

Hot and Cold Packs

Overview

Although not a medication, the use of hot and cold packs carry risks and care needs to be taken in their use.

Application of a hot or cold pack can only be used if allowed by your organisation and must always be under the direction of a registered nurse. If hot or cold packs are used a comprehensive skin assessment should be carried out prior and after use.

Process

1. Wash skin to remove any creams or ointments, especially those that heat e.g. Dencorub®, Deep Heat®
2. Test the temperature of the hot/cold pack, it should feel comfortable on your inner wrist.
3. Ensure that the person can access the nurse call bell, instruct patient to remove the pack if it feels too hot/cold or causes discomfort and to call for assistance.
4. Check the site where the pack is applied 3-5 minutes after initial application and continue regular checks thereafter.
5. Therapy is generally recommended for a period of 20 minutes per treatment.
6. Following use, clean with a pre-impregnated disposable neutral detergent wipe (or refer to your cleaning policy if the person is under specific infection control precautions).
7. Return to the shelf or freezer.
8. Document outcome of therapy and site checks in persons notes.

Risks/Considerations

- ⚠ Hot packs should be heated according to the instructions on the hot pack only, never heat them for longer. Hot packs heated for too long can cause fires and serious injury, including significant burns to the person.
- ⚠ Hot packs should be about 60 degrees C and the content should be mixed to ensure there it is the same temperature throughout.
- ⚠ Hot and cold packs must always be used with a cover and are not to be applied directly to the skin.
- ⚠ Care is to be taken with people who are at higher risk of injury including people who have impaired consciousness, sensation, circulation or mobility and people who have language or communication difficulties.