



Musculo-skeletal

North Bristol **NHS**
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P.R.I.C.E.



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P.R.I.C.E. A guide for patients on the management of acute soft tissue injuries

This leaflet provides patients of all ages and abilities with recommendations on managing their soft tissue injuries during the first 3-7 days, using:

Protection,
Rest,
Ice,
Compression and
Elevation (**P.R.I.C.E.**).

What is a soft tissue injury?

A soft tissue injury may be any injury to a:

- Muscle.
- Ligament.
- Tendon.
- Cartilage.
- Joint Capsule (a sac surrounding a joint).

Common examples include sprains, strains, tears and bruises.

Who can suffer from a soft tissue injury?

People of all ages can suffer from soft tissue injuries. They are most common in people who participate in sports and recreational activities.

What are the signs and symptoms of a soft tissue injury?

- Heat and redness – due to the opening up of thousands of tiny blood vessels in response to chemicals released during inflammation.
- Swelling – due to leaking fluid from damaged blood vessels.
- Pain – due to chemicals released during inflammation and increased pressure caused by swelling affecting nerve endings.

The injury may be classified as:

- Mild (or first degree) – minimal swelling, heat and redness; mild pain at the extremes of movement.
- Moderate (or second degree) – moderate swelling, heat and redness; moderate pain with any movement associated with the damaged tissue.
- Severe (or third degree) – significant swelling, heat and redness, severe pain even at rest and inability to perform normal activities (e.g. walking).

What are the aims of P.R.I.C.E.?

- Reduce temperature.
- Reduce pain.
- Limit and reduce swelling.
- Protect the damaged tissue from further injury.
- Promote good healing of the tissue.

Who administers P.R.I.C.E.?

Your physiotherapist, GP or sports physician may advise you about PRICE, but it is your responsibility to make sure you follow the advice.

1. Protection

- Protection should be applied during the first 3 days. Mild injuries may require a shorter period and severe injuries may require a longer period of protection. Some injuries will not require any type of protection.
- The type of protection will depend on the site and the nature of the injury. Examples include crutches, slings, braces, splints, taping and bandaging. Your physiotherapist or doctor will be able to advise you on types of protection.
- The type of protection used should allow some movement of the injured area and should allow for swelling.

2. Rest

- Your general activity levels should be reduced immediately following the injury, but you can make sure other parts of the limb remain supple by keeping them moving.
- You should start to gently move the injured part as early as possible, but movements should be carried out with care to avoid too much stress on the tissues. Your physiotherapist will advise you on suitable exercises.
- You may need to rest the injured area for one day to one week. It will depend on how severe your injury is.

3. Ice

- Ice should be applied immediately following an acute soft tissue injury.
- Crushed ice in a damp towel, ice in a plastic bag or frozen gel packs may all be used. A damp towel or similar should be used in between the ice and skin to prevent ice burns.
- The ice should cover the entire area affected by injury. If the area is particularly small, you could massage it with an ice cube.
- The area should be checked for ice burns regularly, especially if you have decreased sensation.
- It is advised that ice is used for 20-30 minutes every two hours.
- Ice should not be used if you have a history of cold induced high blood pressure, an allergy to cold, very poor circulation or sensation, Raynauds Disease or sickle cell anaemia.
- Ice should be used for as many days as the area is painful and/or swollen.

4. Compression

- Elastic bandages, tubigrip, neoprene supports and inflatable pressure devices may be used to provide compression.
- It should be applied as soon as possible following injury. However, do not use compression while you are elevating the injured area or while in bed, as this may compromise circulation.
- If you are not elevating the area, compression can be used and may help to reduce swelling. Ensure it is not restricting circulation above or below the area.

5. Elevation

- The injured part should be elevated above the level of the heart as much and as soon as possible during the first 3 days following injury.
- The area should be adequately supported and any methods of compression removed.
- Care should be taken when lowering the limb, as blood may rush to the area causing increased pain and swelling. Lower it slowly to give the area time to adjust.

Are there any other treatments available for soft tissue injuries?

Yes. Your doctor may prescribe painkillers and/or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to assist with the healing process. These should be taken as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.

Your physiotherapist may use electrotherapy, manual therapy, taping and/or exercise rehabilitation if necessary. The most important thing to remember is that these treatments should be used along side PRICE, not instead of it.

What will happen if I do not use P.R.I.C.E.?

The recovery from your injury may take longer and you may have more pain and time away from your normal activities.

What happens if P.R.I.C.E. does not help my injury?

In most cases PRICE will help your injury. In rare cases it may not and you should seek further help from your doctor or physiotherapist.

What can be done for a soft tissue injury after the first 3-7 days?

Your physiotherapist should be able to advise you on the further management of these injuries. This may include:

- Regaining full and normal movement.
- Muscle strengthening.
- Retraining balance.
- Exercises specific to an activity or sport.

How soon will I be able to return to full activity?

Your physiotherapist will be able to advise you on the right time to return to your activities. This information only gives advice for up to 7 days following an injury. You may need further advice and exercises before you can return to full activities.

References

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (2002) **Guidelines for the management of soft tissue (musculoskeletal) injury with Protection, Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation (PRICE) during the first 72 hours.**

CSP website: <http://www.csp.org.uk> [accessed July 2006]

NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities. Available at www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution

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