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LEG CRAMPS

Leg cramps are common, and although can be quite painful, is generally not a serious condition. They tend to increase as people get older.

Prevention

The exact cause of muscle cramps is not known but it is believed to be due to inadequate stretching before exercise and muscle fatigue due to exercise. Fitness also helps prevent leg cramps because as you become fitter your muscles become more accustomed to the increased exercise leg cramps reduce. To help prevent your cramps, it is important you warm up before you walk or exercise. After a short warm up, you should stretch your muscles out gently. Stretching after you complete exercise should also help.

Dehydration also plays a role. When you exercise you lose fluid, which can upset calcium and phosphorous levels in the body and can trigger cramps. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid before and during exercise.

Heavy or tight bed clothes can force the toes downwards, stretching the leg muscles. Sleeping under a light, loose duvet may help.

Other treatments

If the above advice does not work, you can try Crampex® tablets. It is an over the counter treatment available in most pharmacies. Crampex® contains calcium gluconate which replaces deficiency of calcium and colecalciferol which assists in the absorption of calcium whilst nicotinic acid improves circulation. As with all medication, check with your pharmacist or doctor to ensure it is suitable for you.

Sometimes quinine is used to prevent leg cramps, especially at night. Quinine should only be considered if all other efforts fail. Quinine can only be obtained with a doctor's prescription. Quinine can cause dizziness and blurred vision occasionally so caution is advised. Tonic water contains very small amounts quinine, so it may be enough to relieve night cramps.

Can there be another cause?

Leg cramps can very rarely be a sign of arteriosclerosis, also known as hardening of the arteries. In this condition, the arteries become clogged by fatty deposits, limiting the supply of blood to the muscles. When you exercise, your leg muscles need more oxygen and this is supplied by blood flowing to the muscles. In atherosclerosis, blood supply is limited, meaning the muscles can't get enough oxygen. This results in the build up of chemicals that can trigger pain and spasms, usually in the calves. In mild cases, you may notice your legs are cold and your skin is dry.
In more severe cases, the leg may become blue and ulcerated. Smoking, diabetes, high

cholesterol and high blood pressure are all risk factors for atherosclerosis.

This condition is rare, and your GP will diagnose it quite quickly if you are concerned.

Disclaimer: Information given is suitable for the person above only; Please ensure you consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended

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