

PUT YOUR PAIN ON ICE

If you have ever had a bad ankle sprain, you know from experience how sensitive a swollen joint can be. Movement in any direction can irritate a swollen joint capsule, and pressure on the joint can result in excruciating pain. When the affected joint happens to be a spinal joint, however, the intensity of pain can rise off the charts.

Whether the injury occurs bit by bit or all at once, when inflammation results it increases the pressure on sensitive spinal nerve roots. This not only exacerbates back pain, but can also refer pain along the nerve pathway into the body.

Inflammation is part of the body's natural healing response, but when it becomes excessive or prolonged it can aggravate already painful symptoms.

One option in treating inflammation, albeit not a great one, is to medicate with a prescription anti-inflammatory or over-the-counter drug. While these medications can help to temporarily reduce swelling, they always come at a cost. Any drug that you ingest, even one that you buy off the shelf, must be processed and filtered by the body. So in effect you are only swapping out one stress for another when you medicate for inflammation.

The safer, more effective option for reducing swelling is to simply use ice. In most cases, when used properly an ice pack can control inflammation as well as medication, and without the dangerous side effects.

Here are some tips to help you give your pain the deep freeze.

- Invest in a soft, pliable ice pack that can be easily molded to fit the body's contours. Ice packs come in all shapes and sizes.
- Always wrap the ice pack in a towel, do not apply it directly to the skin, as this can result in damage.
- Limit ice to 15-20 minutes at a time, or through the 4 phases of C-BAN (cold, burning, aching, numbness).
- Ice after stretching or exercise, never before. Ice can help aid in recovery, especially if engaging in particularly rigorous exercise.
- Ice can be used for as long as inflammation persists. It need not be limited to the first 24 hours after injury.

