

## Muscle Cramps and Leg Pain

**M**uscle cramps and leg pain often strike during exercise, especially during hot weather. They can be caused by low levels of potassium in the body due to dehydration, or by using a muscle without stretching it first. They can also be caused by arthritis or phlebitis, which is a condition when a vein becomes inflamed. Pain in the front of the lower leg may be due to shin splints, an overuse injury that may occur when exercise levels are increased.

To prevent muscle cramps and leg pain, warm up well before any activity and stretch afterward. Drink lots of water before and during exercise, especially in hot or humid weather. Also, eat foods that are rich in potassium, such as bananas, orange juice, and potatoes. To prevent stomach cramps during exercise, do side stretches before you begin, and breathe deeply while exercising so your lungs are fully expanding and contracting. Finally, if cramps bother you at night, take a warm bath and do some stretches before you go to bed. Make sure your legs are warm enough when you sleep.

These prevention guidelines should be followed even if muscle cramps and leg pain occur. Additionally, you might try massaging and stretching the cramping muscle. In the case of shin splints, you can apply ice and take aspirin, ibuprofen, or acetaminophen for the pain. (Of course, never give aspirin to children or teens younger than 20.) Rest the affected area and return to exercise slowly and only if it doesn't cause pain.

You should call your medical professional if you have persistent leg cramps that don't respond to the prevention and home treatment guidelines just mentioned, or if the cramps occur repeatedly during mild exercise. You should also call if you have any of the following five symptoms:

1. deep pain in your leg or calf
2. heat, redness, or pain along a leg vein
3. swelling of one leg
4. a leg that's white or blue and cold
5. shortness of breath or chest pain

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### For more health information ...

- Connect to our Web site at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org)
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.