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Heat therapy is an easy and effective way to make your dog feel happier while relieving pain associated with [injury](#), [surgery](#), [exercise](#) or even [arthritis](#).

Concept of heat therapy

The application of heat is used to reduce [stiffness](#) and muscle spasms, increase blood flow and relieve pain. Unlike cold therapy, heat therapy is applied after the initial [swelling](#) and [inflammation](#) (a.k.a. irritation) stage of an injury. Typically, cold therapy is used for the initial 72 hours.

Heat therapy can also be used for ongoing conditions such as arthritis. [Click here to learn more about arthritis if your dog is having a hard time getting around.](#) By reducing stiffness, heat therapy helps to improve joint range of motion during and after exercise. In addition to these healing benefits, heat therapy provides comfort, relaxation and anxiety reduction.

Location of heat therapy

Heat therapy is most commonly applied to joints: shoulders, elbows and wrists in the front legs; and hips, knees and ankles in the back legs. It can be used on any part of your dog's body where muscle damage, strain or spasm occurs. For example, a dog with a disc problem in the spine (neck or back) may have muscle spasms, which heat therapy can relieve.

Technique when using heat therapy

Many forms of commercial heating devices, wraps and electrical heating blankets are available in sporting goods stores and pharmacies. Instructions on the packaging should be carefully followed to avoid burning your dog's [skin](#).

Alternatively, a simple homemade heating device consists of a tube sock filled with uncooked rice and tied at the open end. This "rice sock" can then be microwaved to the desired temperature. How long you need to warm it up will depend on your microwave. Before applying the rice sock on your dog's skin, shake it a few times to make sure the heat is distributed evenly.

[Editor's Note: Check with your [veterinarian](#) before using any kind of heat therapy on your pet.]

Danger of heat therapy

Burning the skin is probably the biggest risk of applying heat therapy to a pet. Your heating device should be warm, never hot.

Don't apply the device directly to your pet's skin. Padding, such as a thin towel, should always be used between the heating device and your dog's skin to avoid burning.

Always test the temperature of the heating device on your inner wrist (similar to testing the temperature of a baby's bottle) before applying it to your dog's skin. Test it on your skin for about 30 seconds before using it on your dog.

Appropriate heat therapy usage

After your dog has surgery, an injury, or goes through any strenuous physical activity, heat therapy may be an option. It is important however to wait for 72 hours before applying heat to the affected area: remember, cold therapy is applied for the first 3 days following surgery or an injury.

If your veterinarian has recommended heat therapy he may suggest this course of action or something similar:

- Hold the pack in place on the affected body part for about 15 minutes, or until the skin feels warm to the touch

- Heat therapy can be repeated every 6 to 8 hours.

It is not unusual for your dog to fall asleep during the heat therapy process, which shows how soothing this treatment can be. If your dog displays any signs of discomfort during the therapy such as excessive movement, growling or biting, stop the treatment immediately and contact your veterinarian.

Heat therapy is a simple, yet effective way to help your dog feel better after an injury, surgery or exercise. At the same time, it will increase comfort, relaxation, and happiness for both your dog and yourself.

Questions to ask your veterinarian

- Should I use heat therapy on my dog?
- Which exact protocol would you suggest?
- Which heating device should I use on my particular dog?

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.

Next, [click here to learn about cold therapy.](#)