

## **To Ice or not to Ice**

With the weather warming up everyone is starting to get out and about in the garden, out exercising, or just generally being more active. With all that there are bound to be a few injuries or the odd aches and pains, so what can you do straight away to help settle things down? Do you ice it, or place heat on it?

The answer comes down to the type of injury you have and how long you have had it.

Ice treatment is most commonly used for acute injuries. If you have had a recent injury (in the last 48hrs) and there is heat and swelling, you should use ice treatment. Ice works as a vasoconstrictor (closing of small blood vessels). This helps limit the amount of swelling that occurs immediately after the injury. It also has a calming effect on nerves, which can decrease pain.

Ice can also be used in some cases of overuse injury (shin splints/RSI). In this situation the muscles become so tight and unable to relax that swelling can occur in the muscle sheaths. Ice works to help control the inflammation that occurs after use. It is always important to remember not to apply the ice/cold pack directly to the skin due to risk of frostbite and damage to the tissues.

Heat treatment is most commonly used for chronic conditions or injuries more than 48hrs old, where there is no swelling. Heat works as a vasodilator (to open blood vessels), which boosts the supply of oxygen to the site accelerating the removal of waste products and increasing nutrient supply. It helps promote muscle relaxation and reduce related stiffness.

There is also the option of alternating ice and heat. This is most commonly used for more acute/recent injuries. By doing 5-10mins of each you keep the swelling down with the cold, while you keep the blood and its nutrients circulating through the injured area with the heat. This method promotes the opening and closing of the blood vessels, pumping the swelling out of the area. You should always start and end with ice treatment.

If pain or inflammation persists, come and see Craig or Fionna at Balance Osteopathy Welcome Bay for an assessment and treatment.