

Wellesley Women's Care, P.C.

Obstetrics / Gynecology / Infertility

2000 Washington Street, Suite 764

Newton, MA 02462

617-965-7800

Leg Cramps During Pregnancy

What causes leg cramps during pregnancy and can they be prevented?

Leg cramps are painful involuntary muscle contractions that typically affect the calf, foot or both. Leg cramps during pregnancy are common, often striking at night during the second and third trimester. The exact cause of leg cramps during pregnancy isn't clear. However, some research suggests a connection between leg cramps and the buildup of lactic and pyruvic acids (byproducts of the metabolism of sugar and starch) which occur as a result of impaired blood flow in the legs.

What you can do to help prevent leg cramps during pregnancy:

- **Stretch your calf muscles.** Stretching before bed may help prevent leg cramps during pregnancy. Stand at arm's length from a wall, place your hands on the wall in front of you and move your right foot behind your left foot. Slowly bend your left leg forward, keeping your right knee straight and your right heel on the floor. Hold the stretch for about 30 seconds, being careful to keep your back straight and your hips forward. Don't rotate your feet inward or outward and avoid pointing your toes. Switch legs and repeat.
- **Stay active.** Regular physical activity may help prevent leg cramps during pregnancy. Before you begin an exercise program, make sure you have your health care provider's OK.
- **Take a magnesium supplement.** Limited research suggests that taking a magnesium supplement before bed may help prevent leg cramps during pregnancy. Make sure you have your health care provider's OK to take a supplement, however. You might also consider eating more magnesium-rich foods, such as whole grains, beans, dried fruits, nuts and seeds.
- **Stay hydrated.** Keeping your muscles hydrated can help prevent cramps. If your urine is dark yellow, it may mean that you're not getting enough water.
- **Choose proper footwear.** Choose shoes with comfort, support and utility in mind. It might help to wear shoes with a long counter, the firm part of the shoe that surrounds the heel.

If leg cramps strike, stretch the calf muscle on the affected side. Walking or jiggling and then elevating your legs may help keep the leg cramp from returning. A hot shower, warm bath or ice massage also may help.