



## What's the Story about Cramps?

*Just about everyone who has played football has experienced a cramp at some time. Cramps can range from mildly uncomfortable to severely debilitating and are a great source of frustration to everyone from recreational footballers to professionals.*

- Cramps occurring during exercise are referred to as **Exercise Associated Muscle Cramps** to distinguish them from those that may occur at rest or as a symptom of an underlying medical condition.
- Exercise related cramps are best described as a sudden, tight and intense pain that most commonly occur in the muscle groups directly involved in running e.g. calf or hamstring. They can range from a slight twinge to an excruciating pain, and may last for a few seconds or several minutes. An exercise related cramp can be a one-off or occur several times before the muscle relaxes and the pain goes away.
- Cramp is more likely to occur in tired muscles and ones that are already in a shortened position. Poor fitness, poor flexibility or exercising at high workloads can increase the likelihood that they will occur. Poor stretching habits may also contribute.
- Dehydration has for a long time been associated as a possible cause of exercise related cramp. Cramp has been attributed to the depletion of sodium, potassium and minerals such as calcium and magnesium.



### How can I avoid cramp?

- Allow adequate recovery and rest for muscles after hard training sessions.
- Increase your strength and fitness. Stronger, fitter muscles are more resilient to fatigue and therefore cramp.
- Maintain good muscle flexibility.
- Be wary when changing speed or intensity especially during the later stages of training and playing. Fatigued muscles are more likely to cramp.
- Wear comfortable, unrestrictive clothing and comfortable footwear.
- Practice good hydration principles before, during and after exercise to optimise muscle function.

### How should cramp be treated?

- Rest and stretching helps to decrease the muscle contraction and allow the muscle to relax.
- Massaging the area can help recovery and decrease muscle soreness.
- Applying ice can help reduce muscle spasm.
- If pain is severe or re-occurring, get assessed from our physiotherapists or your GP.

**Please note: this information should serve as a guide only. When in doubt always seek advice from Southside Physiotherapy & Sports Injury Centre or your GP.**