



“Wellness” doesn’t just mean practicing healthy habits and getting good preventive care. It also means taking care of yourself when you’re sick or hurt. Injuries can happen to anyone, but if you’re just starting out on an exercise routine, you may find yourself stiff and sore until you get used to it. This guide to heating and icing injuries can help get you back on track to wellness and a healthy lifestyle.

## Heat it or ice it? Hot vs. cold guide to treating injuries

Like tea or yoga, pain relief comes in more than one temperature. You reach for a bag of frozen peas from the freezer if you twist your ankle. You might even take a clue from your chiropractor and use a heating pad to relax that knot in your right shoulder. But what about when your shins start aching from too many miles on the pavement, or when you pull a muscle picking up the cat litter the wrong way? No cold pack or heated blanket can repair a sprained ankle or mend a torn tendon, but both warming and chilling a painful area can help minor injuries heal faster and temper pain.



### When to chill out

Ice shrinks the blood vessels in your skin and other tissues, decreasing blood flow. All the chemical reactions in the area slow to a crawl, including those that contribute to swelling and inflammation.

To use cold therapy safely, apply a gel pack, bag of crushed ice, or even

frozen vegetables for 15 to 20 minutes every hour or two, all day if possible. Place a moist towel or dishcloth in between the ice and your skin to prevent frostbite. (Pro tip: if you go the veggie route, mark the bag so no one cooks it later—thawing and re-freezing can spoil food.)

### Use ice:

- **Within the first 24 to 48 hours after an injury.** Whether you sprained an ankle or pulled a muscle, you’ll reap the most reward from ice’s inflammation-fighting properties at this stage. Basically, by icing an injury early, you can significantly decrease swelling later.
- **Immediately after a tough workout.** While not necessary every time, if you finish a workout and realize you’ve overdone it, some icing now can save you from stiffness and pain tomorrow.
- **On injuries that feel warm when you touch them.** This is a sign of active infection or inflammation; heat could worsen your condition at this stage. In addition to relieving inflammation, the ice should feel pretty good.
- While pregnant, especially near your abdominal area. Hot packs in this spot could increase your core temperature and harm your baby. In extreme cases, a high core temperature could even contribute to birth defects—so check with your doctor if you have questions.

## What is Trigger Finger?

Trigger finger is a painful condition that causes the fingers or thumb to catch or lock when bent. Trigger finger happens when tendons in the finger or thumb become inflamed and swollen. Over time, the inflammation can cause scarring within the tendon sheath, making the joint snap or pop.

Trigger finger can be caused by a repeated movement or forceful use of the finger or thumb. So can grasping something, such as a power tool, with a firm grip for a long time, which means that certain occupations, like farmers, industrial workers, and even musicians, are more likely to develop the condition. Rheumatoid arthritis, gout, and diabetes also can cause trigger finger.

One of the first symptoms of trigger finger is soreness at the base of the finger or thumb. The most common symptom is a painful clicking or snapping when bending or straightening the finger. This catching sensation tends to get worse after resting the finger or thumb and loosens up with movement.

### How is trigger finger treated?

The first step is to rest the finger or thumb. Your doctor may put a splint on your hand to keep the joint from moving. If symptoms continue, your doctor may prescribe drugs that fight inflammation, such as ibuprofen or naproxen. Your doctor may also recommend an injection of a steroid into the tendon sheath. If the trigger finger does not get better, your doctor may recommend surgery. However, most patients with trigger finger recover within a few weeks by resting the finger and using anti-inflammatory drugs.

Adapted from [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

## When to heat things up

Heat operates in the opposite way, opening up blood vessels and increasing blood flow, delivering nutrients that allow cramping muscles to relax. Hot packs also fight pain by altering the messages your sensory nerves send back to your brain.

You can use a moist heat pack warmed in water, electric heating blanket or heating pad, or a popcorn-type pack that goes in the microwave. Place a towel or cloth over your skin first to avoid burning. Leave it on no more than 20 minutes at a time, and let your skin cool completely before reapplying.

### Use heat:

- **A day or two after a tough workout.** However, while a heating pad may provide temporary relief, it's better to create warmth by heating the muscles themselves with gentle movement, like walking, easy cycling, or yoga. This again increases blood flow to affected areas and relaxes the muscles.
- **For chronic soreness, such as low back pain.** Warm showers or baths can be especially helpful by releasing the tension from continually contracted muscles, but not very practical for all day relief. A microwaveable heat pack that you can take with you to work is a good option for pain management during the day.
- **On an injury after the first few days.** At this point, inflammation has decreased and increasing blood flow can provide healing nutrients. Each injury is different, so there's no set time period when to ice versus when to heat. Switch to heat when icing the injury loses its effectiveness as pain relief.



## Alternating heat and ice

Some injuries actually react better to an alternating pattern of heat and ice, instead of just icing at the beginning, then switching to heat. Following the first three days after injury, you can alternate the use of ice and heat to treat your sore muscles. Apply heat if you're feeling stiff – for example, in the morning after you get out of bed. Apply ice to decrease pain after activities. Additionally, contrast baths may decrease pain and swelling in your sore muscles. They work best for areas that can be easily submerged in water. Alternating immersion in warm and cold water helps flush excess fluid out of the area as your blood vessels expand and contract. Warm bath temperatures should range from 105 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit and cold baths from 50 to 65 F. Specific instructions for contrast baths vary, but they can begin immediately after injury. Treatment typically lasts for 10 to 30 minutes and may be performed more than once a day.

Heat and ice are both good, inexpensive at-home remedies, but it's important to see a doctor if you think your injury is more severe than a simple sprain or strain. Chronic pain, too, should be investigated by a healthcare professional.

Adapted from [www.prevention.com](http://www.prevention.com) and [www.livestrong.com](http://www.livestrong.com)



### Recipe of the Month:

## Warm Spinach-Artichoke Dip

Super Bowl is one of the biggest calorie fests of the year for many. The average football fan eats about a day's worth of calories during the game. Instead, snack on this sneaky, low-cal dip with iron-rich spinach and beans!

### Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 (16-ounce) can lima or butter beans, drained
- 1 cup light mayonnaise
- 4 ounces tub-style fat-free cream cheese
- 1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
- 1 teaspoon capers, drained
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1 (14-ounce) can artichoke hearts, drained
- 1 (10-ounce) package frozen chopped spinach, thawed, drained, and squeezed dry
- 3/4 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup sliced green onions
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

### Instructions

Preheat oven to 350°. Combine first 8 ingredients (through dry mustard) in a food processor, and process until smooth (about 15-20 seconds).

Add remaining ingredients; pulse 5 times, then process until mixture is consistent throughout (about 10 seconds). Transfer mixture evenly to a 1-quart casserole dish, smoothing top.

Bake for 25-30 minutes or until lightly browned and bubbly at the edges. Cool 10 minutes.

### Nutrition per serving (2 tbsp):

- Calories: 59; Fat: 4 g; Saturated Fat: 1 g;
- Cholesterol: 5 mg; Sodium: 183 mg;
- Carbohydrates: 4 g; Fiber: 1 g; Protein: 3 g;
- Iron: 1 mg; Calcium: 53mg

Adapted from [health.com](http://health.com)