

Leg Pain (Thigh and Calf)

Patient Information Leaflet

MSK Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service



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What causes leg pain?

Most people will get pain in their leg at some point in life. This can be in the thigh (top of the leg), or the calf (back of the lower leg). It can hurt a lot but is **rarely caused by anything serious.**

Common causes include:

- muscle pain or strains
- doing the same activity too much
- Pain that starts in the back or hip and is felt in the leg
- doing much more than usual or being much less active
- poor sleep, stress, feeling low or very tired can also make pain worse

More rarely, problems with blood flow in the leg can cause calf pain.

Leg pain can start for no clear reason. Most leg pain **gets better within a few weeks.** Scans are **not** usually needed and usually do not change treatment

What are the symptoms?

You may notice:

- pain or stiffness in the thigh, calf or whole leg
- cramping or tight muscles
- stiffness or less movement than normal
- pain when walking, standing or exercising
- pain that starts in the back and spreads into the leg
- a change in feeling in the leg, such as a feeling of tingling, numbness or pins and needles

Pain can change from day to day. This does **not** mean you are causing damage

Self-Help

Most new leg pain will improve within **6-8 weeks**. Following some of these useful tips should help.

- change your activity levels – do **not** rest completely but try doing a bit less for a short time
- keep moving – short walks and changing position often can help
- simple pain relief – ask a pharmacist or GP for advice before taking

- stay at work or return as soon as you can – your employer or GP can help with adjustments
- look after your sleep and stress levels – both can affect pain
- try gentle exercises – moving regularly and doing simple exercises can help
- use heat – a heat pack or hot water bottle can help reduce pain (don't put it straight on your skin)

Should I refer myself to physiotherapy?

Physiotherapy may help if.

- your pain is not improving after a few weeks
- you are struggling to return to work or normal activities
- you keep getting leg pain again and again
- you have ongoing pain coming from your back into your leg
- you would like further advice on exercises and recovery

When should I seek urgent medical advice?

Leg pain is rarely serious, but you should go to **A&E straight away** if you have:

- sudden swelling, redness, heat and pain in the **calf**
- severe pain after an injury
- you can't put any weight on your leg
- noticed any new symptom (in the last 4 weeks) of:
 - altered feeling when using toilet paper to wipe yourself
 - change in ability to achieve an erection or ejaculate
 - inability to stop a bowel movement or leaking
 - increasing difficulty when you try to stop or control your flow of urine
 - increasing difficulty when you try to urinate
 - leaking urine or recent need to use pads
 - loss of feeling or pins and needles between your inner thighs or genitals
 - loss of sensation when you pass a bowel motion
 - loss of sensation when you pass urine
 - not knowing when your bladder is either full or empty

- numbness in or around your back passage or buttocks

You should contact your GP or call 111 urgently if you develop:

- Weakness in your leg that is getting worse.
- New leg pain with a history of cancer, HIV, TB or inflammatory arthritis.
- Leg pain with feeling unwell, a loss of appetite, fever, unexplained weight loss or night sweats.

Remember

Most leg, thigh and calf pain improves with time, gentle movement and gradual return to normal activities.

If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.



MSK Physiotherapy Service

Find out more about the MSK Physiotherapy Service and what we offer

www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-msk-therapy-physiotherapy/



Further Resources

Access our other MSK Physiotherapy resources www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/

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