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## 4 ways to control and treat muscle cramping

If you've ever gotten bad muscle cramps, you know they're best avoided. They hurt.

"You can cramp anywhere in your body, but they tend to occur in muscles being worked. Runners, for example, will get them first in their legs," said Dr. Todd Arnold, sports medicine physician with Methodist Sports Medicine/the Orthopedic Specialists.

The common causes of cramping are dehydration, overheating, not stretching properly, fatigued muscles and exercising that is too strenuous.

If you're having cramping regularly in muscles after moderate, 30-minute workouts, Arnold said that would warrant an examination to see if any vascular problems exist.

Most often, though, Arnold suggests controlling muscle cramps by:

- 1. Warming up before exercising:** Ride a stationary bike, for example, for five minutes before a run, or just start with brisk walking. Stretching can be a form of warming up, too. Properly stretch your calves, hamstrings and quadriceps till muscles are warm and supple. Once you get a cramp, stretching right away will tell muscles to stop contracting.
- 2. Building up workout time gradually:** Train muscles so they can slowly tolerate longer bouts of exercise; don't start with an hour long workout. If you do, you're asking for trouble.
- 3. Hydrating properly:** If you're competing or exercising strenuously, make sure that the day before, you get plenty of fluids. When you get a cramp, stop what you are doing immediately and rehydrate, so fluid will help the blood cells deliver oxygen to the muscles.
- 4. Using cold and heat properly:** Treat tense or tight muscles with heat and sore muscles with cold. If you're cramping, ice the muscle to lower its temperature.

-- Barb Berggoetz