

Leg cramps

Leg cramps are common, usually harmless and only last a short time. They can happen at any time, but most people have them at night or when resting.

Check if it's leg cramps

Leg cramps happen when a muscle in the leg shortens and causes a sudden pain that can make it hard to move.

The cramps can last from a few seconds to 10 minutes.

They can affect the:

- calf muscle, below the knee at the back of the leg
- muscles in the feet or the thighs (less often)

After the cramp has stopped, the muscle might feel sore for up to 24 hours.

Causes of leg cramps

Leg cramps can sometimes be caused by:

- ageing
- putting too much strain on muscles during exercise, which can be worse in hot or humid weather
- pregnancy (usually in the later stage)
- certain medicines, for example medicine for lowering cholesterol ([statins](#)) or high blood pressure ([diuretics](#))
- not drinking enough fluids ([dehydration](#))
- [liver disease](#) caused by drinking too much alcohol

The reason for some cramps is unknown.

Things you can do yourself

There are things you can do to help ease and prevent leg cramps.

During a cramp

Stretching and massaging the muscle may ease the pain during a cramp. Most cramps go away without you doing anything.

Paracetamol or ibuprofen can help to ease muscle soreness after a cramp. They will not help when it's happening because they take too long to work.

Preventing cramps

Regularly stretching your calf muscles may help to reduce leg cramps. But it may not completely stop them from happening.

► [How to stretch your calf muscles](#)

Contact your GP if:

- leg cramps are disturbing your sleep
- you also have numbness or swelling in your legs
- leg cramps last longer than 10 minutes
- you have any other symptoms or concerns

Treatment for leg cramps

Your GP will try to find out the reason for your leg cramps.

They will suggest a treatment depending on the cause.

This might be:

- stretching exercises
- quinine tablets if exercise has not helped

Quinine is not suitable for everyone. Your GP will discuss potential risks and side effects with you.

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