

# Wheatie Bags in the Management of Children's Pain - Paediatric Full Clinical Guideline - Derby only

Reference no.: PA GI 05/Aug 20/v004

## Introduction

A heated or cooled Wheatie bag can be used safely by children and young people to help relieve their pain or discomfort

## Aim and Purpose

To safely introduce a non-pharmacological method to reduce pain, muscle spasm and joint stiffness and improve circulation and range of movements

The bags do not need to be prescribed by a doctor and can be administered by any health care professional within Children's services.

This procedure can be taught to the parents/carers to enable them to use the wheatie bag appropriately and safely to help relieve their child's pain.

## Definitions, Keywords

Paediatric pain

Non-pharmacological pain management

## Information

When heated, the bag may cause vasodilation, increase metabolism, have sedative properties due to the Lavender aroma and lower pain perception.

When cooled, the bag may reduce swelling and bruising.

Children and young people over the age of 2 years, experiencing abdominal or joint pain, for example, may find relief from using a heated or cooled wheatie bag on the affected area.

## Contraindications

- Non-verbalising/immobile age group/ infancy
- Children with severe learning disability
- Impaired circulation of the area to be treated
- Areas of recent bleeding or haemorrhage
- Lack of thermal sensation
- Devitalised skin i.e. after deep X-ray treatment
- Open wounds/post surgical wounds
- Site of malignancy

## Precautions

Avoid lying on top of bag – particularly the trunk

Do not allow the bag to get wet as this will cause the bag to be unusable

## Hazard

Excessive erythema

## Equipment

Wheatie bag – contains natural wheat and sometimes Lavender essential oil.

Heated – Plastic sandwich style box

Microwave

Chilled – Plastic freezer bag

Freezer compartment

**Procedure**

| Action  | Rationale   |
|---|---|
| Obtain new bag for each patient.<br>Each Wheatie bag should have ONE owner only   | Once used by the patient, it should be taken home and brought into hospital for subsequent visits if necessary.   |
| When reheating used bag – check frequently for deterioration of material and contents.  | To ensure that the Wheatie bag is safe to use and undamaged.  |
| Read instructions on each Wheatie bag before use  | Each Wheatie bag may have different heating times, depending on the size of the bag   |
| For hot pack: place the Wheatie bag in a plastic sandwich style box and place in a microwave.<br>(The Tupperware should be washed out with soap & water before & after heating)   | This reduces the risk of cross infection by isolating the bag from food products.   |
| Heat bag for 1 – 2 minutes depending on the size of the bag.  | Vary heating times to suit personal comfort and levels of warmth required.<br><b>DO NOT</b> exceed recommended heating times<br><b>DO NOT</b> heat in a conventional oven<br><b>DO NOT</b> leave heating unsupervised |
| Apply bag directly to affected area   | The heat from the bag may help to ease pain/ discomfort by causing vasodilation and lower pain perception.  |
| Allow the bag to cool to room temperature before reheating.   | The wheat in the bag may lose moisture if reheated too frequently.  |
| For a cold pack: place the bag in a plastic freezer bag in the freezer, or freezer compartment of the fridge, for a least 1hr.  | A cold bag applied to a painful joint or bruised area will help to reduce swelling.   |
| Cleaning: lightly sponge clean only –<br><b>DO NOT IMMERSE</b> in water   | The wheat inside the bag will swell if immersed and the bag will be unusable  |
| If used daily, re-hydrate the bag weekly.<br>To maintain the condition of the bag, re-hydrate it by first heating a cup of water in the microwave to boiling point, creating steam, and then place the bag in the microwave and heat as required. | If the bag is being used frequently the wheat will become drier and start to smell of porridge!!<br>The bags will work just as effectively whether you re-hydrate them or not, but will smell fresher.                |

Some Wheatie bags contain Lavender oil as well as the wheat filling. When first used, wheat aroma and moisture are experienced. This is normal and will reduce with frequent use.

Lavender oil can be reapplied on the bag if the aroma lessens.

There isn't a set life span of the wheatie bag, but they will lose their nice smell over a period of time.

They can be reheated as long as they are being enjoyed and are beneficial to the patient.

**Outcome**

The child / young adult is given a non-pharmacological method to help relieve their pain.

The Wheatie bags are used as a comfort and are designed to help relaxation and create an overall sense of well-being.

**References (including any links to NICE Guidance etc.)**

Healthline Editorial team (2014) Treating Pain with Heat and Cold  
<http://www.healthline.com/health/chronic-pain/treating-pain-with-heat-and-cold#Heatvs.Cold1>

Lane E, Latham T. (2009) Managing Pain using Heat and Cold Therapy Paediatric Nursing Jul; 21(6):14-8.

<http://www.theheatpackcompany.com/frequently-asked-questions>

**Documentation Controls**

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Development of Guideline: | Dr Sarah Rushman<br>Liz Taylor  |
| Consultation with:        | Laura Gates   |
| Approved By:              | <i>Paediatric Business Unit Guidelines Group, Women and Children's Division - date<br/>Anaesthetic Business Unit- 27<sup>th</sup> August 2020</i> |
| Review Date:              | Aug 2023<br>Extended to June 2024   |
| Key Contact:              | Laura Gates<br>Paediatric Acute Pain Nurse  |