Heat Therapy

Heat Therapy is used to increase your skin temperature on a certain part of your body. Heat causes your blood vessels to get bigger which allows more blood to go to the area where the heat is applied. Blood brings nutrients and carries away wastes. This helps healing.

What are the types of Heat Therapy?

- **Moist Hot Packs**

  Moist hot packs are kept in water at a temperature of 140 to 160 degrees Fahrenheit. The packs are often wrapped in 6 to 8 layers of towels in order to prevent burning. When using the moist hot pack, check your skin after 5 minutes for burning or other signs of injury to the skin. If your skin is okay, reapply the pack for up to 15 more minutes. Your skin may look red after use. This redness goes away in about 6 hours.

- **Heating Pads**

  Heating pads produce a dry heat. Heating pads are not used by your Physical Therapist because moist heat is more comfortable and goes deeper into the body.

  Heating pads may be bought at a drug store. Make sure that you do not use the pad on more than the medium setting or you may get burned. Some pads can be used with water. If the pad you purchase is approved for use with water, use it in this way. Put a moist towel over the area to be treated and put the heating pad on top of the moist towel. Make sure that it is set no higher than at the medium setting. **Never** use a heating pad at home for more than 30 minutes at a time.
- **Paraffin**
  Paraffin is wax mixed with mineral oil that is heated to a temperature between 118 to 130 degrees Fahrenheit. It is often used to treat arthritis of the hands and feet. A person dips a hand or foot into the paraffin ten times to form a thick coating around the area. The hand or foot is then wrapped in a towel for up to 20 minutes. This allows all of the hand or foot joints to warm up. Home paraffin units are available.

- **Whirlpools**
  Whirlpools are special bath tubs that are kept at a temperature between 98 and 104 degrees Fahrenheit. The area of the body to be treated is placed in the water for about 20 minutes. Agitation is often used to help move the heat of the water around the body part. The agitation also helps improve circulation throughout the skin.

**How does Heat Therapy help me?**
The warmth created by heat helps to:
- Relax your muscles when you are tense.
- Increase blood flow to your body parts.
- Heal your body tissues.
- Prepare your muscles and joints for exercise and stretching.

**If the heat is uncomfortable, please tell your therapist.** Heat can cause your skin to burn. Do not sleep on any type of heating unit. You may get burned if you do.

Please ask your therapist questions about the use of this treatment.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions.** You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.