

Tips for Leg Cramps

No one likes being woken up in the middle of the night by sudden painful cramp-like discomfort in the muscles of your leg. Nevertheless, leg muscle cramps are common in healthy people as well as those with underlying health conditions.

Seventy percent of leg cramps tend to happen at night and can affect any part of your leg, but most cramps occur in the calf muscles and, less commonly, in the feet and thighs. During cramping, the affected muscles become tight and painful, and the feet and toes tend to be stiff.

In most cases, cramps can last anywhere from a few seconds up to 10 minutes, but thigh muscle cramps tend to last the longest.

Causes of leg cramps

Leg cramps can occur for seemingly no apparent reason or be triggered by an underlying health condition. They are more common in people with Diabetes.

Below are some of the common causes of leg cramps:

- **Exercise**

During exercise, muscle cramps might occur as a result of fatigue/ muscle stress or dehydration through sweating. Normal cramps should last a few seconds/minutes but if it's more painful, then you may want to seek medical advice.

- **High or low blood glucose**

Glucose is essential for muscles contracting and relaxing. With low blood glucose, muscles are then starved for glucose and such imbalances result in muscle cramps.

- **Nerve damage**

Chronic hyperglycemia causes a complication called diabetic peripheral neuropathy which damages nerves that send signals to the legs and feet. This then results in muscle twitching, numbness, or tingling in your feet and toes. But in severe cases, it causes sharp or aching pain and even full-blown leg cramps that quickly spread.

- **Thyroid Condition**

Leg cramps may be brought by thyroid conditions. Hypothyroidism is a condition where a person is unable to produce enough thyroid hormone and with time the deficiency may damage the nerves sending signals from the brain and spine to your legs and arms. This may cause numbness in the legs and hence leg cramps.

- **Mineral Deficiency**

Not only water is lost when sweating, but electrolytes too. If you have low electrolytes and an imbalance of calcium, potassium, sodium, and magnesium, you may experience leg cramping.

Remedies for leg cramps

Below are some things you can do to help leg cramps:

- **Stretching**

Stretching can help keep your muscles healthy and flexible. There are a number of stretches for all of the different muscle groups. Make it a habit to do these stretches at some point during the day after you are warmed up and especially after exercise.

- **Therapeutic Massage**

Therapeutic massage helps relieve pain by relaxing painful muscles and hindering pain messages from the brain. Regular spa days may help ease your pain and ensure all muscles, tendons, and cells are working properly.

- **Dietary Minerals**

Healthy diets contain essential minerals required by the body. When exercising, consider taking sports drinks. Add magnesium to your diet. Good sources of magnesium are nuts and seeds. Foods like spinach, bananas, yogurt, sweet potatoes, and nuts also play a big role in fighting mineral deficiencies that lead to leg cramps.

- **Proper Hydration**

This is easily overlooked, but dehydration can be the main cause of leg cramps. Take the recommended amount of water each day (typically 64-128 oz. depending on your body weight and the amount you sweat) to prevent dehydration triggered muscle cramps.

- **Get Physical**

Consider walking around when experiencing leg cramps. Walking eases leg cramps by sending signals to the muscle that it should relax after contracting. You can also consult your doctor or trainer on some of the exercises that can ease muscle pains.

- **Control Your Blood Sugar**

High blood sugar is the root cause of problems for diabetes patients. Please do what it takes to keep it within normal ranges.

- **Medication**

If your cramps are mild, they will go away within a short period of time. But if you feel more pain/discomfort, consider talking to your doctor. He/she will advise the best medication to ease your pain and ways to prevent the same from recurring.

Preventing leg cramps

They say prevention is better than cure. So do these to avoid leg cramps.

1. Maintain a healthy blood sugar range.
2. Eat a balanced diet with all essential minerals more so calcium, magnesium, and potassium.
3. Keep hydrated.
4. Avoid sitting long hours and get physical by doing exercises and stretches.

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