

## **Nondrug Pain and Symptom Management**

### **COLD**

COLD – may work better than heat in some situations. Research has found:

- Cold usually relieves more pain than heat
- Cold usually relieves pain 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 treatments (frozen gel packs or cold cloths) are placed against the patient's skin to relieve pain. Works by:

- Numbing nerve endings in skin
- Reducing muscle spasms
- Decreasing swelling
- May decrease desire to scratch an itch

Not limited to use at the site of pain. May be applied:

- On opposite side of body from where pain is felt
- Above site of pain
- Below site of pain

Important guidelines for using cold:

- 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
- Avoid applying cold to
  - Areas being treated by radiation
  - Areas with poor circulation
  - Open wounds

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)
2. Towel or pillowcase
3. Six-inch elastic wrap and tape
4. Menthol-containing products (Icy-Hot, Ben-Gay)

Directions:

1. Remove gel pack from freezer and wrap in pillowcase or towel
2. Make sure bag does not leak
3. Help patient into a comfortable position. Secure gel pack to painful area with six-inch elastic wrap and tape.

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 20 – 30 minutes or longer. Minimum time needed is 5 – 10 minutes).
6. Try alternating cold with heat. Find correct area or temperature that provides the most relief.
7. Menthol-containing products may be used with cold, but NOT WITH HEAT. Wash hand thoroughly after using menthol-containing products.
8. Return gel pack to freezer
9. Make sure patient is warm. Provide a blanket or sweater if needed or increase heat in the room.

If patient is reluctant to try cold

- Explain benefits
  - Relief may be quicker than with heat
  - Cold may be more effective than heat
  - Relief from cold lasts longer than relief from heat
- Provide gradual onset of cold by one of the following
  - Wrap cold pack with many layers of cloth; remove layers slowly, one at a time so that skin gradually becomes accustomed to cold
  - Begin with a warm moist cloth between skin and cold pack
- Use cold pack that is
  - Soft
  - Lightweight
  - Conforms to body contours
  - Does not leak

Adapted from:

1. Beth Miller-Kraybill, Nondrug Pain & Symptom Management in *Nursing Assistant End-of-Life: Computerized Educational Program*.
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 RN or CNA should only administer non-drug therapies that are within his/her particular scope of practice. Please follow the policies and procedures of your facility regarding administration of non-drug therapies.**