



## **Ice, heat both useful in treating injuries**

*Information for this article was provided by Aurora Sports Medicine Institute. For more information, call the Sports Medicine Hotline™ at 219-7776 or 1-800-219-7776 or log on to [www.Aurora.org/SportsMedicine](http://www.Aurora.org/SportsMedicine)*

Following an injury, you may have pain and swelling — but how do you know the best treatment for a fresh injury such as an ankle sprain?

You can make the right choice by understanding the effects of both heat and ice. Ice is beneficial initially because, when applied to the injured area, blood vessels constrict and decrease blood flow, controlling swelling.

Keeping this swelling down is one of the keys to a quick recovery. A general rule is to apply ice to an injury for at least the first 72 hours. Not only will this help control swelling, but it can reduce pain. Ice should be applied for 15 to 20 minutes at a time by using a gel pack, plastic bag of ice, bag of frozen vegetables or ice wrapped in a towel.

Heat has the opposite effect of cold, and increases blood flow to the area. Additional blood flow helps healing by removing unwanted fluid from the injured area. The best time to use heat is after the first 72 hours of an injury, but only if there is minimal swelling and the area is no longer warm in comparison to surrounding tissue.

Heat, as with ice, should be applied for about 15 to 20 minutes at a time. The easiest way to use moist heat at home is to take a warm bath or shower. However, you can also put damp towels in the microwave for about 2 minutes or use a heating pad. Always add a layer of cloth between your skin and the heat if the heat pack gets too hot.

Remember that if an injury shows signs of swelling or inflammation, ice should be used. If the swelling or pain is severe or persists, see your doctor.