

Non-Drug Pain Relief: Frozen Gel Packs

Pain may be relieved by applying cold to the painful area. One method of applying cold is to use frozen gel packs. Gel packs do not replace your pain medicine. They work with your pain medicine to help you get better pain relief.

How Frozen Gel Packs Help

When you apply cold to the skin, it decreases skin sensations by numbing nerve endings. Cold also may reduce muscle spasms, inflammation and help stop the desire to scratch areas that itch.

Special Precautions

- **Do not** apply frozen gel packs to:
 - Skin being treated with radiation therapy
 - Severe injury
 - A wound in the healing phase
 - Areas that have poor circulation
- **Do not** use cold if pain increases.

Supplies

- Gel Pack
or
- Homemade Gel Pack
 - Buy hair styling gel. Seal this in a self-sealing small plastic bag. Freeze it until it becomes slush.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- ▶ Or mix together 1 cup of rubbing alcohol and 1 cup of water into a self-sealing small plastic bag. Place the plastic bag with the mixture in it in the freezer until the mixture becomes slush.
- Towel or pillowcase
- Six-inch elastic wrap
- Products with menthol such as Ben Gay or Icy Hot, if desired.

Directions

1. Remove the gel pack from the freezer.
2. Wrap the gel pack in a pillowcase or towel. You do not have to do this if the gel pack is covered in its own fabric or elastic wrap. If you use a homemade gel pack, be sure the plastic bag does not leak. Cover the plastic bag with a towel or pillowcase.
3. Get into a comfortable position.
4. Place the gel pack on the area that is painful. Wrap the gel pack around the area where you want relief. The elastic wrap attached to the gel pack can be secured with the Velcro tape on the wrap. If you are using a homemade gel pack, use a six-inch elastic wrap to hold the gel pack in place.
5. If it is too painful to put the gel pack directly on the area, place it above or below the painful area.
6. Leave the gel pack on for 15 minutes, three or four times a day. Leave the gel pack off for at least 45 minutes between each use.
7. You may alternate cold with heat. Try either heat or cold several times to find the correct area or temperature that gives you the most relief.
8. Products with menthol, such as Ben Gay or Icy Hot, can be applied to the painful area when using cold. **Do not** use these with heat as burns may occur. Wash your hands well after using any product that has menthol and avoid getting it into your eyes. Try a small amount of the menthol product on your inner arm. If you do not have redness or irritation after a few minutes, you may use the product.
9. Return the gel pack to the freezer.
10. If you are keeping a Pain Management Log, record the cold method and how it works.