Cooling Devices Used in the Home Setting

Effective: August 1, 2017

Next Review: May 2018
Last Review: June 2017

IMPORTANT REMINDER

Medical Policies are developed to provide guidance for members and providers regarding coverage in accordance with contract terms. Benefit determinations are based in all cases on the applicable contract language. To the extent there may be any conflict between the Medical Policy and contract language, the contract language takes precedence.

PLEASE NOTE: Contracts exclude from coverage, among other things, services or procedures that are considered investigational or cosmetic. Providers may bill members for services or procedures that are considered investigational or cosmetic. Providers are encouraged to inform members before rendering such services that the members are likely to be financially responsible for the cost of these services.

DESCRIPTION

Cooling devices use chilled water to decrease the local temperature of tissue. There are a variety of cooling devices available, ranging from gravity-fed devices that are manually filled with iced water, to motorized units that both cool and circulate the chilled water. These devices are typically used when ice packs would normally be applied, e.g., after orthopedic surgical procedures.

MEDICAL POLICY CRITERIA

Active and passive cooling devices, with or without compression, used in the home setting are considered not medically necessary for any indication including the use of compression only.

NOTE: A summary of the supporting rationale for the policy criteria is at the end of the policy.

CROSS REFERENCES

None

BACKGROUND
Cooling devices use chilled water to decrease the local temperature of tissue. There are a variety of cooling devices available, ranging from gravity-fed devices that are manually filled with iced water, to motorized units that both cool and circulate the chilled water. These devices are typically used when ice packs would normally be applied, e.g., after orthopedic surgical procedures.

Cold and/or compression therapy following surgery or musculoskeletal and soft tissue injury has long been accepted in the medical field as an effective tool for reducing inflammation, pain, and swelling. Ice packs and various bandages and wraps are commonly used. In addition, a variety of continuous cooling devices are commercially available and can be broadly subdivided into those providing passive cold therapy, and those providing active cold therapy using a mechanical device.

PASSIVE COLD THERAPY

The CryoCuff® (DJO Global) and the Polar Care Cub (Berg Inc.) devices are examples of passive cooling devices. The CryoCuff® device consists of an insulated container filled with cold water that is attached to a compressive cuff. When the container is raised, the water fills and pressurizes the cuff. The amount of pressure is proportional to the height of the container. When body heat warms the water, the cooler is lowered and the water drains out. The cooler is then raised above the affected limb and cold water refills the compressive cuff. The Polar Care Cub unit consists of pads held in place with elastic straps, which may also provide compression. The pads are attached to a built-in hand pump which circulates the water through the pads at the same time as increasing the compression around the joint.

ACTIVE COLD THERAPY

In active devices, a motorized pump both circulates cold water and may also provide pneumatic compression. For example, the AutoChill® (DJO Global) device, which may be used in conjunction with a CryoCuff®, consists of a pump that automatically exchanges water from the cuff to the cooler, eliminating the need for manual water recycling. The Hot/Ice Thermal Blanket is another example of an active cooling device, which consists of two rubber pads connected by a rubber hose to the main cooling unit. Fluid is then circulated via the hose through the thermal blankets. The temperature of the fluid is controlled by the main unit and can be either hot or cold. The Game Ready™ Accelerated Recovery System (CoolSystems, Inc.) is an example of an active cooling device combined with a pneumatic compression component. The system consists of various soft wraps and a computer-controlled unit to circulate the water through the wraps. The ProThermo and the NanoTherm™ Therapy Unit (ThermoTek), OPTI-ICE™ Cold Therapy System, Hilotherm® Clinic facial mask (Hilotherapy), ThermaZone® and the Iceman® Cold Therapy (DonJoy) are other examples of combination active cooling with and without compression devices. CTM™ 5000 and cTreatment are computer-controlled devices that provide cooling at a specific (11°C) and continuous temperature.

REGULATORY STATUS

A number of cooling devices have received 510(k) marketing clearance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), including the NanoTherm™ and the Game Ready™ System.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY
The primary difference between ice packs and passive cooling devices is that water recirculation is more convenient with passive cooling devices. Active cooling devices are designed to provide a steady low temperature, which, in addition to convenience, might provide a unique benefit compared to the more variable temperature achieved with ice packs or passive cooling devices. Benefit is typically focused on pain control and swelling.

The focus of this evidence section is on randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of cold therapy in the home setting that evaluate whether cooling devices provide a benefit (e.g., decreased pain, swelling, analgesic use) beyond convenience. Studies should include standard ice packs as treatment in the control groups. RCTs performed in the inpatient setting and those lacking an appropriate control group are excluded from this review.

