as a cold pack.



Place the cold pack in a pillowcase to help reduce frostbite.

1. Bockstahler B, Levine D, Millis D. *Essential Facts of Physiotherapy in Dogs and Cats: Rehabilitation and Pain Management*. Babenhausen, Germany. 2004. BE VetVerlag. pp 113-114.
2. Steiss, Janet. Levine, David. Physical Agent Modalities. *Veterinary Clinics of North America (Small Animal Practice)*. 35-6; Nov 2005.
3. Millis DL, Levine D, Taylor RA. *Canine Rehabilitation & Physical Therapy*. St Louis. 2004. Saunders. p 282.

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