

Keep from Cramping

Diet-based ideas for conquering muscle cramps

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The run starts no different than the others. The groove of one leg in front of the other feels so good. Without warning you're stopped dead in your tracks. Reacting with a grit of the teeth and reach for your calf, no relief can be found from the mind blowing intensity of such a pain. The tension that overwhelmed the whole body slowly starts to fade. A final deep breath and it's over.

Although the violent strike of the muscle cramp has subsided, a bruised sore feeling has now taken its place. You try to resume with a light jog. Oh, but what a tenderness remains. This one wasn't as bad as the one a few weeks ago; you'll be able to finish this run. Why does this keep happening?

There are many contributing factors to muscle cramping. This makes it difficult to say there is one clear cut answer for a runner seeking relief from the debilitating pain. A change in training, massage, or light stretching may prove to be quite beneficial. In ruling out all potential causes, a look at dietary considerations can support modifications in the training routine and help you get back to full stride.

Hydration

Hydration, or a lack of, is one of the most common causes of muscle cramping. This may become more pronounced in those who train in the heat or consume little fluid during longer sessions. However, this can also apply for those who find it a challenge to drink enough fluids throughout the day. It's easy to get side tracked, neglecting fluid with or between meals. Drink adequate fluids such that light colored urine is produced. This is an indicator you're on the right track with your daily fluid requirements. As for those longer training sessions, be aware of major weight changes and sweat rate to better evaluate your fluid needs.

Eat Those Bananas

Potassium is present in many foods including the well-known source of a banana. The concern here is the contribution of electrolyte imbalances that trigger muscle cramping. Potassium is an electrolyte that when the body craves more it may respond with an uncomfortable muscle spasm. Include more potassium rich foods such as bananas, oranges, potatoes, spinach, tomatoes, and avocado into the diet. You will not only be getting the wonderful nutrients available in such foods, but you can keep your fingers crossed this will reduce your chances of muscle cramping.

Got Milk

There is no real proven evidence that a lack of calcium is the cause of muscle cramping. It is a fact that calcium plays a big part in muscle contraction. However, the body has quite a pool of calcium it can dip into and readily available from the bones. No matter the rationale, there are continued reports of unwanted muscle contraction relief with

heightened calcium efforts in the diet. Who would want the body to have to pull from its bone stores in meeting muscle requirements anyway? That would only lead to inadequate calcium in the bone. It's a good idea to drink your milk and eat your cheese in protecting the body for two reasons: to avoid muscle cramping and to maximize bone health.

Sodium

This can be conflicting to some. So much of the world preaches to a low sodium tune and for good reason. However, there is a difference for those who lead a lifestyle with high sweat losses. The combination of sodium loss in sweat and consuming a lower sodium diet can throw the body into an electrolyte imbalance leading to those unwanted cramps. Combine such a lifestyle with a long run and only water to drink and sodium levels can dip too low. Generally most diets consist of plenty of sodium, but if you struggle with cramping issues a little extra salt won't hurt the situation. Also try packing a sports beverage for your next long training session.

Unfortunately there isn't a specific remedy to managing the cramping blues. Adjustments in the training routine can certainly make a difference. Add a diet with plenty of fluid, your favorite high potassium and calcium rich foods, as well as have a dash of salt every now and then and you just might prevent a cramp in your stride.

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