PASSIVE COOLING DEVICES

Appropriate trial design for passive cooling devices should include an equal number of exchanges of ice bags and episodes of water recirculation between groups.

Whitelaw and colleagues reported on the results of a trial that randomized 102 patients undergoing knee arthroscopy in the outpatient setting to receive either the CryoCuff® device or traditional ice therapy. The number of exchanges of ice packs and water recirculation was not reported. There was no significant difference in average pain assessment, although those in the CryoCuff® group reported decreased pain medication use compared to the control group.

Healy and colleagues reported that the CryoCuff® device provided no benefit for pain control or swelling compared to ice packs in a randomized trial of 76 patients (105 knees) undergoing total knee arthroplasty. No data was provided on the number of ice pack exchanges, although the water was recirculated in the CryoCuff® device every one to four hours. The duration of therapy and whether it was applied in the inpatient or outpatient setting is not clear from the published article.

In a randomized trial comparing CryoCuff (n=25) to ice packs (n=26) following arthroscopic wrist surgery, Meyer-Marcotty et al. reported no significant between-group differences in swelling, range of motion, use of pain medication, and subjective functional impairment. Pain levels were significantly less in the CryoCuff group for postoperative day 1 and 2, but not significantly different from the control group during the remainder of the 21 days follow-up.

MANUALLY OPERATED PASSIVE COOLING DEVICES

Intermittent Cooling Regimens

In the largest study to date, 116 patients who had undergone total knee arthroplasty (TKA) were assigned in a quasi-randomized order to 8 hours daily of advanced cryotherapy at a fixed temperature (cTreatment) or to application of cold packs for 15 minutes after each of the 2 physical therapy sessions. Both groups could apply cryotherapy during the evening and night whenever they wanted for comfort and pain control. Thirty percent of patients in the cTreatment group did not use the device at night due to excessive noise. Primary outcomes were visual analogue scale (VAS), at rest and during deep active knee flexion, walking without aid, and analgesic use. Secondary outcomes were knee range of motion (ROM), active straight leg raising, walking without aid, swelling, visual hematoma, and length of stay. There was no significant difference between the groups in VAS, need for analgesics, or for any of the secondary outcomes. There was a significant decrease in flexion at 6 weeks in the advanced
cryotherapy group (114° vs 120°).

Konrath and colleagues reported on the results of a trial that randomized 103 patients undergoing ACL reconstruction to one of four different postoperative cold therapy strategies:[5] 1) Active cooling with a Polar Care pad set at a temperature of 40 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit, 2) Active cooling with a Polar Care pad set at a temperature of 70 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit, 3) Ice packs, or 4) No cold therapy.

Both the water in the Polar Care pad and the ice packs were changed every 4 hours. The length of hospital stay, range of motion at discharge, use of oral and intramuscular pain medicine and drain output were not significantly different between groups. These results suggest that the Polar Care device provided no incremental benefit in comparison with ice packs when used with the same intermittent treatment regimen.

**Continuous Versus Intermittent Cooling Regimens**

Hochberg randomized 72 patients to either continuous cryotherapy using a temperature-controlled cooling blanket to intermittent 20-minute ice applications over the first 3 days after carpal tunnel release.[6] Pain and wrist circumference were measured preoperatively, immediately after surgery, and on postoperative day 3. Continuous cooling resulted in significantly reduced pain and wrist circumference on postoperative day 3 in comparison to intermittent ice packs. Larger RCTs are needed to validate these outcomes.

Schröder and Passler compared the CryoCuff device to ice therapy in 44 patients who had undergone ACL repair.[7] Those randomly receiving ice therapy received an ice bag 3 times a day postoperatively. While those randomly assigned to the CryoCuff group reported significant decreases in pain, swelling, and analgesic use, it is not clear whether icing 3 times a day is a typical icing regimen.

**ACTIVE COOLING DEVICES**

In a 2008 randomized controlled trial (n=60), Woolf et al. compared a temperature-controlled cryotherapy device to a standard icing regimen following outpatient knee arthroscopy.[8] Seven patients (12%) were excluded from analysis or lost to follow-up. Both groups were instructed to apply the treatment for 20 minutes every 2 hours during waking hours for the first 4 days after surgery. For the night time, the cooling device group was instructed to use the device throughout the first 4 nights, whereas the control group was advised to use ice packs at their own discretion. No differences in daytime pain were observed between the two groups. There was a tendency for more patients in the cryotherapy group to report that they did not awaken from pain during the night; this difference reached significance only for postoperative day 2 (36% vs. 6%, p = 0.04). Additional study with a larger number of patients is needed to determine whether use of continuous cooling at night improves health outcomes.

