

The Center for Facial Restoration

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Cosmetic and Functional Nasal Surgery · Revision Rhinoplasty · Cosmetic Surgery of the Face

COLD PACKS FOR POST-OPERATIVE SWELLING

Cold packs are very important in the first 48 hours after surgery to reduce post-operative swelling. Use them 20 minutes on, 20 minutes off, to prevent damage to the skin. After 48 hours, you may still apply cold packs for comfort, but the therapeutic value will be diminished.

Below are suggestions and comments regarding various types of cold packs:

Alcohol Slushy Packs

Alcohol slushies make excellent cold packs for post-surgery use. They are inexpensive and easy to make using common household items, can be shaped or molded around the affected body part, and retain cold for a much longer period of time than other types of cold packs. They are also reusable.

To make an alcohol slushy, you will need a large bottle of rubbing alcohol (any kind, the cheapest one is fine), water and a box of thick plastic food storage bags. High quality, name brand ziplock freezer bags (such as Ziploc) are best, as they are nice and thick and can withstand repeated use without leaking. For this purpose, the original flat, double seal type is better than the newer zipper pull type. (The zipper pull can leak at one end.) For the nose area, the freezer quart size works well.

Mix one part alcohol to three parts water and add to the ziplock bag. Do not overfill the bag, as the slush needs room to move around, and you don't want the bag to be too heavy since it will be resting on your face. For a quart size bag, start with 1 cup of water and 1/3 cup of rubbing alcohol. Push out the air and seal the bag carefully. Optionally, you can then place it zipped-end first into a second bag. The second bag gives you maximum protection against leakage, but it will also make the pack thicker and less malleable.

Place the bag in the freezer for several hours. Then test the consistency. It should feel like fresh snow or a thick frozen drink; you should be able to crush it with your fingers. If it is too solid, let it melt a bit, pour off some of the liquid and add more alcohol. If it is too liquid, pour some off and add more water. Place the bag back into the freezer and re-test in an hour or two. Once you are happy with the formula, make several more so that you have backups ready to go as needed. It is a good idea to have the slushy packs already prepared and in the freezer before the morning of surgery, so that when you return home or to your hotel, all you have to do is grab one and head to bed to rest.

To use, wrap the slushy pack in a clean, dry washcloth, pillowcase or cloth napkin. This will protect your skin from injury due to the extreme cold. Then place the pack on the affected area of the body and mold the slush so that it conforms to the shape below it (such as the bridge of your nose). If it feels too cold or not cold enough, adjust the cloth thickness accordingly.

Once the slushy pack begins to warm up, you can extend the cold effect by using a damp cloth rather than a dry one. Once you are finished, simply place the slushy pack in the freezer again to rejuvenate it.

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Surgical Glove Ice/Water Packs

You may receive this type of cold pack in the hospital after your rhinoplasty. Simply fill a surgical glove with crushed ice (not cubes) and water, taking care not to overfill it. Then tie off the open end with a knot, like you would tie a party balloon. Place the glove on the nose and use the fingers of the glove to cover the sides of the nose and undereye area.

This type of cold pack is easy to make but does not retain cold nearly as well as the alcohol slushy method. Also, the glove cannot be placed in the freezer to be reused, as it will freeze into a solid chunk of ice. This applies to all ice/water packs, regardless of the container used. The knotted glove is also very difficult to untie again for refilling. Thus, it is usually discarded after one use.

Frozen Vegetables

Another commonly used cold pack is a bag of frozen vegetables. Small vegetables like peas work best, because they can conform to the shape of the nose or other body part. However, the vegetables will start to degrade from repeated defrosting and refreezing. You should not eat the vegetables after using them for cold packs.

Retail Cold Packs

There are often several types of cold packs for sale in the first aid section of the drugstore. Unfortunately, they are usually somewhat stiff and not designed for small, delicate areas like the nose and eyes. They may be uncomfortable to use and challenging for you to position in such a way that the cold pack makes enough contact to be effective.