

Cramps

Over the past weeks many professionals in a range of sports have given us their input into the issue of cramping. What you are about to read is a general guide to delaying the onset of cramps, and how to recover quickly from the nasty suckers!

WHY DO WE GET THEM? HOW DO YOU STOP THEM?

There are many things associated with the problem of muscle cramps. It is not all bad news though! If you cover your bases, you can manage the problem. So basically, there are three main areas to look at.

HYDRATION

Water. It is great stuff! Look to drink one litre per 25kg of body weight every day, especially leading up to an event. If you are going to have sports drinks, you need to have a look at what is in them and understand why you are drinking them. Those mainstream sports drinks that you can buy at the corner shop are great for energy, but can lack the important minerals which can help delay the onset of cramps.

Specialised sports drinks, which cost more than the mainstream variety, contain goodies such as Thiamin, Riboflavin, Niacin, Pantothenic Acid, Magnesium, Sodium and Potassium. These can in many cases work a treat at delaying cramps. Remember, this approach is not the answer to controlling cramps - just one piece of the puzzle.

NUTRITION

Too many people do prepare themselves for the challenges of maintaining energy levels by eating whilst riding. What we mean is, if you expect to ride an intense event and have not exposed your system to carbo gels, special bars and sport drinks, you can expect the worse! Your body needs to get used to digesting food while riding as well as get used to the taste and texture of the foreign foods. The worst case situation would be to lose appetite while riding which leads to cramps, due to lack of nutrients. Suggestion: have a range of different foods while riding so you do not lose interest in eating.

We have learnt that, if you want your body to function at its best while competing, eat the foods which you will be using during the competition while training. Why? Because, some foods work great for some people, but not for others. Find out what works best for you and stick with these! Also, the quantity and timing of serves is very important. Most of the athletes we look after for endurance events have timers to alert them to eat and drink every 20 minutes or so. The idea is to be constantly fuelling your fire, so small snacks are ideal.

CONDITIONING

To do well, your body has to be exposed to the type of intensity, which you will experience in a race situation. This might mean riding long distances before the Mont 24, or short intense rides before a short course event. Having your riding training planned out helps to increase your fitness, as well as condition your muscles for the race event. Have a cycling coach examine your riding technique as well as you may have imbalances of power delivery with each pedal stroke. This will lead to fatigue of weaker links within your legs. Once the weaker links are exhausted, spasms can occur which lead to cramping.

Go to Quick Stability Exercise 

Conditioning also includes strength training using resistance equipment. This type of training causes the body to rebuild muscle tissue due to the stress placed on the tissue by the resistance of the weights. Again, this can help improve the rate of recovery if cramps do occur.

RECOVERING

Having good flexibility and regular massages will also help to speed up the recovery of the muscle tissue. But, we have seen people cramp up in the legs straight after massages during endurance events. Massage is not the single one answer! You must keep hydrating, eating and stretching - after you experience the pleasure of involuntarily and forcibly contracted muscle tissue activation.

QUICK STABILITY EXERCISES FOR THE LEGS

Try this exercise at home or at the gym.

Single Leg Squat on uneven surface –

Find a bench or a chair with padding and step up on to it. Now perform a squat movement with all your body weight on the one leg. The other leg can be left straight or however is comfortable for you. Range of movement should be to a 90 degree bend at the knee.

Try to do 2 sets of 10 reps on each leg.

This exercise will increase the weaker links in your legs, making them more stable under load - basically improving the legs' efficiency.

Race Elements is based in Brisbane.

First session with Race Elements is on us.

Internet based training is available.

Check out our website www.raceelements.com.au

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