

# Dr. Colin Gage \* Dr. Duane Drobot

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Nicola Valley Chiropractic  
1949 Quilchena Ave.  
P.O. Box 909  
Merritt, BC  
V1K 1B8

Ph: (250) 378-5456  
Fax: (250) 378-8259  
Email: info@merrittchiro.com  
Website: www.merrittchiro.com

*"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"*

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## Ice On an Injured Area?

There has been an ongoing debate for years about whether to use ice, heat, or even alternating both for a recent injury. The jury is still out on this one but I will attempt to give you general guidelines.

Using acute low back pain as an example, a recent aggravation of an old problem or even a brand new injury usually consists of a few things. First, the joint is acutely painful, swelling is present in and around the joint, the swelling may irritate any neighboring nerves, irritated nerves may cause muscle spasms. The theory is that applying an ice pack to the affected area decreases or helps prevent further swelling and inflammation. The fluid that accumulates, causing swelling, actually leaks out of the blood vessels. Creating a cold environment in and around an injured area makes the blood vessels shrink or "constrict". Therefore, less fluid leaks out and the severity of the swelling decreases. Another positive effect of using ice is pain relief. The nerve endings in and around the injured area work at a slower rate when cooled. Therefore, the pain will not feel as severe. Recent studies have also shown that the use of ice on recent injuries does help speed up the recovery time. Different practitioners may have slightly different recommendations but the general consensus is that you should apply a cold pack for fifteen to twenty minutes at a time over the injured area. Then remove it for at least twenty minutes. This should be repeated three to four times per day until the swelling decreases.

What is the best source of cold to use? Believe it or not, a respectable study was done that compared the use of "gel packs" and a simple "bag of frozen peas". Guess what? The peas were victorious since they stayed cold longer and was able to cool the deeper tissues better.

On a serious note, if your injury is even mildly serious, you should have it checked by a chiropractor or medical doctor. In our office, joint and soft tissue injuries receive treatment so that they heal properly with normal strength and flexibility.

Whenever I recommend the use of ice to a patient, they often ask when they should be using heat. Heat should not be used on any new injury since it will increase the

blood flow in and around the injured area and may actually increase the swelling. Heat should be used for muscle or joint stiffness that is not a result of a recent acute injury or in “inflammatory disorders”. Ask your healthcare practitioner for advice on the use of heat before using it on anything out of the ordinary.