

CONNECTICUT VALLEY HOSPITAL

Physical Therapy Services

PT Equipment Procedure # 12

Re: Paraffin Bath

Date: January 25, 2001

Revised: October 19, 2008

Description:

A Paraffin Bath is a tank containing a mixture of paraffin and mineral oil in a ratio of four pounds of wax to one pint of mineral oil. The paraffin is melted, and the temperature is maintained at 120-126°F. Paraffin has a low specific heat, so it is unable to deliver as much heat per gram as water, so the paraffin feels cooler at a higher temperature.

Indications:

Paraffin is another means of delivering heat, especially to areas, which are difficult to heat with anything but a liquid medium (i.e. hands). In addition to the recognized effects of heat, a paraffin bath significantly increases perspiration and helps to soften the skin. Temperatures of subcutaneous tissues may be increased by heat conduction from superficial tissues. Paraffin baths have been used with good results for such conditions as: stiff joints, arthritic joints, old sprains, local swelling, painful feet, tenosynovitis, bursitis, fibrositis, strains, and contusions.

Contraindications:

Patients with known skin lesions or with abrasions or cuts are contraindicated. Other contraindications include: skin infections, recent thin scars, disturbed thermal sensation, peripheral vascular diseases, and conditions in which ability to tolerate heat is impaired.

Procedure:

1. Prepare the patient by washing his/her hands and removing metal from the area.
2. Instruct the patient to dip the part, remove it, and allow the paraffin on the part to harden. Repeat the process 6-8 times so that a glove of solid paraffin is formed.
3. Instruct the patient not to crack the solid paraffin or touch the bottom of the tank.
4. Wrap the part in wax paper or plastic and then with a terry cloth towel so that several layers of toweling are formed. Secure with tape if necessary. Do not use safety pins.
5. Treatment duration is 15 minutes.
6. At the conclusion of the treatment, peel off the paraffin and discard it. If no other treatment is to follow, dry off the skin.

Care of Paraffin Bath:

1. Any spills or wax drips should be cleaned immediately following the treatment session.
2. Wax should be replaced and the tank cleaned when visible signs of dirt begin to show in the bottom of the tank. Frequency of cleanings depends on the amount of use of the paraffin bath. Since the tank is self-sterilizing, cleaning may be as infrequent as once a year.
3. Cleaning Procedure:
 - a. Unplug the tank and allow the wax to partially solidify.
 - b. Slide the old wax out of the tank into a plastic bag and dispose of it.
 - c. Clean the inside and outside of the tank with alcohol.
 - d. Replace the wax and mineral oil in a ratio of four pounds of wax to one pint of mineral oil (premixed blocks of paraffin and mineral oil are available).
4. All Paraffin machines receive Biomedical Testing on an annual basis in January of each year.