

Ouch! Cramp

An exercise-related cramp usually occurs in a muscle that is stressed beyond normal use. Cramps can range from a slight spasm to severe pain, usually affecting the lower leg or calf, the back of the thigh (hamstring) and the front of the thigh (quadricep). Inadequate stretching and muscle fatigue, exercising or working in intense heat, dehydration or lack of salt and minerals (electrolytes) can lead to cramping.

For self care: Simply stop the activity that triggered the cramp; gently stretch and massage the muscle, then hold the muscle in a stretched position until the cramp stops. Consult your health care provider if cramps associated with exercise persist. To prevent cramps, build better overall fitness and stay hydrated.

How much water should you drink? The body needs plenty of water to replenish fluids lost during workouts. By the time you are thirsty, you may already be getting dehydrated. Drink at least 8 glasses of water every day.

If you suffer a sprain or strain, remember RICE for first aid:

- R** **REST:** Don't use the injured area if moving it causes pain.
- I** **ICE:** Apply an ice pack immediately to reduce swelling.
- C** **COMPRESSION:** Wrap the injury in an elastic bandage.
- E** **ELEVATION:** Lie down or sit down and keep the injured area elevated above your heart.

When to seek help:
See your health care provider if swelling continues after 24 hours or if the injury seems severe.



More Tips for Exercising Safely

Outdoors: Wear lightweight, breathable clothes during hot weather; wear layered, protective clothing in cold weather. Your clothes should not restrict your movement or circulation. Also, wear reflective and brightly colored clothing on dark days and at night.

After an injury: Working out or using an injured area before it heals can lead to another or worse injury. First, follow any medical instructions you may have received. Otherwise, ease back into your routine with gentle exercises. If you feel pain at the source of the injury, give it more time to heal.

With fitness equipment: Read the manufacturer's instructions or talk to a qualified person about how to operate the equipment.

With children: If you push your child in a stroller while walking or jogging, make sure:



... your stroller has a locking brake and a handle that won't get slippery when you sweat. A safety wrist strap will keep the stroller close to you on downhill strides.

... the construction of both backpacks and strollers is sturdy and stable.

On trails and other public recreation areas: Walk in familiar, well-populated areas and make sure someone knows your route. Walk confidently and pay attention to your surroundings.

Final thought: Exercise should be fun and energizing. Try different kinds of exercise to avoid muscle fatigue from repetitive motion. And exercise safely no matter what your activity. A few precautions go a long way toward keeping your body injury free and active.

SMART AND FIT

HOW TO EXERCISE SAFELY



DON'T LET YOUR WORKOUT WEAR YOU OUT

Chances are that you're aware of the benefits of exercise.

Perhaps you've already added physical activity to your life to help control stress, reduce your risk of heart disease and keep your body healthy and strong. **Working out can also have a downside:** exercise-related injuries. Learn how to exercise safely, stay injury free and stick to your exercise program.



Exercise Safety Basics

- **Talk** to your health care provider before you start an exercise program, especially if you have been inactive, are overweight, are over 40 years old, or have a chronic health condition.
- **Start** your exercise session with a 5-minute warm-up, and end with a 5- to 10-minute cooldown and stretch to protect your muscles and ligaments and allow your heart rate to adjust.
- **Drink** plenty of water before, during and after exercise.
- **Stay** aware of your body's signals during exercise — stop and rest if you feel pain, or you experience shortness of breath or dizziness, or other unusual symptoms.
- **Consult** your health care provider if the symptoms persist or you continue to have discomfort during your workouts.
- **Gradually increase** the length and intensity of your workouts.

Experts say for health benefits you should get at least 30 minutes of exercise most days.

Make Your Body Injury Resistant

One of the best ways to avoid hurting yourself while you exercise is to vary your exercise activities. A healthy balance provides aerobic, flexibility and strength training exercises. A strong and flexible body is more likely to stay injury free.

3 WAYS TO WORK OUT

AEROBIC EXERCISE is any moderate nonstop activity such as brisk walking or swimming that boosts your heart rate and increases oxygen flow. **Tip:** To ensure you're not overdoing it, try the "talk test": You should be able to carry on a conversation without being too winded. But if you can easily sing a song, then pick up your pace.

STRETCHING helps prevent muscle strain and injury and improves range of motion. Gently stretch all of your muscle groups before and after you exercise. **Tip:** Think of stretching as more than just a warm-up or cool-down activity. Stretching is key to maintaining flexibility. **Tip:** Fit in a few minutes of stretching every day, and consider adding a yoga or flexibility class to your weekly fitness routine.

STRENGTH TRAINING builds muscle mass; protects bones, ligaments and tendons; and helps improve physique. **Tips:** Don't try to lift more weight than you can handle. Lift and lower weights in slow, controlled movements to help prevent back pain and injury.

Choosing Shoes

Wear shoes designed for the playing surface and condition. Good shoes provide cushioning, stability and can help prevent injuries. **Examples:** You may be more likely to twist your ankle or fall if you wear running shoes while playing tennis; you may slip if you play basketball in shoes that don't grip the court.

Should You Exercise When You Are Sick?

Above-the-neck symptoms, such as a stuffy head or runny nose, may actually feel better with exercise (but take your workout down to half speed, and stop if you feel worse). Below-the-neck symptoms such as a fever, frequent cough, stomachache or diarrhea warrant a day or two off.

Preventing Overuse Injuries

Pushing the body beyond its limits causes most exercise related injuries. You don't have to be a marathon runner to suffer from tired and injury-prone muscles. If you've been sedentary for a while or you've just increased your exercise intensity, you could suffer an overuse injury during your very first workout. **Prevent the pain:**

CHANGE your routine slowly. Whether you bike, run or walk, a good rule is to increase your distance or time by no more than 10 percent per week.

PAY attention to pain. If something hurts, stop. That nagging pain in your side or twinge in your calf muscle could turn into a serious injury if you push it.

USE the right equipment. Running and walking shoes, compression shorts, sports bras, biking gloves ... sports equipment isn't just for good looks. The right equipment can help you prevent blisters, chafing, sprains and strains, or worse. **Tip:** Find equipment that fits.

DON'T be a "weekend warrior." Following up a week's worth of sofa time with a two-hour bike ride or Saturday touch football game is an invitation for injury. **Remember:** Regular exercise helps build fitness so you can stay strong and enjoy weekend fun.

