

# Health Tips

Your Good Health Information From eDocAmerica

with

Dr. D


 Printer Friendly


**Click Here!**

to forward this  
Health Tip to a friend

eDocAmerica  
Services  
Overview

Click  
HERE...

Unsubscribe



If you wish to [unsubscribe](#) from any eDocAmerica mailings, please click on the image above.

### Register Now

If you have not yet used eDocAmerica to communicate with our physicians, we urge you to give it a try. Email us about this or

## Health Tip: Nighttime Leg Cramps



A "charley horse" is the common name for a muscle spasm. One type of charley horse, known as nocturnal (nighttime) leg cramps, characteristically occur just prior to falling asleep or waking up. These cramps typically affect the calf muscles or the muscles of the feet. They come on suddenly with knotting of the involved muscles and are intensely painful. These painful cramps can last from a few seconds to a few minutes. Once they resolve, they can leave the affected muscles aching and sore. Middle age

and older individuals experience these most often, although they do occur in children as well. Both men and women seem to be equally affected.

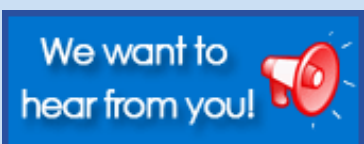
**What causes nighttime leg cramps?** No one knows for sure the exact cause of these. Some doctors believe that they occur because of a disturbance of electrolytes (e.g. sodium, potassium, chloride, calcium, etc.) which are important chemicals needed to enable muscles to function properly. Other factors associated with the development of nighttime leg cramps include:

- Overexerting muscles during work or exercise
- Prolonged standing or walking on hard surfaces such as concrete floors
- Dehydration
- Pregnancy
- Diabetes
- Certain medications, e.g. diuretics, niacin, calcium channel blockers
- Sitting for long periods of time

**Is there a treatment for these once they occur?** Different things seem to work best for different people. Once they begin, a few of the most effective "home remedies" are:

1. Get out of bed and walk around. If the spasm keeps you from getting up, jiggle the muscles in the part of the leg that are cramping.
2. Take a hot bath or shower.
3. Stretch the calf muscles. This can be done in bed by straightening your

any other topic or question you have!



leg and flexing your foot up toward your knee. You can assist this stretch by placing a towel around your foot and gently pulling on either end. You can also perform a standing calf stretch---stand, facing a wall 2 to 3 feet away. With the affected leg straight and the heel on the ground, gradually lean into the wall, stretching the calf muscles.

4. Apply an ice pack
5. Massage the affected muscles.

**Will medications help?** In the past, quinine was available as an over-the-counter drug and was commonly used to treat these. Because of adverse side effects, quinine has now become a prescription medication and has somewhat fallen out of favor as a preferred treatment. Other treatments that have been used include the use of Vitamin B12 and E supplements, muscle relaxers, and the anti-seizure medication, gabapentin (Neurontin).

**Is there any way of preventing nighttime leg cramps?** Here are some suggestions for those who suffer with this problem to help decrease the likelihood of their occurrence:

- Stay well hydrated—drink six to eight glasses of water each day.
- Perform calf stretches before you go to sleep.
- Keep blankets and sheets loose around your feet so that toes are not distorted.
- Some people benefit from light exercise prior to retiring at night, such as riding a stationary bicycle.
- Limit or avoid drinking alcohol or caffeine-containing beverages
- Make sure that you are eating a healthy diet, rich in calcium, potassium and magnesium

**What if I have tried all of measures mentioned and I still have cramps:** In most cases, nighttime leg cramps are more of a nuisance than a serious medical concern. Rarely, however, they can be a sign of a more serious problem such as diabetes, circulatory disease of the lower legs, or Parkinson's disease. Nighttime leg cramps also need to be distinguished from a neurological condition called [restless leg syndrome](#) (RLS). Instead of having leg cramps, the prominent symptom of RLS is a "creepy-crawly" sensation affecting the legs along with an uncontrollable urge to move the legs. If the "charley horses" continue despite conservative measure mentioned above, it's wise to consult with your doctor.

---

#### Have you ever used eDocAmerica?

To register, just [Click Here](#) and follow the simple directions. The entire process should take less than 5 minutes.

You'll be glad you did.

11719 Hinson Road, Suite 130 Little Rock, Arkansas 72212

Toll Free 1-866-525-eDoc (3362) [www.eDocAmerica.com](http://www.eDocAmerica.com)

Copyright 1999-2008 eDocAmerica. All rights reserved. Patent Pending. [\[click here to unsubscribe\]](#)