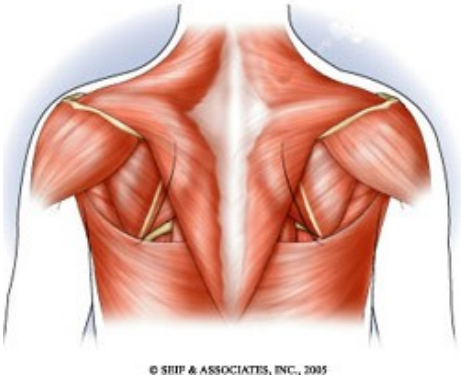
Muscle Cramps

Muscle cramps are due to sudden *involuntary muscle contraction.* This means you have no control over the tightening of a muscle (or muscles). Often there are no obvious causes. Muscle cramps may occur with over-exertion. They may also occur with chilling of the muscles. An example of a muscle chilling activity is swimming. It is uncommon for cramps to be due to a serious underlying disorder. In most cases, muscle cramps improve (or leave) within minutes.



CAUSES

Some common causes are due to:

- Injury.
- Infections, especially viral
- Abnormal levels of the salts and ions in your blood (*electrolytes*). This could happen if you are taking water pills (*diuretics*).
- Blood vessel disease where not enough blood is getting to the muscles *(intermittent claudication).*

SOME UNCOMMON CAUSES OF MUSCLE CRAMPS ARE:

- Side effects of some medicine (such as lithium).
- Alcohol abuse.
- Diseases where there is soreness (*inflammation*) of the muscular system.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- It may be helpful to massage, stretch, and relax the affected muscle.
- Taking a dose of over-the-counter Benadryl® (dephenhydramine) is helpful for night leg cramps.
- Tonic water that contains quinine may be helpful.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Cramps are frequent and not relieved with medicine.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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