

⌘6 Pause and Practice:

Reducing Edema of the Hand

I have had good success with using an ice dip to temporarily reduce edema of the hand. It is quick and I see immediate results. Most patients tolerate the cold for the quick immersion.

Starting Position

- Take a bucket and fill it two-thirds full with ice. Add enough water to cover the ice, making “slush”. Place the bucket on a footstool in front of the patient to minimize shoulder flexion. Patients exhibiting shoulder pain find it too difficult to raise their arms high enough to get their hand in the bucket, if the bucket is placed on a table.



Handling

- Place a towel in their lap. Gently bring the patient forward and dip the hand in the ice slush, just past the wrist, for no longer than three to five seconds. I usually do this twice. The second time will feel colder.
- As the cold constricts the vessels, it moves the fluid out of the hand. This can be done in the clinic or at home and several times a day if the edema is persistent.
- Immediately follow the ice dip with gentle finger flexion and extension. ROM of the fingers can be passive or active. Never force ROM of fingers, especially when they are swollen as this can cause damage to the structures of the fingers and hand.



Tips

For a few patients, the cold is too uncomfortable. If this is the case, then use one of the methods previously described. If for any reason, your physician does not want the ice dip used, use an alternative method.