



MedReview

A monthly medication management column

Matters

for older adults

Leg Cramps

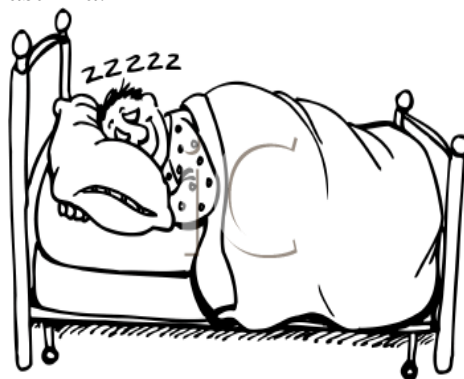
Leg cramps that awaken people when they sleep are very common. They are known as a charley horse. They are not part of restless leg syndrome (RLS) or other leg problems. The cramps or spasms happen on the calf muscles, thighs or the bottom of the feet. They can last from few seconds to several hours.

Sometimes a low potassium or sodium blood level is the cause. Other times standing on hard surfaces for long periods or sitting with legs in an awkward position can cause a charley horse. Medical causes include diabetes, diseases that affect nerves and muscles, Parkinson's, and patients with kidney disease getting dialysis.



There are many things to do to stop the cramps when they start. Grab the toes and pull them toward your body, straighten the leg, massage the area, get out of bed and walk. Avoid stretching your legs before getting out of bed. There is no one best way to stop the cramps.

The only drug that is known to treat nighttime leg cramps is quinine. FDA has supposedly stopped the sale of quinine without a prescription. The government claims that the cramps are not serious but quinine can cause critical side effects including irregular heartbeats, chest pain, and asthma.



There are some remedies to try and prevent the cramps. They MIGHT help. Some of them are silly like putting a bar of soap at the bottom of your bed. Quinine water is still sold in the soda section of the supermarket. It has very little quinine, but drinking it may help to avoid the shortage of water in your diet. Providing extra liquid to keep you hydrated could also prevent the cramps. Other unproven ways include drinking low-sodium V-8 juice, taking extra B-complex vitamins, and the mineral magnesium.

Be careful of any products offered on the Internet, because they may be unsafe. Also it is important to remind you that if you take quinine with other drugs, vitamins, natural remedies and certain foods they may cause serious reactions. Some of these drugs include antacids, antidepressants, antifungals, antibiotics, anti-HIV drugs, anti-seizure medications, anti-cholesterols, and dextromethorphan (DM) for coughs.

Rather than trying to find quinine, one or more of the home remedies might take care of the charley horse.

Quinine should never be confused with Quinidine. Quinidine is used in certain heart conditions.

References

FDA Bans Quinine For Leg Cramps

<http://www.peoplespharmacy.com/2007/01/22/fda-bans-quinin-1/>

Night leg cramps

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/night-leg-cramps/MY00410>

Leg Cramps: Home Remedies and Treatments

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVzbIC_zG-s

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MedReview Matters is produced monthly by Philadelphia Corporation for Aging's PrimeTime Health Promotion Unit and is written by Registered Pharmacists Elaine Mackowiak, Ph.D., R.Ph. and Stephen Paul, Ph.D., R.Ph. | 642 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130-3409 | 215-765-9000 | Visit PCA online at: www.pcaCares.org. © 2012 All rights reserved. Philadelphia Corporation for Aging PrimeTime Health: Promoting the health of older Pennsylvanians.