

GLENDALE

VETERINARY HOSPITAL

ALL KINDS OF CARE FOR ALL KINDS OF PETS

03 How And When To Use Ice Therapy For Your Pet

Many of us reach for an ice pack when we have lumps, bumps and sprains but did you know that your pet can benefit from ice packs too?

Ice therapy or cryotherapy as many physiotherapists call it, is an inexpensive and non invasive method of reducing pain, swelling and inflammation. The reduction of pain and inflammation can help speed healing.

Ice has a very good heat absorption capability, which means it is able to absorb a lot of heat from the soft tissues resulting in cooling effects that gets to tissues deeper within the body.



Ice therapy is the application of ice packs or cold packs to the external body to help aid in the healing and recuperation of injured soft tissues. What ice therapy is not is a replacement for a diagnosis and treatment plan of an injury or pain source to your pet. Improperly applied ice therapy can be detrimental to the healing process in some cases. The veterinarian may recommend ice therapy for your pet after surgical procedures, diagnosis of soft tissue injuries, management of chronic pain such as osteoarthritis, and certain skin conditions.

There are several methods of applying ice or cold therapy to your pet's body. Some are more effective than others. "Magic bags" or bean bags that are stored in the freezer are actually not very good at applying cold therapy to the body. They lack the ability to hold on to the heat emitted by the body, which causes them to warm up very quickly once removed from the freezer. They will not be able to reduce the temperature of soft tissues that are deeper than the skin. Commercially available freezer packs can be cumbersome if they are not able to mold to the body shape and often contain chemicals which could be dangerous to your pet if ingested. Home made ice packs using alcohol and water can be an effective and inexpensive way to use cold therapy but must be watched with supervision so as to prevent ingestion. Good old fashion ice chips are the best and least expensive method of applying ice to the body. Ice has a very good heat absorption capability, which means it is able to absorb a lot of heat from the soft tissues resulting in cooling effects that gets to tissues deeper within the body. This is especially helpful with joints, which tend to have a lot of superficial bones and cartilage which would prevent cold therapies from being effective.

Ideally the ice therapy should encompass the entire area of inflammation. The stifle or knee of the dog is a commonly iced area of the dog. The ice must be applied to the inside, outside and front of the knee to be most effective. To do this, wrap your ice bags (if using several to encompass the area) with cold damp tea towels or old pillow cases. If your dog's coat is very thick the length of time to apply the ice therapy will increase. Apply the ice to the area for 20 minutes at a time, stopping to examine the skin every 5-10 minutes. Your pet may not be entirely happy about this because the body's natural physiological response is to produce an unpleasant sensation to prevent it from developing frost bite. What is normal is for the skin to take on a red slightly irritated look. White or firm skin indicates that damage to the skin is taking place and ice therapy needs to be stopped immediately. After the first 20 minutes stop and let your pet rest. In some cases the veterinarian will recommend repeated icing sessions. 20 minutes on, 20 minutes off several times a day is the general rule.

There are recipes for making home made ice packs using alcohol available on line as well as a company that makes specially made canine ice therapy wraps which would benefit animals managing long term potentially painful conditions such as arthritis.