

Nondrug Pain and Symptom Management

HEAT

HEAT – is often seen as a more “comforting” option. Relieves pain by:

- Improving circulation to skin and muscles
- Reducing irritation
- Decreasing sensitivity to pain

Note: When using heat or cold, patient’s skin must be checked frequently for redness or paleness that would indicate problems.

In the home, usually applied by:

- Electric heating pad
- Hot water bottle
- Gel pack warmed in boiling water or microwave.

Generally, electric heating pads are not allowed in facilities, but special hot packs may be available, or washcloths run under hot water may be used.

Note: Water temperature should be between 104 and 113 degrees Fahrenheit.

Do not put boiling water in a hot water bottle or on a washcloth.

Important guidelines for using heat:

- Don’t use heat if pain increases
- Use caution in areas where there is an impaired ability to feel
- Think WARM, not HOT. Keep a layer of material between heat source and skin
- Moisture increases effect of heat and cold. A warm, wet washcloth placed under the gel pack helps more heat to be absorbed into the skin.
- **NEVER USE PRODUCTS CONTAINING MENTHOL WHEN USING HEAT. These products cause skin to absorb heat more deeply and might cause burns (examples: Icy Hot or Ben-Gay)**

Equipment:

1. Hot water bottle
2. Towel
3. Thermometer (type used for pools or spas)

Directions:

1. Fill hot water bottle from faucet. Do not use boiling water.
2. Use pool/spa type thermometer to take temperature of water as it runs from tap into hot water bottle. Should be between 104° F and 113° F.
3. Push all air out of bottle and screw cap on tightly. Check seal by holding upside down.
4. Place hot water bottle in towel or pillowcase

5. Place hot water bottle on area where patient needs pain relief. May be placed above or below site of pain, or on opposite side of the body corresponding to site of pain.
6. Do not allow patient to sleep on top of hot water bottle.
7. Keep hot water bottle on area for as long as possible to obtain relief, usually 20 – 30 minutes. Refill with hot water when bottle is no longer warm. Check temperature each time (Typically applied intermittently on skin for 10 – 20 minutes at a time. May be used for any length of time as long as skin is not irritated).
8. Try alternating hot and cold to improve comfort. Find correct area or temperature that provides optimal pain relief.

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.

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)

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