

Muscle Cramps and Myasthenia Gravis (MG)

A COMMON COMPLAINT AMONG INDIVIDUALS LIVING WITH MYASTHENIA GRAVIS

A guide from the Myasthenia Gravis Association



myasthenia gravis association

MGA

established 1960

Prepared by the Myasthenia Gravis Association

Revised 2026

Muscle Cramps and MG

Muscle cramps are a common complaint among people living with myasthenia gravis (MG), although they are **not considered a direct symptom of the disease itself**. Instead, cramps may be related to muscle fatigue, overuse, dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, medication side effects, or other medical conditions.

If muscle cramps become frequent, severe, or interfere with your daily activities, talk with your healthcare provider. Identifying the underlying cause is the first step toward finding effective treatment.

Why Do Muscle Cramps Occur?

Muscle cramps are sudden, involuntary contractions of a muscle that can be painful and last from a few seconds to several minutes.

For people with MG, cramps may be associated with:

- Muscle fatigue or overuse
- Dehydration
- Electrolyte imbalances
- Physical activity without adequate rest
- Prolonged sitting or standing
- Medication side effects
- Heat exposure
- Other medical conditions unrelated to MG

Although muscle cramps can occur in anyone, people with MG may be more aware of muscle discomfort because their muscles fatigue more easily.

Could My Medications Be Contributing?

Some medications used to treat MG or other health conditions may contribute to muscle cramps in certain individuals.

Potential contributors include:

- Diuretics ("water pills")
- Statin medications
- Corticosteroids
- Some blood pressure medications
- Certain asthma medications

In addition, some people taking **pyridostigmine (Mestinon®)** may experience muscle twitching, muscle cramps, or abdominal cramping as a side effect, particularly if the dose is too high. Never adjust your medication without consulting your healthcare provider.

Lifestyle Strategies for Muscle Cramp Management

While muscle cramps may not always be preventable, healthy lifestyle habits can help reduce their frequency or severity for some people. Staying hydrated, maintaining a balanced diet, engaging in gentle physical activity, and managing fatigue all support healthy muscle function. Because muscle cramps can have many different causes, it's important to work with your healthcare provider to identify the underlying cause and determine which strategies are most appropriate for you.

Stay Hydrated

Even mild dehydration can increase the likelihood of muscle cramps.

To help maintain hydration:

- Drink fluids regularly throughout the day.
- Increase fluid intake during hot weather or exercise.
- Limit excessive alcohol intake, which can contribute to dehydration.
- Speak with your healthcare provider if you have medical conditions that require fluid restrictions.

Heat & Fatigue

Many people with MG notice that heat and fatigue make their symptoms worse.

To reduce your risk:

- Avoid becoming overheated.
- Rest before muscles become exhausted.
- Break larger tasks into smaller steps.
- Take frequent rest breaks.
- Exercise during cooler parts of the day if heat affects your symptoms.

Gentle Stretching & Physical Activity

Regular movement may help reduce muscle cramping for some people.

Consider:

- Gentle stretching before and after activity.
- Light range-of-motion exercises.
- Walking or other low-impact activities, as tolerated.
- Avoiding prolonged periods in one position.
- Following an exercise program developed with your healthcare team or physical therapist.

Because overexertion can worsen MG symptoms, balance activity with adequate rest.

Maintain Healthy Electrolyte Balance

Electrolytes—including potassium, calcium, and sodium—play important roles in normal muscle function.

Rather than taking supplements on your own:

- Eat a balanced diet that includes a variety of fruits, vegetables, dairy products (or fortified alternatives), and whole grains.
- Ask your healthcare provider whether blood tests are needed if cramps are frequent.
- Only take electrolyte supplements if recommended by your healthcare provider.

Too little—or too much—of certain electrolytes can contribute to muscle problems.



Should I Take Magnesium?

Magnesium is an important mineral that supports normal muscle and nerve function. However, **high-dose magnesium supplements and magnesium-containing medications (such as some antacids and laxatives) may worsen muscle weakness in some people with MG** by affecting neuromuscular transmission.

Do not start magnesium supplements without discussing them with your neurologist or healthcare provider.

Magnesium found naturally in foods is generally not a concern for most people unless advised otherwise by their healthcare team.



What About Quinine?

The **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises against using quinine for routine treatment of leg cramps** because it can cause serious side effects, including dangerous heart rhythm problems, bleeding disorders, and allergic reactions.

In addition, quinine has long been recognized as a medication that **may worsen myasthenia gravis** and should generally be avoided unless specifically prescribed for another medical condition under close medical supervision.

Conclusion

Key Takeaways

- Muscle cramps are common but are not a defining symptom of MG.
- Stay well hydrated and maintain a balanced diet.
- Balance activity with adequate rest to avoid muscle fatigue.
- Stretch regularly and avoid prolonged inactivity.
- Review medications with your healthcare provider if cramps are persistent.
- Avoid quinine-containing products unless specifically directed by your healthcare provider.
- Discuss any supplements—including magnesium, calcium, or potassium—with your healthcare provider before taking them.

Helpful Resources

Myasthenia Gravis Association (MGA)

The Myasthenia Gravis Association provides:

- [Support groups](#)
- Educational webinars
 - [Video Library of previous webinars](#)
- Patient education
- [Resource library](#)
- Advocacy opportunities
- Connections to others living with MG

Website: <https://mgassociation.org>

Additional Resources

- American Academy of Neurology (AAN) – Clinical guidance on neuromuscular disorders.
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) – Educational information about myasthenia gravis.
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) – Safety communication regarding quinine for muscle cramps.
- Talk with your neurologist, primary care provider, or pharmacist if you have questions about persistent muscle cramps or possible medication side effects.

Scientific Sources and Clinical References

This guide was informed by current clinical and research literature, including:

- International Consensus Guidance for Management of Myasthenia Gravis (2021 update) (Neurology)
- American Academy of Neurology (AAN) guidance on neuromuscular disorders
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) safety communications advising against quinine for nocturnal leg cramps
- Reviews in journals such as Neurology, Muscle & Nerve, and American Family Physician on the evaluation and management of muscle cramps