



### Can painkillers help?

Most leg cramps come on suddenly and do not last very long. Therefore, painkillers are unlikely to help because the cramp will probably have passed before the drugs take effect. However, if a severe leg cramp leaves your muscle feeling tender afterwards, you could take a painkiller such as paracetamol.



### Stretching exercises

If you get a leg cramp, try stretching and massaging the affected muscle. For example, if the cramp is in your calf muscle:

- Straighten your leg towards your head
- Try walking around on your heels for a few minutes

Below is another exercise to help stretch your calf muscles.

- Stand with right / left foot back, with knees bent
- Keeping heel on floor, turned slightly out, lean into wall until stretch is felt in lower calf
- Hold 20 seconds, repeat continues.

Stretching exercises can also help to reduce how often you get leg cramps. Try doing the exercises three times a day, including just before you go to bed.

If you get leg cramps frequently, stretching exercises may help to prevent them or reduce how often you get them. It is worth giving yourself a 2-4 week trial or regular calf stretching exercises to see if your cramps ease off. The cramps may not go completely but their frequency and / or severity may reduce.

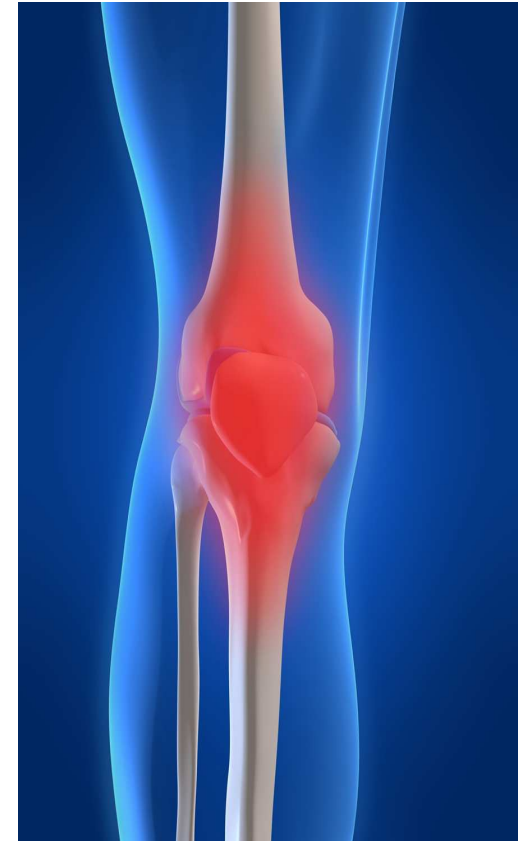


### Supporting your toes

Supporting your toes while you're asleep may also help you to prevent getting cramp in your legs. The following advice may be helpful to you:

- If you're lying on your back, prop your feet up with a pillow
- If you're lying on your front, hang your feet over the end of the bed. This will keep your feet in a relaxed position and help to stop the muscles in your calves from contracting and tensing
- Keep your blankets and bedding loose.

## Leg cramp



Muscle cramps are very common, particularly in the legs. Leg cramps commonly affect your calf muscles (at the back of your leg, below the knee).

### **Who gets leg cramps?**

Many people get leg cramps. They can affect people of any age, although they're more common in older people.

### **What are leg cramps?**

A leg cramp occurs when your muscles suddenly shorten (contract), giving you pain in your leg. This is called a spasm, and you're unable to control the affected muscle when it happens.

The cramp can last from a few seconds to 10 minutes. When the spasm passes, you'll be able to control the affected muscle again.

During a leg cramp, you will feel a painful muscle spasm that you can't control. The muscle will often feel hard and painful, and it may remain tender for up to 24 hours after the cramp.

If you have leg cramps, you will feel pain in your leg muscles. The cramp may affect the muscles in your calf, thigh and feet.

The cause of leg cramps is often unknown, and treatment isn't usually needed. Self-care techniques, such as stretching exercises, can help reduce them.

However, exercise and (in rare cases) underlying health conditions may cause leg cramps. Certain medications may also cause leg cramps.

### **Exercise**

Leg cramps sometimes occur during or after vigorous exercise, where the muscles are placed under severe stress or are used for prolonged periods of time.

### **Underlying conditions**

If your leg cramps are caused by another condition, you will probably have other symptoms along with the leg cramps.

If your GP thinks that another condition may be causing your leg cramps, you may need to have some tests. Your GP may refer you to a specialist.



### **Medication**

Some types of medication can cause leg cramps. For example:

- Diuretics
- Salbutamol: medicine used to treat conditions such as asthma
- Statins: medicines that lower the level of fats (lipids) in your blood.

You should visit your GP if you're taking medication and you start to get frequent leg cramps.

You should visit your GP if your leg cramps are affecting your quality of life. For example, see your GP if you have frequent leg cramps, or they are affecting your sleep.

### **Making a diagnosis**

When you visit your GP with leg cramps, they will ask you about your symptoms and examine your legs and feet. Your GP may ask you:

- About the pain in your calf, thigh or foot, and how severe it is
- Whether the pain comes on suddenly
- How long the pain lasts
- Whether your leg cramps are affecting your sleep, mood and quality of life.

Your GP may also ask if you have any other symptoms, such as numbness or swelling.

Leg cramps with no underlying cause often get better without any treatment.

Your GP may give you advice to help you ease your leg cramps when they happen, and reduce how often they happen.