



Leg Pain & Ankle Pain

Pain in the legs or ankles can range from mild to severe. The type and amount of pain depends on the cause.

Leg Pain & Ankle Pain Chart

Signs & Symptoms	What It Could Be	What to Do
Pain, redness (may have shades of red, purple, and blue), or swelling in one ankle or leg. May be followed by severe shortness of breath that came on all of a sudden. May include coughing up blood or pink-frothy sputum. Chest pain.	Deep-vein thrombosis (DVT) with or without a blood clot to the lung.	Get medical care fast!
Swelling of both ankles at the same time. Shortness of breath. May have a dry cough or a cough with pink, frothy mucus.	Heart failure.	Get medical care fast!
Sudden and severe pain in a leg that is not relieved with rest.	Peripheral vascular disease.	Get medical care fast!
Muscle pain in one or both legs. Fatigue in the thighs, calves, and feet. This improves with rest. Open sores on the lower leg, ankles, or toes. Weak or no pulse in the affected limb. Cold or numb feet. Pale, bluish-colored toes.	Peripheral vascular disease.	See doctor.
Any of the signs that follow occur after a leg or ankle injury. A bone sticks out or bones in the injured limb make a grating sound. The injured limb looks deformed, crooked, or the wrong shape. You lose feeling in the injured limb. The skin under the affected injured area is cold and blue. The limb is very painful and/or swollen or you can't bear weight on the limb or move it.	Broken bone or dislocation.	See Broken Bones/Dislocations at www.HealthyLearn.com .

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Leg Pain & Ankle Pain, Continued

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Signs & Symptoms	What It Could Be	What to Do
Pain in the leg or ankle after an injury that does not keep you from moving the limb.	Sprain, strain, or sport injury. Other overuse injury.	See Sprains, Strains & Sports Injuries at www.HealthyLearn.com .
Pain with fever, redness, tenderness, warmth and pus at a wound site. A red streak up the leg (rarely).	Infection. Could also be Cellulitis .	See doctor. Get an appointment right away for a red streak up the leg.
Sudden, severe pain in a toe, knee, or ankle joint. The pain can be felt even when clothing is rubbed against the joint. The joint area is swollen, red, or purplish in color. It also feels warm, and is very tender to the touch.	Gout.	See doctor.
Leg pain that radiates from the lower back. Pain or stiffness in the knees. Bowing of the legs or other bone deformity. Unexplained bone fractures. May have headache, dizziness, hearing loss, and/or ringing in the ears.	Paget's disease. This is a bone disorder that progresses slowly. Most persons with this disease do not develop symptoms.	See doctor.
Sharp pain from the buttocks down the leg. Numbness and tingling in the leg.	Sciatica.	See Sciatica at www.HealthyLearn.com .
Pain, stiffness, and swelling, usually in both knees or ankle joints. The joint looks deformed. Weakness and fatigue. Dry mouth and dry, painful eyes.	Rheumatoid arthritis.	See Arthritis at www.HealthyLearn.com .
Pain, stiffness, and sometimes swelling of the knee or ankle joints. Often, the joint has gotten tender over months or years and may look enlarged or deformed.	Osteoarthritis.	See Arthritis at www.HealthyLearn.com .

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Leg Pain & Ankle Pain, Continued

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Signs & Symptoms	What It Could Be	What to Do
Leg or ankle pain with gradual loss of height; stooped posture; backache; and/or past bone fractures, especially in the wrists and hips.	Osteoporosis.	See Osteoporosis at www.HealthyLearn.com .
Pain or itching in the legs with swollen and twisted veins that look blue and are close to the surface of the skin. The veins bulge and feel heavy. Swelling in the legs and ankles.	Varicose veins.	See Varicose Veins at www.HealthyLearn.com .
Muscle or joint pain and chronic swelling of the knee joints. These problems develop months or years after a deer-tick bite and a bulls-eye red rash with pale centers.	Lyme disease.	See doctor.
Pain and swelling around a knee or hip joint. The pain gets worse with movement. Fever (maybe).	Bursitis.	See doctor. See also, Self-Care / Prevention – For Bursitis, Tendinitis, or an Injury That Does Not Appear Serious at www.HealthyLearn.com .
Painless or painful swelling behind the knee. May feel like a water-filled balloon.	Baker's cyst.	Call doctor.
Aches in leg muscles and joints with fever and/or chills. Headache. Dry cough. Sore throat. Fatigue.	Flu.	Follow guidelines for Colds & Flu at www.HealthyLearn.com .
Sudden, sharp, tightening pain in the leg, often the calf. The muscle feels hard to the touch. The pain subsides after a minute or so and the muscle relaxes.	Leg cramp.	See Self-Care / Prevention–For Leg Cramps on next page.



