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NEWSLETTER



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Muscle Cramps: It may be more than a tight muscle

We all have experienced aches in our muscles stemming from overuse. Often an entire region of the body is sore. Muscle stretching, massage, moist heat, over-the-counter analgesics such as acetaminophen, topical Ben-Gay® or anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen can help relieve muscle aches.

A muscle cramp, by contrast often occurs abruptly without warning. This involuntary, painful muscle contraction usually affects one muscle as opposed to a group of muscles, the most common being the gastrocnemius. Cramping usually lasts only a few seconds but afterwards, the affected muscle is often still sore. An elevated serum creatinine kinase (CK) level may be present after protracted muscle spasms indicating that muscle damage has occurred.

Underlying disorders which may predispose patients to muscle cramps include dehydration, diuretic use, hemodialysis, or excessive diaphoresis. Pregnancy, hypo- or hyperthyroidism, adrenal insufficiency, electrolyte abnormalities including hyponatremia, hypomagnesemia, hypoglycemia, hypocalcemia, or

hypokalemia can also be included in the differential diagnosis. Muscle cramps are a symptom of many neuromuscular conditions as well, including spinal stenosis.

Medications that may be associated with involuntary muscle cramping include albuterol, bergamot (bergapten), caffeine, clofibrate, corticosteroids, cyclosporine, diuretics, labetalol, lithium, nifedipine, terbutaline, tetanus, theophylline, and vitamin A. In addition, abrupt withdrawal of corticosteroids could precipitate cramping.

The primary treatment for muscle cramps as for all diseases and conditions is to look for and treat the underlying cause. Pharmacological treatment could be considered for persistent cramping. Most commonly quinine sulfate, 260 mg orally at bedtime or twice a day can help. Tonic water with quinine could also be considered. Less commonly other medications such as carbamazepine, phenytoin, amitriptyline, Vitamin E or Calcium have also been utilized for muscle cramps, though in our practice we have found that quinine is the most effective therapy for persistent cramping. As with any muscle ache or cramping, stretching with aerobic conditioning is strongly encouraged.

For Information and Referrals:

(610) 954-9040

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