



Reducing acute swelling

This leaflet gives advice on reducing the acute swelling of joints experienced by patients with arthritis.

Symptoms of arthritis

Redness, heat, increased swelling and pain are associated with an arthritic flare of a joint.

- Redness and heat are a result of increased blood flow to the arthritic area.
- Swelling is a result of increased movement of fluid and white blood cells into an area (inflammatory response).
- The release of chemicals and compression of the nerves in the swollen area causes pain.

Advice during a flare

In this phase, remember PRICE:

- **P** = Protection from further damage to the joint by:
 - Supporting the swollen/painful joint in a splint or a wrap. This will help avoid the ligaments being over-stretched
 - Avoid applying too much pressure to the painful joint. Use joint protection techniques (e.g. slide rather than lift, use widened grips – see separate sheet on joint protection).
- **R** = Rest. It is important to keep the joint moving (see exercise sheet) but keep daily tasks to a minimum and avoid movements and activities that cause an increase in pain.
- **I** = Ice (cold) for the first 72 hours of the flare or until the redness and heat have gone. Ideally ice for 20 minutes (no longer as this may reverse the effect and increase swelling) every hour. Do not apply ice packs directly to the skin as frostbite can occur – wrap the ice in a clean tea towel or flannel.
- **C** = Compression. Your therapist will show you how to apply elastic sports wrap or Coban wrap to the area to help provide compression. This will help push fluid out of the swollen joint. To apply the wrap: pull it to a full stretch, relax the stretch to 50%, then apply making sure each wrap overlaps by half until the swollen area is covered. If applying the wrap to a finger, leave the fingertip free and always apply from just below the nail towards the hand.
- **E** = Elevation of the swollen joint above heart level (e.g. sitting with your hand on your shoulder or head, or lying with your feet up on a pillow).

Contacting us

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Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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