



United States Military Academy
Sports Medicine-Physical Therapy Services
Keller Army Community Hospital and Arvin Gym, West Point, New York
"Academic, Research, and Clinical Excellence"

P. R. I. C. E.

The key principles in treating acute injuries to the musculoskeletal system are prevention, rest, ice, compression, and elevation. The acronym PRICE can be used to help recall these principles.

P – PREVENTION

Most injuries can be prevented by designing a well-balanced PT program that does not overstress any body part, allows enough time for recovery, and includes a warm-up and cool-down.

R - REST

It is essential to prevent further injury and to allow ligaments to heal. This does NOT mean total immobilization or bed rest, but means avoiding any activity which causes further pain or swelling. Soldiers may be put on crutches. They should walk naturally and put as much weight on the injured extremity as they can tolerate without pain.

I - ICE

Ice should be used until swelling has resolved. Place an ice pack around the injured joint for twenty minutes. Ice should be used at least 2-3 times per day. To make an ice pack, place ice cubes or crushed ice in a plastic bag (or use a bag of frozen vegetables) and wrap it with a moist towel. Do NOT switch to heat unless instructed by a medical provider. If the pain is local to a tendon, as in tendonitis, for instance, an ice cup may be used. This is made by filling a styrofoam or paper cup $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way with water and freezing it. After peeling down the paper, massage the ice over the painful area for 5-7 minutes. The cup may yield more than one treatment.

C - COMPRESSION

Usually comes in the form of an "ace wrap" or other compressive taping. Compression should be used until the swelling is gone. Remove the wrap for showering and for placing an ice pack on the joint. Do not wrap it so tight as to impede circulation.

E - ELEVATION

The injured joint needs to be positioned above heart level. For example, if the knee or ankle is injured, the soldier should lie on his back with the foot propped on pillows. This prevents further swelling and assists in decreasing the swelling that is already present.

Returning to activities after an injury is individualized. It depends on the extent of the injury and the ability to keep the initial inflammation under control. The physical therapy staff can assist recovery by instructing in motion, stretching, strengthening, and functional exercises. Without proper rehabilitation, the chances are greater that the soldier will sustain another injury.