

Leg Pain - Muscle Cramps

Definition

- Leg muscle cramps from sports or exercise (muscle overuse)
- The pain is not caused by an injury
- Also called muscle spasms or heat cramps

Health Information

Symptoms

- Brief pains (5 to 15 minutes) in the leg muscles
- The calf muscles or feet are the most common site.
- Foot or leg cramps can be very painful. They may also awaken your child from sleep.
- The involved muscle feels hard and tight.

Causes

- Most often occur after strenuous sports
- Sweating a lot can be a risk factor.

Pain Scale

- **Mild:** Your child feels pain and tells you about it. But, the pain does not keep your child from any normal activities. School, play and sleep are not changed.
- **Moderate:** The pain keeps your child from doing some normal activities. It may wake them up from sleep.
- **Severe:** The pain is very bad. It keeps your child from doing all normal activities.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Muscle cramps are common after too much exercise or hard sports. Examples are hiking or running.
- Muscle cramps occur in 30% of children.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. Stretching and Massage for Cramps:

- During attacks, stretch the painful muscle. Hold the stretch until you break the spasm.
- Stretch in the opposite direction to how it is being pulled by the cramp.
- For calf muscle cramps, pull the foot and toes upward.
- For cramps in front of the lower leg or foot, pull the foot and toes down and backward.
- While stretching, also massage the muscle upward toward the heart.

3. Water for Cramps:

- Water can make muscle cramps go away more quickly. Reason: improves blood flow to the area.
- Drink 2 glasses of water while stretching the muscle.
- Continue with stretching.

4. **Pain Medicine:**
 - Not needed because the pain goes away quickly.
5. **Prevention of Recurrent Muscle Cramps with Stretching:**
 - Future attacks may be prevented by daily stretching exercises of the tight muscle. Hold each stretch for 10 seconds. Also do this before and after playing sports.
 - For calf muscle cramps, stretch the heel cords. Stand with the knees straight. Then, stretch the ankles by leaning forward against a wall.
 - For front of the leg and top of the foot cramps, stretch those muscles. While standing, bend the knee and grab your foot from behind. Stretch your foot upward toward the back.
 - Videos for every muscle cramp are easy to find.
 - Place a pillow under the covers at the foot of the bed at night. This gives the feet more room to move at night.
 - Also, be sure your child gets enough calcium in the diet. Daily Vitamin D3 may also help. Some people report improvement by taking a magnesium supplement.
6. **Prevention of Recurrent Muscle Cramps with Fluids:**
 - Muscle cramps occur more often when playing sports on a hot day. Reason: we lose fluids from sweating and become somewhat dehydrated. These are also called heat cramps.
 - Prevent them by drinking lots of fluid and staying well hydrated. Water and sports drinks are good choices.
7. **What to Expect:**
 - Muscle cramps usually last 5 to 30 minutes.
 - Once they go away, the muscle relaxes and returns to normal.

Call Your Doctor If

- Fever, persistent limp, or a swollen joint occurs
- Muscle cramps occur often
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

Author: Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

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