

How to Manage **Muscle Cramps** at Home

This guide will help you understand:

What are muscle cramps?

What causes muscle cramps?

What you can do to help manage your muscle cramps.

When you should talk to your healthcare team.

One:carepath gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the many patients, caregivers and providers that were involved in preparing this Symptom Self-Management Guide.

What are muscle cramps?

A muscle cramp is a strong tightening of any muscle that causes pain and feels uncomfortable. It can happen suddenly and can last a few seconds to several minutes.



Tell your healthcare team if you have muscle cramps and are finding it difficult to manage.

What causes muscle cramps?

Often there isn't a clear reason why people get muscle cramps. Some causes of muscle cramps include:

- **Medications:** Certain medication such as antipsychotics (Haloperidol), birth control pills, diuretics (water pills) and steroids (Prednisolone) may cause muscle cramps.
- **Chronic conditions:** Such as blood flow problems, kidney disease, cirrhosis, thyroid disease and multiple sclerosis.
- **Injury:** From exercising or overuse of muscles
- **Diet:** Not having enough sodium, potassium, calcium and other minerals in your blood.
- **Dehydration:** Which means that your body has lost too much fluid.
- **Exposure:** To cold temperatures, especially to cold water.
- **Posture:** Sitting for a long time or keeping your legs in awkward positions while you sleep.

What you can do to help manage your muscle cramps.

Managing muscle cramps works best when you play an active role.

- Try to figure out if there is a cause for your muscle cramps.
- Is it better or worse at different times?
- What helps or makes it worse?
- You may want to use a symptom diary to record information about your muscle cramps. Tracking this information will help you talk to healthcare team about your muscle cramps.

Physical steps you can try:

- **Medication:** If you take medicine for your muscle cramps, take it as prescribed so your symptom doesn't get too bad.
- **Gentle exercise:** If it is safe for you. Try to get up and walk around if you have been sitting for a long period of time. **Wear comfortable shoes with good support.**
- **Daily Stretching:** If you have muscle cramps at night, try stretching before bedtime.
- **Heat or cold:** Applying heat e.g. warm towel or heating pad, take a warm shower or bath. Massage the area you feel the muscle cramp. Be careful if you have nerve damage from diabetes.
- **Get a good night's sleep:** Muscle cramps may feel worse if you don't get enough sleep. Keep the bed covers at the foot of the bed loose and not tucked in so you can move your legs in bed.
- **Drink plenty of water:** Only if you do not have fluid restrictions.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Speak with your healthcare team about what a healthy diet means for you.
- **Limit or stop:** Alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine to see if your symptoms get better. These can make your muscle cramps worse.

When you should talk to your healthcare team.

Speak with your healthcare team if muscle cramps are a problem for you. Your worries and questions are important to you and them. Your healthcare team may speak to you about the different medicines you can take.

- Let them know if you think your medical condition or medications are the reason for your muscle cramps.

- Let your healthcare team know if a medicine is working for you or if you're having side effects. You may have to try a few different ones to know what works best for you.
- Talk to them before taking over-the-counter medication, including vitamins and herbal remedies.

Tips on sharing your symptoms with your healthcare team:

Make some notes about your muscle cramps and tell your healthcare team about them.

- Has there been a change in your muscle cramps?
- What does your muscle cramps feel like? How bad is it?
- When does it happen and how long does it last?
- What makes it better or worse? What have you tried already?
- Make a list of all the medications you are taking including over the counter medications.

Notes: _____
