

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 where there are sudden halts or quick movements. This sudden stretch can cause damage to the muscle.

What are the Symptoms?

Pain and tightness in the back of the calf
Pain on walking or standing on tip toe
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"> • Take it easy 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 **HARMD**:

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 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 good movement and less discomfort. 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.

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 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.

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



2. Sit on a chair with both feet on the ground, arms resting on your lap. Raise your heels off the ground, hold a second or two before you lower back down. Repeat this 10 times and 3 - 4 times a day.



- 3.** Sit on a chair and straighten and bend your knee Repeat 10 times and 3 times a day



- 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.

- 5.** Lean forwards and hold a comfortable stretch in the calf of your injured leg for 30 seconds, relax and repeat x3



- 6.** Stand on injured foot, with both hands on the wall. Bend your knee slightly and push your hip forward and down while keeping your heel on the floor. When you feel a stretch in the back of your lower leg, hold the position for 30, relax and repeat x 3



- 7.** Once you are able to stand on your toes without pain you can start to strengthen the muscle. Stand holding on to a chair, spread your weight equally over both feet and push up onto your toes as high as possible. Hold for 5 seconds & slowly lower. Repeat 10 x 2-3 per day



8. Balance is important to work on after an injury. Stand on injured foot. Find balance and slowly lift your other knee to hip height and back down x 10 2-3 times a day



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	
<p>Painkillers, such as Paracetamol, are useful to ease pain, but it is best to 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.</p> <p>With all medication it is essential that you follow the instructions on the packet or bottle carefully</p>	<p>Anti-inflammatory painkillers can also be used. 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.</p>

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

Physio self-referral link:

[Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Physiotherapy Service \(wales.nhs.uk\)](https://www.wales.nhs.uk)



If you are unable to do this electronically you should call 0300 3732539 between 8.30am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

References:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sprains-and-strains/>

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

**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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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg**