

Nondrug Pain and Symptom Management

COLD

COLD – Cold treatments (frozen gel packs or cold cloths) are placed at or near the site to relieve pain. Works by numbing nerve endings in skin, reducing muscle spasms, and decreasing swelling. Cold applications may work better than heat in some situations. Research has found:

- Cold usually relieves more pain and more quickly than heat
- Pain relief from cold lasts longer than pain relief from heat.
- Cold is more effective in decreasing pain and swelling in the first 72 hours following acute injury

Cold application guidelines:

- Don't use if it increases the pain
- Provide extra warmth if needed (sweater, blanket) while cold is in place
- Use single layer of cloth between ice pack and skin to prevent skin from freezing
- For some, a gradual onset of cold application is preferred. This can be achieved by wrapping the cold pack with many layers of cloth and removing the layers slowly, one at a time, so that skin gradually becomes accustomed to cold. Another strategy is to begin with a warm moist cloth between skin and cold pack
- Try alternating cold applications with heat. Find correct area or temperature that provides the most relief.
- Avoid applying cold packs to
 - Areas being treated by radiation
 - Areas with poor circulation
 - Open wounds
- Not limited to use at the site of pain. May be applied:
 - On opposite side of body from where pain is felt
 - Above or below site of pain

Necessary equipment:

1. Gel pack (homemade pack: pour 1/3 cup of rubbing alcohol and 2/3 cup of water into one self-sealing plastic bag. Seal bag and place in freezer until slushy). May also use instant cold packs
2. Towel or pillowcase
3. Six-inch elastic wrap, or other device to secure the pack

Directions:

1. Remove gel pack from freezer and wrap in pillowcase or towel
2. Make sure bag does not leak
3. Help older adult into a comfortable position and apply gel pack to painful area, securing with elastic wrap as needed

4. Gel pack may be placed above or below site of pain, or on other side of body corresponding to where pain is located.
5. Leave on for 10 – 15 minutes, three to four times a day (can be applied for up to 20 minutes, but minimum time needed is 5 – 10 minutes).
6. Return gel pack to freezer for future use

What you can do:

- Consider care-planning a trial of assisting the older adult to use this strategy for three days, asking the him/her to rate their pain before and after each application of the cold pack. If it is effective in reducing pain, care-plan the process permanently, so that all team members can encourage the use of this nondrug technique.
- Document your findings, sharing with the rest of the health care team

Adapted from:

1. Fouladbakhsh, J.M., et al., Nondrug therapies for pain management among rural older adults. *Pain Manag Nurs*, 2011. 12(2): p. 70-81.
2. The Nursing Home Pain Management Algorithm Clinical Trial, R01 NR009100, 7/1/05 – 4/30/10; Mary Ersek (PI) Used with permission of Mary Ersek and HPNA (2009).

Reference: Swedish Medical Center. *Nursing Assistant End-of-Life: Computerized Educational Program*. Pittsburgh, PA: Hospice and Palliative Nursing Association; 2006.

NOTE: The direct care worker should only administer non-drug therapies that are within his/her particular scope of practice. Please follow the policies and procedures of your setting regarding administration of non-drug therapies.