Contrast Baths:
Hot and cold “baths” are recommended to assist in reducing swelling. By alternating between hot and cold you allow your blood vessels to dilate and constrict thus promoting a reduction in swelling and flushing away the waste products of injury from the surrounding tissues. By reducing swelling contrast baths may also decrease pain, control inflammation and improve mobility in the affected area. Contrast bath therapy is one technique that your physiotherapist may recommend to help you quickly and safely restore normal mobility and function after injury.

Common Injuries That May Benefit from a Contrast Bath:
Injuries that benefit from contrast bath treatments are those that cause pain and swelling around soft tissue and the joints of the body. These injuries include, but are not limited to:

- Ankle and leg fractures
- Plantar fasciitis
- Achilles tendinitis
- Upper extremity fractures
- Hand and finger arthritis

Follow the procedure below 2-3 times daily until the swelling comes under control.

- Immerse the swollen area in a basin with warm water (make sure the water is warm and not too hot!) or wrap a heat pack around the area for 30-60 seconds. Remove the affected area and then
- Immerse the swollen area in a basin of cold water with ice or wrap a cold pack (bag of frozen peas in a damp towel, ice cubes in a damp towel) around the area for 30-60 seconds. Remove and then
- Repeat this sequence 5 times.
- Always end with cold water, except when treating rheumatoid arthritis, in which case, finish with a warm application.

Do not use contrast baths if you suffer from:

- High blood pressure.
- If you have circulatory problems.
- Have any areas of broken or sore skin.
- Have reduction sensation in the affected area.
- If you suffer from peripheral vascular disease.

Please discontinue the contrast baths if you experience any increase in pain.

Should you have any further queries please contact the Physiotherapy Department on (01) 2936692.

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This Patient Education leaflet was developed by the Chartered Physiotherapists in Beacon Hospital.
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