

Do You Cramp? Can Nutrition help? Maybe!

SPORTS NUTRITION SERIES



Summary: No one knows what causes a cramp. Most widely accepted cause is from fatigued / over worked muscle(s). Other common causes are nutrition based, such as lack of water, potassium, salt, magnesium, and calcium. If you eat a well balanced diet, like the Mediterranean, drink water so your urine is pale yellow, follow a well balanced conditioning program, and do not work your muscles too hard you may be able to avoid cramps.

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Most active people get cramps. They are not immune to them. I get them sometimes. It typically happens after I really fatigued a muscle. No one totally understands what causes muscle cramps. According to some authorities if you suffered on you are at risk for having more. Because cramps commonly occur when muscles are fatigued, the problem may be related to a nerve malfunction that creates an imbalance between muscle excitation and inhibition, which prevents the muscle from relaxing (Clark 2018, Schwelonus et al. 2004). Muscle cramps are most likely related to overexertion, other predisposing factors may include fluid loss, lack of fitness, and electrolyte imbalance. The solution can be a mix of massage, motion, stretching, and of course nutrition. Motion typically works for me if I am having a cramp and maybe a little light stretching.

N. Clark says that these nutrition tips may not solve your problem but should be tried if you have cramping.

- Lack of water. Cramps commonly coincide with dehydration. To prevent dehydration-induced cramps, drink enough fluids before, during, and after you exercise. Like I always say drink enough fluids daily that your urine is clear, pale yellow, and copious. General rule 8 ounces every 15 to 20 minutes if you are sweating.
- Lack of sodium. Athletes who exercise hard for more than four hours in the heat may be putting themselves at risk of developing a sodium imbalance that could contribute to cramps if they consume only water during the event and no foods or beverages that contain sodium. N. Clark suggest endurance sports drinks and salted pretzels might be wise snack choices during extended sweaty exercise.
- Lack of calcium. Calcium is not just good for your bones. It plays an essential role in muscle contractions. So it stand to reason it could be involved in cramping. I am always trying to get people to get calcium in their diets ([how to get calcium in your diet](#)). N. Clark suggest that some active people report that their problem with cramping disappears when they boost their calcium intake. People who experience cramps should consume dairy products or other calcium sources (calcium-fortified orange juice or almond/soy milk) at least twice each day.
- Lack of magnesium. What many people do not know is that just as muscles need calcium to contract, they also need magnesium to relax. Magnesium can help reduce leg cramps that occur in the middle of the night. Whether magnesium also helps with exercise-related cramps is unclear. Richest sources of magnesium are green leafy vegetables, whole grains, nuts, beans, and legumes. In other words a healthy diet, like the Mediterranean.
- Lack of potassium. Electrolyte imbalances is often mentioned with cramping. An electrolyte imbalance, such as a lack of potassium, may play a role in muscle cramps. Many fruits like bananas and oranges as well as vegetables like potatoes are great sources of potassium.
- N. Clark suggests that shocking the system with a pungent taste, such as Hotshot or pickle juice, can disrupt the cramp. I never heard that before.
- These were only suggestions that will do no harm but are just good for overall health. Summary: Adding extra fluids, low-fat dairy products, potassium-rich fruits and vegetables, and if sweating a lot some salty foods, If you are cramping consult with us regarding proper training techniques and your diet. Also N.Clark suggest if you are taking statins to lower cholesterol, talk with your doctor. The medication may be contributing to the problem