



MANAGING A “CHARLEY HORSE” OR MUSCLE CRAMP

A Charley horse is an American phrase that had its origin in the sport of baseball. There are lots of stories of how the phrase came to be, but one story is that a group of baseball players (in one version from Baltimore, in another from Chicago) bet on a horse named Charley who came up lame in the home stretch. The next day, when a player suffered from a muscle pull in the leg, it was dubbed Charley horse.

While most of us don't play baseball regularly, we have experienced a muscle cramp which is a sudden and involuntary contraction of one or more of our muscles. The most common muscle groups are the back of the lower leg/calf, back of the thigh (hamstring) and front of the thigh (quadriceps). Other cramps that are common are in the feet, hands, arms and along the rib cage.

There are many reasons for muscle cramping:

1. A muscle is overused or injured
2. Dehydration
3. Holding a position for a prolonged period of time
4. You have low levels of minerals such as potassium, calcium or magnesium

Some cramping may be due to an underlying medical condition such as an inadequate blood supply or nerve compression. Most cramp resolve on their own but you may want to consult with a physician if your cramping causes severe pain; is associated with leg swelling, redness or skin changes; is associated with muscle weakness; happens frequently; don't improve with self-care

SELF-CARE/HOME REMEMDIES

- Stretch and massage the muscle
- Heat with relax the muscle when the spasm begins but ice may be helpful when the pain has improved. You can use a heating pad or take a warm bath.
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications can help with pain.

