

A blue-tinted photograph of a person's legs, likely a woman, sitting on a couch. The person is wearing dark blue jeans and is holding their right leg with their hands, suggesting discomfort or pain. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue.

Leg Pain

Symptoms, Causes & Remedies

OVERVIEW:

Occasional short-term leg pain can happen for a variety of reasons and, with rest, typically improves quickly. Often, leg pain stems from overuse or inactivity. That's very different from the health impact of chronic or long standing leg pain that worsens with time and prevents normal activity. People falsely believe it's because they are merely "getting old" and don't know that it's often a highly treatable condition. The goal of this e-book is to help you learn more about the type of leg pain you are experiencing, understand what remedies and treatment options are available, and give you the confidence to know when to pursue solutions.

Effects Of Severe Leg Pain

Severe leg pain can be debilitating. The pain or discomfort occurs anywhere in the leg and can range from a dull ache to an intense stabbing sensation. It reduces even basic activity, weakens the body and when present for a long time, often results in weight gain. It can interrupt normal activities: walking, taking the stairs, and - since it often peaks at night - sleeping. When leg pain sufferers start avoiding activities that normally bring them joy or reduce their calorie burning, for example, a walk in the park or playing with children or grandchildren, it's time to seek solutions. Sufferers begin modifying their lives, avoiding activities that cause pain, but they wish for life to be normal again. Their limitations can lead to weight gain and make them feel old and disabled. Not surprisingly, they often have feelings of depression and low self-esteem as their health slips away and they feel old age coming on.

Most Common Causes:

Leg pain can result from a variety of sources: stiffness, inflammation, arthritis, blood clots, varicose veins or poor circulation. While there is often overlap between symptoms, some of the most common causes are as follows:

1. Exercise and overuse/injury from overuse:

Symptoms include pain and tenderness when walking, even a few steps. Localized to muscles and tendons close to the joint. Pain improves over time with ice, rest and over-the-counter pain relievers.

2. Rheumatoid arthritis

Arthritis sufferers can have pain in the hip, knee or ankle joints that is worse in the morning. Improves quickly with movement and activity; anti-inflammatory medications often help.

3. Iliotibial band syndrome (thigh scar tissue):

Characterized by pain in the hip, thigh and knee, it can be worse at the end of the day. Pain occurs in the iliotibial band on the side of the hip, thigh and knee and is very tender when pressed. Typically, the front of the thigh is pain free.

4. Bursitis

Bursitis hurts in the hip with walking. There is always a point tenderness right over the hip. Constant inflammation causes constant tenderness, and it slowly worsens with use during the day.

5. Leg cramps:

Cramps are extremely painful and occur most often in the feet, calves or thighs. Often a sign of underlying vein disease, the affected muscle is always tender and sore 24-48 hours after the episode. When cramps occur mostly at night, it is often due to poor vein circulation and improves with treatment.

6. Joint trauma or degenerative arthritis:

Pain occurs in the hip, knee or ankle when standing or walking. Sitting down typically relieves this type of leg pain immediately. Often associated with clicks and pops in the joint.



7. Back pain with sciatica:

Sciatica is a pain in the back or hip which tracks down the back and side of the leg, often on to the side of the foot. It is worsened by certain positions: sitting, lying, bending or sleeping; the position depends on the individual. It does not always go away quickly with rest because of muscle spasms impinging on nerves and may last hours to days.

8. Poor artery circulation:

Poor artery circulation affects the calves, thighs or buttocks muscles and always comes on when walking and at the same distance/speed each time. It is always worse going uphill or up stairs and goes away within 15 minutes of rest.

9. Poor vein circulation:

This condition affects the feet and calves and is always worse at the end of day, evening or night. It is worse after sitting or standing for long periods and is usually improved with leg elevation and compression stockings. It is always better after overnight rest.

10. Statin anti-cholesterol medications:

These medications are known to cause pain in the thighs but can involve the calves and arms.

It is a constant symptom. It usually starts shortly after beginning these medications.

11. Fibromyalgia and sleep apnea:

Both cause severe sleep disturbance. Poor sleep causes muscle aching and pain in the arms and legs. It is constant throughout the day, and debilitating generalized fatigue is always present.

12. Blood clots:

Blood clots in the legs cause both swelling and leg pain. The pain is worsened with minimal walking. The swelling does not resolve with leg elevation and always involves the calf. This is often due to recent immobility, trauma or travel.

13. Lymphedema:

The pain of lymphedema is usually constant during the day with little improvement overnight. There is also swelling in the calves, toes and feet and occasionally the thighs as well. The swelling does not go away with overnight rest - it's always there. This condition can be due to genetic causes in teens or young adults or can develop later in life, often due to obesity and excess pelvic pressure which impedes the circulation leading out of the legs.



REMEDIES

For some, the discomfort often disappears within a short time and for others can be eased with home remedies. If not, a visit to your healthcare provider or specialist can give answers.

1. Rest.

If leg pain is due to overuse, it will take at least 3 days of rest before it begins to improve due to inflammation in the tissues. Inflammation peaks 48-72 hours after injury and then slowly resolves over the next 2 weeks. Rest can help relax the back muscle spasms of sciatica, and the most comfortable position usually in a bed or recliner is important.

2. Elevate your legs which reduces swelling.

This is especially helpful if you have overuse injury, leg swelling or vein problems. Lying so that you can elevate your leg above the level of the heart works best. Note that using a recliner, which does offer some help, is only partial elevation compared with lying on a bed or sofa.

3. Apply ice or heat

Which to use depends on whether the inflammation is still peaking or resolving. If peaking in first 48-72 hours, ice works best, if resolving, heat works best. Try ice first and if this does not feel better, try heat. One of them should bring some relief, but you will have to try it yourself. Apply for up to 15 minutes with a 5 min break, and use as much as you can comfortably tolerate.

4. Gently stretch, ice and massage cramping muscles.

The muscle will be tender and inflamed and any passive stretch which brings the muscle under tension will help. An active stretch (stretch while contracting the muscle) is not recommended since it may trig-

ger a cramp. Use of topical anti inflammatory and analgesic cream can help as well. Stretching is the primary therapy for iliotibial band syndrome.

5. Take over-the-counter medicines

Medications like ben gay, acetaminophen, aleve or ibuprofen are good to take, unless you have a medical reason not to. Tylenol can be combined with aleve or ibuprofen and topical creams for greater effect. These can help with mild injuries, arthritis and bursitis.

6. Compression socks or stockings with support.

Stockings will reduce inflammation and counteract the effects of vein disease. If they do help relieve pain, it indicates the presence of vein disease and predicts further improvement with vein treatments. Knee-high stockings are good enough for most situations but thigh-high may help for those with thigh symptoms. No more than 20-30 mmHg compression is recommended since higher strength hurts and can cause nerve injury. Wear from arising in the morning and remove just before sleep for best results. If not noticing any improvement in leg symptoms after two days, it will not likely help to wear any more.

7. Use alternative therapies

Options such as turmeric or arnica cream will provide some antiinflammatory effects. Horse chestnut extract can also help with leg pain that is due to vein disease.



CONCLUSION:

No one wants to suffer from leg pain. Most people with long standing leg pain reduce their activity and want desperately to return to a healthier, more youthful lifestyle. Many common causes of leg pain can be treated at home, but severe or persistent pain that doesn't respond to home remedies can indicate a more serious condition. Know that it's not something you have to put up with, and though it may have worsened as you age, it isn't something you have to accept. Make an appointment with your healthcare provider or specialist and get the answers and treatment options you seek.

