

Calf Strain Advice

What is Calf Strain?

Calf strain involves one or both of the muscles of your calf.

The Gastrocnemius and the Soleus muscle are the major muscles that make up your calf. Normally it's the gastrocnemius muscle that's injured. The strain usually occurs in sports often in actions where there are sudden halts or quick movements (tennis, badminton or squash). This sudden stretch can cause a tear and damage to the muscle.



What are the Symptoms?

Pain in the back of the calf

Pain on walking or standing on tip toe **or you are unable to stand on tiptoe**

Swelling or bruising in the calf muscle

The following advice should help you to recover:

Things you should do	Things you shouldn't do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rest for the first 24- 48 hours after your injury but avoid long spells of not moving at all When sitting down keep your leg raised (elevated) with your foot higher than your bottom to help prevent/reduce the swelling Use ice packs (frozen peas wrapped in a towel will do), for 10-15 minutes every 2 hours if you can Take the recommended medication to relieve the pain – this can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Follow the instructions on the packet/bottle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use ice packs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> over areas of skin that are in poor condition If you have poor sensation to cold If you know you have poor circulation. Place ice packs directly onto your skin as they can burn. Do not leave ice on while asleep Wear any support bandage in bed Stand still for long periods

For the first 72 hours after a sprain or strain, you should avoid HARMED:

Heat (such as hot baths, saunas, or heat packs)

Alcohol

Running (or any other exercise that could cause more damage)

Massage

Driving

We advise you to try and put weight on the leg and walk as pain allows. If you have been given crutches, use them to help you get around. Do whatever you normally would and stay at, or return to, work - you don't need to be pain and symptom-free to work - this is important and is the best way to get better. Short walks are good for the healing muscle - but avoid long distances and prolonged periods of standing. When going upstairs, lead with your good leg and when going downstairs, lead with your injured leg - this will help to reduce the strain on your calf - if there's a handrail, use it.

Using an insole under your heel in your shoe will avoid stretching your calf muscles and will provide comfort while walking. You can get these from a pharmacy.

Avoid sports or heavy lifting until you have less discomfort and good movement. It may take 6-8 weeks for your calf to return to normal. Remember it is important to warm up properly before you exercise

What exercises can I do?

Begin these flexibility exercises as soon as you can - provided they don't cause excessive pain - as they are designed to mobilise the joints, strengthen your muscles and retain your balance and so improve the range of movement and function of your leg. The repetitions and sets are a guideline.

How to tell if you're exercising at the right level

When doing exercise you should listen to your pain levels, especially in the early stages. You may find that these exercises increase your symptoms slightly in the beginning. However, they should get easier over time. It can be helpful to rate your pain out of 10 (0 being no pain and 10 being the worst pain you have ever had), for example:

Green 1 to 3 - mild pain

Amber 4 to 6 - moderate pain

Red 7 to 10 - severe pain

Aim to keep your pain within a rating of 0 to 5. If your pain gets above this level, you can change the exercises by:

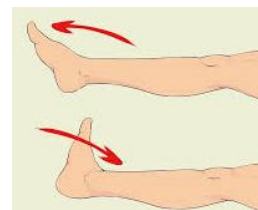
- reducing the number of times, you do a movement
- reducing the speed of a movement
- increasing rest time between movements

Within the first 24-48hours, move your ankle and knee gently for 10 to 20 seconds every hour when you are awake, but don't over stretch your calf muscle.

After 48hours try to use your leg more - exercise really helps your calf and can relieve pain, so do whatever you normally would and stay at, or return to work - this is important and is the best way to get better.

It's beneficial to do specific exercises (see page 3) that can help in your recovery. They may be challenging at the beginning so just do what you can and try to build it up over time.

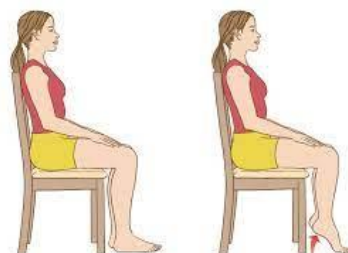
Exercise 1 Sit on the floor or a chair with your leg out in front of you. Point your toes away from you, seconds; then pull your toes towards you, hold for 5 and relax. Repeat this 10 times and 4 times a day.



straight
hold for 5
seconds

Exercise 2 Sit with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Raise the toes and foot of your affected leg up towards you, keeping the heel on the floor. Hold for 5 seconds and relax. Repeat 10 times and 4 times a day

Exercise 3:
Sit with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Gradually lift up your heel as far as is comfortable. Hold for 5 seconds and then lower your heel to the floor. Repeat 10 times and 4 times a day.



floor.



Exercise 4:
Stand in with your injured leg straight behind you and the other leg bent in front of you. with your toes pointing forward and the heel on the floor. Lean forwards and hold a comfortable stretch in the calf of your injured leg for 30 seconds, relax and repeat x3

Exercise 5: Once you are able to stand on your toes without you can start to strengthen the muscle. Stand holding on to a chair, spread your weight equally over feet and push up onto your toes as high as possible. Hold for 5 seconds and slowly lower. Repeat 10 times, and 4times per day. Gradually increase the time you hold for and the number of repetitions.



pain
both

This leaflet only gives general advice and you may have been referred to the Physiotherapy department for treatment to help with your mobility. If you have been referred then avoid active sports until you are seen in the Physiotherapy department.

Pain relief:	
Painkillers, such as Paracetamol , are useful to ease pain, but it is best to	Anti-inflammatory painkillers (like Ibuprofen) can be used.

take them regularly for a few days or so rather than every now and then. They can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Make sure you don't take any other product containing Paracetamol. If Paracetamol doesn't help at all despite taking the recommended dose, then try changing to Ibuprofen 400 mg three times a day. You can also take both drugs – speak to a pharmacist about the best way to do this. If you have been advised not to take Ibuprofen in the past or are on any blood thinning tablets then avoid Ibuprofen.

With all medication it is essential that you follow the instructions on the packet or bottle carefully

These relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling, however if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant you shouldn't use them. Side effects sometimes occur with anti-inflammatory painkillers - stomach pain and bleeding from the stomach, are the most serious. Some people with asthma, high blood pressure, kidney failure or heart failure may not be able to take them either. You can buy Ibuprofen at pharmacies both in tablet and gel form. There is less risk of side-effects with the gel, however, the amount of the drug that gets into the bloodstream is much less than with tablets and it is important that you use enough gel.

**If you have worse
ning**

symptoms, or if you have not improved within 10 days, we advise you to contact your GP, self-refer to your local physiotherapy department or return to the Emergency Department/MIU department where you were seen.

Physio self-referral link: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/physioref/>

If you are unable to do this electronically you should call 01495 768715 between 8.30am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

References:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints/self-management-advice/calf-problems>

Sprains and strains - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

If you are at all concerned about your injury, please contact the relevant Emergency Department - Grange University Hospital: 01633 493287 or Minor Injury Unit (MIU):

Royal Gwent Hospital (RGH) MIU: 01633 234056

Nevill Hall Hospital (NHH) MIU: 01873 732073

Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) MIU 01443 802353

Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318

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