

Patient Teaching Tool

Muscle Cramps

Cramps - especially leg cramps - are common in patients with kidney disease. Cramps are the involuntary contraction of one or more muscles.

Tips for Managing Muscle Cramps

To help prevent cramps:

- Stretch your muscles every day.
- Get up and walk around if you are sitting for long periods. Stretch when you stand up.
- If you tend to get leg cramps at night, stretch before bedtime. Light exercise before going to bed may help prevent nighttime cramps (e.g., a short walk or riding a stationary bicycle).
- Keep the bed covers at the foot of the bed loose and not tucked in.
- Drink plenty of fluids, if you are not on fluid restrictions.
- Avoid exercising in extreme heat.
- Limit alcohol and caffeine.
- Wear comfortable shoes with proper support.
- Avoid walking on concrete floors for long periods of time, if you can.
- You may wish to try Vitamin E (400 units, 1 pill every day). It may help with muscle cramps.
- If you have tried these things and they are not working, talk to your doctor about other ideas.

To ease the pain of muscle cramps:

- Massage the cramped muscle with your hands.
- Straighten the limb until you feel the muscle stretch.
- Apply a warm towel or heating pad to the tight muscle, or take a hot shower or bath. If you have diabetes or peripheral neuropathy, be particularly careful with heating pads because you may not feel the heat and the heat can burn your skin.
- Massaging the cramped muscle with ice may also help.

If muscle cramps occur during hemodialysis:

- Try low intensity exercise (e.g. stationary bike) during hemodialysis.
- Minimize weight gain in between hemodialysis treatments.
- Discuss with your doctor about the timing of your blood pressure drugs in relation to your hemodialysis treatment.