

Can non-drug therapies prevent lower limb muscle cramps?

Clinical Question	How effective are non-drug, non-invasive therapies for lower limb muscle cramps
Bottom Line	<p>A combination of daily calf and hamstring stretching may reduce the severity of night-time lower limb muscle cramps in people aged 55 years and older, but the effect on cramp frequency is uncertain, as the quality of the evidence is very low. Calf stretching alone may not be effective for reducing the frequency of night-time lower limb muscle cramps in people aged 60 years and older, although limitations in the study's design impede interpretation of the results and clinical applicability. It is also uncertain whether a combination of daily calf, quadriceps, and hamstring stretching reduces the frequency and severity of leg cramps in 50- to 60-year-old women with metabolic syndrome, as the quality of the evidence is very low, with serious imitations in the study's design that erode our confidence in the results.</p> <p>Many non-drug therapies are yet to be evaluated.</p>
Caveat	Randomised trials have yet to evaluate the effects of non-drug, non-invasive interventions for lower limb muscle cramps associated with exercise or neurological disease. No study has included anyone less than 50 years of age. As lower limb muscle cramps can have a profound impact on people with neurological disease, including children, this should be a priority for future research.
Context	Muscle cramps are highly prevalent, especially in older adults and people with neurological disease, and have a substantial impact on physical and psychological health (distress, less sleep). Many interventions have been tried in the management of lower limb muscle cramps. The most common interventions can be broadly categorised as drug or non-drug interventions. Non-drug interventions reported in the literature include muscle, massage, relaxation, sensory nerve stimulation, physical exercise and changes in standing and sitting positions. Effectiveness and need for further research into these interventions needs to be evaluated.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Hawke F, Sadler SG, Katzberg HD, Pourkazemi F, Chuter V, Burns J. Non-drug therapies for the secondary prevention of lower limb muscle cramps. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2021, Issue 5. Art. No.: CD008496. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD008496.pub3. This review contains 3 trials with a total of 201 participants.

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Systematic review link:

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD008496.pub3/full>