

## Lesson 59: Applying a Cold, Dry Compress

### I. Introduction

- A. Cold, dry compresses will relieve inflammation and swelling, control bleeding and relieve pain.
- B. Cold therapy treatments are administered for approximately 15 to 20 minutes, usually 2 to 3 times per day per order of the physician or at the discretion of a licensed nurse in an emergency situation requiring first-aid treatment.
- C. The goal of cold therapy is:
  - 1. reduction of acute swelling.
  - 2. relief of pain.
  - 3. promotion of soft tissue healing.
- D. Indications for the use of cold therapy include:
  - 1. the affected area is hot, swollen and painful.  
Examples: sprained ankle, acute arthritis, gouty arthritis.
  - 2. to reduce the swelling of a new injury as a means of first-aid.
- E. Precautions for the use of cold therapy include:
  - 1. If the resident has heart disease or hypertension, it is advisable to consult the nurse before application.
  - 2. If there is any discomfort (for example, numbness or burning) during the application, STOP immediately. Seek assistance from the nurse.
  - 3. If in doubt – seek further instruction from the nurse.
- F. Contraindications for the application of cold therapy may include the following conditions:
  - 1. deep vein thrombosis
  - 2. peripheral vascular disease
  - 3. skin sensation impairment (diabetic residents)
  - 4. severe cognitive impairment (dementia)
  - 5. sensitivity to the cold
  - 6. after cold application, it is normal to have temporary numbness of the applied area. If there is persistent numbness, pain or severe discomfort, seek the assistance of the nurse promptly.
- G. Equipment utilized may include a commercially prepared cold-pack that does not require ice. If utilized, refer to manufacturer's instructions regarding activation. If ice is to be used, an ice bag or collar covered with a fitted cover or towel shall be utilized.

### II. Procedure

- 1. Fill ice bag or collar halfway with crushed ice. Squeeze the device to expel air, fasten the cap and wipe away any moisture on the outside of the bag/collar.
- 2. Bring equipment to the bedside and screen the resident's bed.
- 3. Perform INITIAL STEPS.
- 4. Assist the resident to an appropriate position and expose the area to be treated. **IMPORTANT:** Do not unnecessarily expose the resident. Expose only the area to be treated to avoid chilling the resident.
- 5. Wrap ice bag or collar in towel or cloth and secure with tape. **IMPORTANT:** Do not use pins to secure the wrapping.
- 6. Apply device to the treatment site and leave in place for prescribed time. Refill bags as needed. **IMPORTANT:** If resident complains of numbness or a burning sensation, discontinue treatment immediately and notify the nurse. If you must leave the resident with the cold compress in place, leave call light within easy reach.
- 7. Observe the resident's skin frequently beneath the device. If skin appears blanched or cyanotic, discontinue treatment immediately and notify the nurse.
- 8. When treatment is complete, remove ice bag or collar and check to be certain the resident's skin is dry.
- 9. Make certain the bed is dry and in order.
- 10. Perform FINAL STEPS.

**NOTES:**

