

Health & Fitness || RECOVERY

Ice-Cold Pain Relief

Nothing beats back injury like the trusty old cold pack — or these **HIGH-TECH THERAPY TOOLS**. *By Jebediah Reed*

TO MANAGE PAIN AND GET ATHLETES BACK INTO COMPETITION, TRAINERS and physicians in big-time sports rely heavily on a simple weapon. "Ice is the staple of the training room," says Dr. Kevin Gebke, a physician at the Indiana University Center for Sports Medicine and a medical consultant to the Indianapolis Colts. Not only is icing a simple, highly effective way to control pain and swelling, it minimizes injury response, decreases soreness (see sidebar),

and, according to many athletes, quickens muscle recovery. But a lot of amateurs, turned off by the mess and discomfort, overlook its utility. Fortunately, new high-tech cooling devices make cold therapy easy. For everything from postworkout soreness to postoperative rehab, pro athletes are using these innovations to apply soothing cold (usually in combination with compression and elevation) to swollen joints, sore muscles, and unexpected on-the-field injuries.

Best Methods to Use on the Go

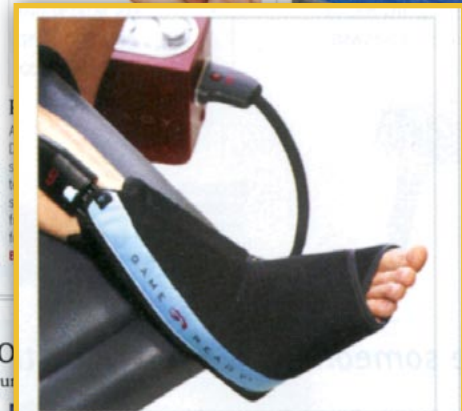
Slip these handy products into your gym bag or daypack for quick, easy icing after any activity.



Cramer Cold Spray

Soccer aficionados know all about the magic cold spray. One minute a player is being carried off the field in agony; the next, after a shot of frost, he's waving at the ref to get back into the game. Although it won't reach deep tissue, the spray dulls pain until you get to real ice (from \$8; cramersportsmed.com).

BEST FOR: Jammed finger, other minor injuries



Game Ready

Born of NASA space-suit technology, this is the Bentley of the bunch. Pro teams buy roomfuls of the machines, which pump air and circulate ice water through fitted sleeves in a cycle of cold and compression. Pricy, but a worthy investment for hardcore amateurs (systems from about \$2,500; gameready.com).

BEST FOR: Back, shoulder, groin, knee, ankle

Best Methods to

Don't just collapse into bed after your



Frozen Peas and Saran Wrap

A bag of frozen peas is a perfect substitute for the ice pellets that pros use: it conforms to the skin better than cubes, and plastic wrap maintains excellent compression. An NBA trainer admits off the record that he prefers this to his team's superexpensive skin-monitoring cryotherapy machine (\$5).

BEST FOR: Practically anywhere

elbow, ankle, etc. You can wear it for hours without risking frostbite. Without the motor, drain and refill the cuff every hour or two (from \$125, plus \$125 for pump; aircast.com).

BEST FOR: Knee, shoulder, foot, wrist, ribs, back

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ICING 101

Hate how it feels? Think you don't have time? Consider the benefits of a cooldown.

WHY IT WORKS

The instant you suffer an injury such as a sprain, strain, or contusion, your body starts a chain reaction that leads to swelling. Initially, blood flow to the site increases, and vessels become more permeable. This is a normal part of the healing process, but it has an unfortunate, and uncomfortable, side effect: it allows fluid to pool in the surrounding tissue, which can increase pain and exacerbate tissue damage by choking off oxygen to healthy cells. Ice minimizes the inflammatory response and decreases the high oxygen demand of cells in the area (increasing their chances of survival).

HOW TO DO IT

During the first 24–48 hours after injury, swelling and fluid pooling are at their peaks. That's the time to be aggressive about cryotherapy. Apply ice along with compression for 20 minutes at least four or five times a day (but, to avoid frostbite, don't ice more than once an hour). Many athletes have found that cryotherapy also helps with muscle recovery after especially hard workouts. While ice might speed the process, however, there's no clinical proof for it yet.

WITHOUT ICE

After sudden trauma or protracted stress, tissue fills with blood and fluid, which restricts movement and causes the injured area to swell.



WITH ICE

Ice controls pain and swelling by numbing nerves and helping to shrink blood vessels, which limits the rush of blood and fluid to the affected area.

