

ARE MUSCLE SPASMS CRAMPING YOUR STYLE?

FACTS ABOUT MUSCLE CRAMPS OR SPASMS

- Occur often in warm weather, but can occur in cooler temperatures
- Occur during or after prolonged exercise when muscles are worked to the point of exhaustion
- Experienced by endurance athletes.
- No definitive cause. The *fluid-electrolyte theory* associates cramps with dehydration and loss of electrolytes. The *muscle fatigue theory* associates cramps with overexertion.
- Passive stretching, massaging, and icing brings relief.

PREDISPOSING FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO CRAMPS

LACK OF WATER

- Cramps often coincide with dehydration
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after exercise
- If well hydrated, urine should be clear, pale yellow and copious
- For long exercise sessions, drink 8 oz. Of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes

LACK OF CALCIUM

- Boosting calcium intake has been reported to cease the cramping
- Calcium along with magnesium is crucial in muscle contraction
- For calcium, try adding low-fat yogurt, milk, almonds, beans and fortified cereals or juice to your daily food plan
- For magnesium, add trail mix, oat bran, spinach, soy foods, nuts and beans

LACK OF FUEL

- Drink sports drinks early on when exercise is longer than 60 minutes
- Small snacks and liquids are good pre-exercise foods: bananas, dried fruit, energy bar, or sports drink.
- Take in plenty of carbs 1-3 hours before workouts
- Eat a post-exercise snack high in carbs with added protein to replenish glycogen stores and repair/build muscles.

LACK OF POTASSIUM

- Eat potassium containing foods: dairy products, vegetables and fruits on a daily basis, especially bananas.

LACK OF SODIUM

- Restricting sodium intake on daily basis could cause a sodium imbalance that may contribute to muscle cramps
- Consuming only water while exercising hard, especially for multiple hours, further increases the risk of sodium loss
- As a preventative, consume sports drinks and snack on salted pretzels during exercise

OTHER WAYS TO PREVENT CRAMPS:

- Be fit to ensure you are not overtaxing your muscles
- Increase your duration slowly
- Shorten your workouts
- Prepare your muscles before workouts

✓ *Be sure to always stretch, massage, and ice the cramp as well!*

Adapted from Nancy Clark's *Sports Nutrition Guidebook*

**For more information contact
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