



---

## Dealing With Injuries

*Editor's Note: The following article is taken from 'FirstHandNews: rice', a publication of Bodyworkbiz.com and is used here with permission. The title has been changed, but the text of the article remains intact.*

It's easy to pull a muscle or sprain a joint. These kinds of injuries may result from simply overdoing everyday activities like gardening or shovelling snow or they can be caused by an accident, like a fall. Use the RICE formula immediately after hurting yourself. You'll dramatically reduce the time it takes for your injury to heal and get back to your normal routine as quickly as possible. RICE is an acronym for rest, ice, compression and elevation.

### **Rest.**

The simplest and most effective thing you can do is rest. Many people try to "work through" the injury in the hopes that it will go away or work itself out. Injuries don't spontaneously disappear. In fact, excessive movement will damage the tissue further, increasing the amount of inflammation and pain. Unless the injury is severe, absolute rest should not exceed 48 hours. Otherwise, your muscles will become stiff and weak, and scar tissue around the injury will tighten up. So as soon as the initial pain and swelling subside, you should begin to gently exercise the injured area.

### **Ice.**

Apply ice immediately. The importance of icing your injury cannot be emphasized enough. Ice is a natural pain reliever and anti-inflammatory. It slows down blood flow to the area and reduces internal bleeding and swelling. Depending on the type of injury, your healing time may be cut in half. Simply place ice cubes in a plastic bag. You can also use commercial gel packs that you keep in your freezer or a bag of frozen vegetables (peas seem to work well). You may find that these mold better to your body. Wrap whatever you're using in a towel or cloth and apply it to the injured area. Leave it on for 10 to 20 minutes and then allow your skin to warm up. As a general rule, don't leave the ice on for more than 20 minutes because you may cause frostbite. Ice the injury as frequently as possible, preferably at least once every waking hour.

### **Compression & elevation.**

Compression and elevation help reduce swelling. You can apply compression to the area with an elastic type bandage. Be careful not to tie the bandage so tightly that you cut off your circulation. If one of your arms or legs is injured, you can elevate the extremity above the heart level.

### **See your massage therapist**

Follow the RICE formula for the first 48 hours following an injury and then see your massage therapist. It's not wise to massage the injured area within the first two days because this may aggravate the injury. After that time, however, massage becomes a vital part of the rehabilitation process. Massage therapists can use special techniques to drain the fluid out of the swollen tissues. They can also get rid of muscles spasms that develop as a result of the pain. As your injury continues to heal, massage will help restore or increase your range of motion and stop scar tissue from forming so that you can get back to your daily activities as quickly as possible.

### **When Should You See Your Doctor?**

This depends on the type of injury and how serious it is. A severe acute injury (one that occurs suddenly) might require immediate medical attention. Call your doctor or go the hospital emergency ward if you have any of the following symptoms:

- stabbing or radiating pain
- numbness or tingling
- significant swelling
- severe weakness
- inability to move the injured body part

Overuse injuries like tennis elbow or runner's knee are injuries that are the result of the wear and tear of repetitive movements and probably won't require a doctor's care. The doctor will likely refer you for massage or some other form of conservative therapy. However, if the pain is severe, persists for more than 10 days, or gets worse, a visit to the doctor would be a wise thing to do.

(over)

## Heat or Ice?

When should you use heat and when should you use ice? If you're ever in doubt use ice, but here are some guidelines.

Use ice if:

- your injury is recent (within 48 hours after the injury)
- your muscles are in spasm

The reason: ice will reduce inflammation and decrease the time it takes for your injury to heal. It also has an anaesthetic effect that will lessen your pain and relax muscle spasms.

Use heat if:

- your injury is chronic (more than 48 hours old)
- your muscles are tense
- you have pain that's the result of trigger points or muscle knots

The reason: In either of these cases, there is no danger of aggravating the inflammation. The heat will relax your muscles and help improve your circulation.