

MUSCLE CRAMPS AND LEG PAIN

This guide is to help you to identify the possible cause(s) of your muscle cramps or leg pain and to offer some self care tips which you can do at home before going to your doctor for further investigations and treatment.

MUSCLE CRAMPS

Generally when muscle cramps occur, you will experience a sharp, sudden, painful spasm, or tightening, of a muscle, especially in the legs. The affected muscles will also be hard to the touch. Persistent cramping pains in lower abdominal muscles may also occur with [back problems](#) or during menstruation.

1. CAUSES:

- * Muscle fatigue
- * Heavy exercise, inadequate conditioning or overexertion
- * Loss of body fluid
- * Low glucose in body or electrolyte imbalance
- * Hormone imbalances due to diabetes or thyroid problems, causing reduce supply of blood oxygen to muscles
- * Pregnancy

2. PREVENTION

- * Drink plenty of water and fluids
- * Have a balanced diet
 - consume a high-CARBOHYDRATE diet e.g. rice, bread.
 - maintain optimal mineral and electrolyte intake including CALCIUM, MAGNESIUM, POTASSIUM, and ZINC which apparently performs combined roles in the prevention of muscle injury and cramps.

- * Frequently and gently stretching the troublesome muscles and/or warming up and cooling down before and after exercise.
- * Do stretching exercises regularly, particularly before bed.

3. SELF-CARE

 Gently stretching the affected muscle may help to relieve:

- **in the foot:** Help the casualty to stand with his weight on the foot. When the first spasm has passed, massage the foot.
- **in the calf:** Straighten the casualty's knee and draw her foot firmly and steadily upwards towards the shin. Massage the muscles.
- **in the thigh:** For cramps in the back of the thigh, straighten the casualty's knee by raising the leg. For cramps in front of the thigh, bend the knee. In each case, massage the muscle firmly with the fingers.

 Apply either ice or heat to the cramped area.

-Ice works best to relax the muscle and slow down inflammation.

-Heat is a better choice if you happen to get a cramp in a cold environment.

4. CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF ...

- ✓ There are severe, prolonged (more than an hour) or recurring muscle spasms or cramps that are unexplained or that aren't relieved by simple stretching.
- ✓ There are prolonged or persistent muscle twitches that are unexplained
- ✓ The cramp is in your chest or arms; this may indicate a serious heart or abdominal problem. Seek immediate medical help.

Cramps are not always related to physical activity. They may be symptoms for a number of other medical problems such as diabetes, atherosclerosis, or any other condition that interferes with muscle metabolism or affects circulation. So it's important to check with your doctor when the problem persists.

LEG PAIN

1. **CAUSES:**

- ❖ Cramps from muscle fatigue, strain or injury
- ❖ Trouble with the veins (blood vessels returning from the legs to the heart)
- ❖ Diseased arteries (blood vessels bringing blood to the muscles of the leg)
- ❖ Problem at the joints in the leg (infection, inflammation due to arthritis or gout)
- ❖ Nerve damage: common in diabetics, smokers, and alcoholics
 - pain or weakness is present in one or both legs
 - numbness, tingling, or a pins-and-needles feeling may develop
- ❖ If the pain is accompanied by numbness and tingling, and it radiates from the hip or buttocks region down the leg, the problem might relate to the back.

Note: There may be other causes of leg pain. Furthermore, the causes may vary based on age and gender of the affected person, as well as on the specific characteristics of the symptom such as location, quality, time course, aggravating factors, relieving factors, and associated complaints.

2. SELF CARE

- ✿ For unexplained leg pain lasting less than 1 week, rest as much as possible. Elevate the leg and take over-the-counter pain medications. Gentle massage may lessen the pain.
- ✿ Heat (warm soaks or a warm heating pad) or cool soaks may also help
- ✿ Leg pain caused by arterial problems tends to improve with the help of gravity when the feet are hanging down.
- ✿ For leg pain caused by nerve disorders, control diabetes or eliminate alcohol and tobacco. Avoid tight-fitting shoes with pressure areas.

3. Call your health care provider if leg pain persists or worsen.

4. Treatment depends on the cause. Medications may include analgesics, anti-inflammatory and others. Consult your healthcare providers for the most appropriate medicine to be used.

REFERENCES:

Websites:

- a) <http://www.onhealthnetworkcompany.com>
- b) <http://health.yahoo.com/health/Diseases and Conditions/Disease Feed Data/Leg Pain/>
- c) http://www.np.ac.sg/~gom/fun_stuff/cramp.htm
- d) <http://www.fitpath.com/fitbyte1.htm>
- e) <http://www.brookwood-medical.com/healthtips/html/SPOR3206.html>
- f) http://www.physical.com/jazzer/fitfacts/ff_006.htm

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