Leg Pain & Ankle Pain, Continued

Self-Care / Prevention

For Pain, in General

- Take an over-the-counter medicine for pain as directed on the label. If the pain is not better after a few doses, call your doctor.
- Use a heating pad (set on low), a hot pack, or a moist, warm towel on the area of pain. If the pain is due to an injury, don't use heat for 48 hours. Use R.I.C.E. (See below.)

R.I.C.E.

- Rest the injured area for 24 to 48 hours.
- Ice the area as soon as possible. Keep doing this for 10 minutes every 2 hours for the first 48 hours. Use an ice pack, ice in a heavy plastic bag with a little water, a bag of frozen vegetables, etc. Put a thin towel between the ice pack and the skin.
- Compress the area. Wrap with an elastic bandage. Do not cut off circulation. Remove the bandage every 3 to 4 hours, for 15 to 20 minutes each time.
- Elevate the area above heart level, if possible. Place it on a pillow, folded blanket, stack of newspapers, etc.

For Paget's Disease

- If needed, take an over-the-counter medicine for pain as directed on the label.
- Take other medicines as prescribed by your doctor.
- Get regular checkups to detect hearing loss.

To Help Prevent Leg Pain & Ankle Pain

- Get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- Get regular exercise. This helps to keep ankle and leg muscles strong.
- Before you exercise, stretch and warm up your muscles. When you are done, cool them down.
- Protect your knees. Use knee pads when you garden or kneel. Always land on bent knees when jumping. Avoid deep knee bend exercises.
- Don't wear high-heeled shoes. Keep your shoes in proper shape.
- Take good care of your feet.



When you can, walk on grass instead of concrete.

For Leg Cramps

- Walk on the leg.
- Shake the leg and then elevate it.
- Sit with your leg flat on the floor. Flex your foot upward, then toward your knee. Reach for your toes and pull them toward your knee. This stretches the calf muscles.
- Have someone massage the cramped muscle gently, but firmly.
- Apply a heating pad (set on low), a hot pack, or moist, warm towel to the muscle cramp.
- Rub the muscle that is cramping. Rub upward from the ankle toward the heart. (**Note:** Do not rub a leg if you suspect phlebitis or thrombosis.)



Leg Pain & Ankle Pain, Continued

Good Sources of Calcium

- Nonfat milks.
- Cheeses.
- Yogurts.
- Calcium-fortified cereals and juices.
- Collard greens, broccoli, and spinach.
- Tofu, if calcium is used in processing.

Good Sources of Potassium

- Citrus fruits and juices.
- Bananas.
- Potatoes.
- Bran cereals.
- Fish.

Good Sources of Magnesium

- Whole grain breads and cereals.
- Dried beans.
- Black-eyed peas.
- Nuts, especially peanuts.
- Wild rice.
- Tofu.

To Prevent Leg Cramps

- Get good sources of calcium, potassium, and magnesium. See lists at left. Take calcium, potassium, and magnesium as advised by your doctor.
- Drink plenty of water and other fluids. Limit drinks with caffeine. Avoid drinks with alcohol. Doing these things can help prevent dehydration which could cause leg cramps.
- Warm up your muscles before you exercise. Cool down your muscles when you are done.
- With your doctor's okay, wear elastic stockings while you are awake.
- Before you go to bed, stretch your calf muscles. Here's one way to do this:
 - Stand an arm's length away from a wall. Lean against it with the palms of your hands.
 - Bend your left knee. Keep your right leg straight behind you. Keep both feet flat on the floor and your back straight.
 - Lean forward. Feel your right calf muscle stretch. Hold the stretch as you count to 10 slowly.
 - Repeat, switching leg positions.
- Another way to stretch your calf muscles is to ride a stationary bicycle for a few minutes.
- Take a warm bath before bedtime.
- Sleep with loose-fitting blankets and night clothes. Keep your legs warm.
- If you have severe leg cramps or get them often, tell your doctor. Ask if any medication you take could cause your leg cramps. Ask for ways to treat your leg cramps.

