△ GENERAL INFORMATION

The purpose of warm, moist packs is to make the microscopic blood vessels (capillaries) in an area expand. They can then bring in more blood (and the important white blood cells in it) to help fight the infection.

Warm. The heat is necessary because it stimulates capillaries to open up.

Moist. Moisture holds and transfers heat better than heat that is dry and not in close contact with the skin.

Packs. This is a convenient as well as effective way to bring warm moisture to the area.

All the above must be done correctly because too much heat can burn your skin. Also, something that is not very hot but is kept on too long can damage your skin. By contrast, something that is moist but is just at room temperature won’t do much good. Unless you are positive of what you are doing, play it safe: not too hot; not too long.

There are a number of ways to apply heat to tissue. The following is one good method.

- Dissolve 1 teaspoon of ordinary table salt in 1 quart of tap water that has been made warm, not hot, in an ordinary clean cooking pot.
- Dip a clean face washcloth into this salt solution, lift it out, and gently squeeze the excess water from it.
- Test the moist washcloth on the back of your hand to be certain it is not too hot. Then spread it over the area to be treated.
- Over this washcloth place a piece of plastic (plastic food wrap or the plastic wrapping from the dry cleaners will do). This will prevent the warm salt solution from being absorbed into the layer over this.
- Over this plastic place a dry face cloth. This may help spread the heat more evenly.
- Over this place a heating pad set to Low, not medium and not high!

- Make yourself comfortable.
- It is better if you use pillows to elevate the part being treated.
- Leave the pack in position as long as you have been directed, usually for 20 to 30 minutes (Fig. 1). You don’t have to do any towel changing during this session.
- Longer or more often is not necessarily better, so do it as you have been advised.
- A new moist washcloth is advisable for each new session. Just reheat the salt solution and use the same plastic and dry washcloth.
- If possible, avoid taking your pain medicine immediately before the soaks. The medicine may keep you from properly feeling something that might be too hot.
- Stop and remove everything if the soaks feel too warm.
- Do not continue with more sessions if the skin doesn’t look right, for example, if it is very red, or blotchy, or possibly with tiny blisters on it.

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Figure 1. Although normally the various layers of warm, moist packs would lie one on top of the other, they are shown separated for the sake of clarity.