Several studies have been reported by a single research group comparing the Hilotherm® device versus cooling compresses. In a randomized observer-blinded study by Modabber et al., 42 patients were treated with open reduction and internal fixation for zygomatic bone fractures and then randomly assigned to a Hilotherm® cooling face mask or a standard cooling compress.[9] Both cooling methods were intended to be used continuously for 12 hours daily for 3 days after surgery; however, no data were provided on whether patients in the control group used the cold compresses for a similar amount of time as patients in the treatment group who used the face mask. Blinded evaluation with a 3-dimensional optical scanner showed a
significant reduction in swelling on day 1, 2, 3, and 7 for the Hilotherm® group; however, no difference in swelling was observed between the groups on postoperative day 28. The visual analog scale (VAS) for pain was lower in the Hilotherm® group on day 1 (2.38 vs. 4.10 on a 10-point scale, p=0.00105) and day 2 (2.34 vs. 4.38, p=0.00003), but not on day 7 (1.43 vs. 1.90, p=0.11627). There were also significant differences between the groups for postoperative neurologic score and eye motility and diplopia on postoperative day 1.

Another randomized study with 32 patients assessed postoperative swelling of bilateral mandibular fractures using the Hilotherm® cooling mask around the head and jaw.[10] The study design was similar to that reported by Modabber et al. Swelling was reduced for the cooling mask group on day 1, 2, and 3 after surgery. VAS for pain was also reduced for the cooling mask group on day 1 (3.87 vs 5.53) and day 2 (3.63 vs 6.31). There was no significant difference between groups in postoperative neurologic score, trismus, or mandibular dysfunction. In addition, it is not clear that the cold compresses used by the control group were applied in a similar frequency as the masks used in the treatment group, limiting conclusions regarding the superiority of the Hilotherm cooling mask compared to standard postoperative therapy regimens.

COMBINATION ACTIVE COOLING AND COMPRESSION (CRYOPNEUMATIC) DEVICES

In studies evaluating combination active cooling and compression, the control group should also receive both active cooling and compression.

Kraeutler (2015) compared the Game Ready shoulder wrap to standard icing in an RCT of 46 patients who had undergone rotator cuff repair or subacromial decompression.[11] Patients were instructed to apply the cryotherapy every other hour for the first 3 days and 2 to 3 times a day until the follow-up visit at 7 to 10 days. Analysis of patient diaries showed no significant differences in average pain, worst pain, and morphine equivalent dosage between the 2 groups on any day during the week after surgery. Post-hoc power analysis showed that 13 patients per group would provide sufficient power to detect a 25 mm (out of 100) difference in VAS scores between the 2 groups.

A multicenter randomized trial with 280 total knee arthroplasty (TKA) patients compared the GameReady cryopneumatic device versus ice packs with static compression.[12] On discharge from the hospital, the treatments were given at the same application cycle of 1 hour on and 30 minutes off. Compliance rates were similar for the 2 groups. Blinded evaluation of 187 patients (67% of patients had complete evaluations) found no significant difference between the groups in VAS for pain, range of motion, 6-minute walk test, timed up and go test, or knee girth under this more typical icing regimen. Narcotic consumption was decreased from 680 mg to 509 mg morphine equivalents over the first 2 weeks (14 mg less per day), and patient satisfaction was increased with the cryopneumatic device.

Waterman et al. reported a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of the GameReady device in 36 patients with ACL reconstruction.[13] Patients were instructed to use ice or the cryopneumatic device for 30 minutes at least 3 times per day and return to the clinic at 1, 2, and 6 weeks postoperatively. Compliance during the first 2 weeks was not significantly different between the 2 groups (100% for GameReady and 83% for icing). The primary outcome measure (VAS) was not comparable at baseline, limiting interpretation of the results. There were no significant differences between the groups for knee circumference, the Lysholm short form-36, SF-36, or single assessment numerical evaluation (SANE) scores. A greater percentage of patients treated with the GameReady device discontinued narcotic use by 6 weeks (83% vs 28%).
PRACTICE GUIDELINE SUMMARY

No clinical practice guidelines were found that recommend use of active or passive cooling devices or combination cold/compression devices.

SUMMARY

There is not enough research to show an improvement in health outcomes as a result of using cooling devices for any indication. Further, when cooling devices and ice packs were used with the same regimen, no differences in health outcomes were observed. No practice guidelines recommend these cooling devices for any indication. Therefore, use of these cooling devices for any indication is considered not medically necessary.

REFERENCES


### CODES

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*Date of Origin: January 1996*