



Ice vs. Heat:

TOPICAL CREAMS

Globally, 1 in 5 adults report they are in pain and 20% of adult Americans have chronic pain due to diseases and aging. This prevalence is encouraging many people to find alternative ways to manage their pain. One such option that does not need to be administered orally is **topical creams**.



Over the counter topical creams such as icy hot, tiger balm, biofreeze etc. can be used to alleviate muscle aches and pains. These creams are absorbed through the skin for a short-term analgesic effect. Because of this, they are most effective to joints that are closest to the surface of the skin such as the hands and knees. All the creams work in different ways to either mask the pain response or dampen the pain nerves. Research is modest at best to support the effects of these topical creams. However, it does demonstrate that it is more effective for arthritic and acute pain as opposed to chronic pain.

Best Uses:

- Acute musculoskeletal pain
- Arthritis
- Minor aches and pains
- Pulled or sore muscles
- Sprains and strains

Benefits of Topical Creams:

- Absorbed through skin so able to target specific area
- Less side effects than oral pain medication
- Generally, does not interfere with over the counter or prescribed medications
- Great option for people who are unable to swallow pills
- Lower risk of stomach irritation

Considerations:

- Never place the cream over broken or irritated skin
- Do not use in conjunction with a heating pad or ice
- Keep away from eyes, nose, and mouth
- Be aware of skin irritation and discontinue use if occurs
- Read directions and only apply as instructed
- Do not use for over 7 days as it could result in a rash or chemical burn

BEST PRACTICE:

Consult with your primary care physician or pharmacist to determine if topical creams would be an appropriate option for pain control.

