

Discharge advice for calf muscle injuries

Information for patients

During your visit to the emergency department, you were advised that you have an injury to your muscle.

This leaflet answers frequently asked questions about calf muscle injuries. In all cases, a doctor can explain the advice to you and answer any questions you may have.

What is a calf muscle injury?

A calf muscle injury is usually minor trauma to the main bulk of the calf muscle. Sometimes this is referred to as a strain or tear.

How long will it take to recover?

This type of injury usually heals without any problems. The pain, tenderness and swelling should settle over a period of several weeks.

A recovery plan has been provided on page two for you to follow. Early movement of your ankle and foot is important to promote circulation and reduce the risk of developing a DVT (blood clot). Follow the exercises below within your pain limits. This will ensure your ankle and foot do not become stiff as well as help the healing process.

Recovery plan timetable

Time since injury	Recovery plan
24-72 hours	<p>Try to rest and elevate your foot. A cold pack (ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can provide short term pain relief. Apply this to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every three to four hours, and ensure the ice is never in direct contact with your skin.</p> <p>Please follow the advice on pain relief given by the clinician you saw in the emergency department. If you need further advice, please ask your local pharmacist or GP.</p>
0-2 weeks	<p>You can walk on your injured leg as much as pain allows. If you were given crutches, you can stop using these as you feel able to.</p> <p>Start the exercises described later in this leaflet as you are able.</p>
2-6 weeks	<p>Gradually start to resume your normal activities. Continue with the exercises shown below.</p>
6-12 weeks	<p>By now you should be returning to your normal level of activity. You might still feel some discomfort with higher level activities such as running.</p> <p>If you experience a significant increase in pain and/or swelling you will need to reduce your activity levels and gradually increase these over a longer period of time.</p>

Exercises to follow

Please note, the number of times you need to carry out each exercise is included as a guide only. If you experience a significant amount of pain while carrying them out, you should reduce the number of times you do each exercise, and gradually increase the amount during your recovery.

Ankle range of movement exercises

Repeat each exercise 10 times, three to four times a day.

1. Point your foot up and down within a comfortable range of movement.



2. Turn your foot inwards so that your toes are pointing towards your other foot, then move back to the starting position.



3. Turn your foot outwards so that your toes are pointing away from your other foot, then move back to the starting position.



Weight bearing exercise

Repeat each exercise three to four times a day.

1. Hold onto a chair or table for support and practise standing on your injured leg for up to 30 seconds. When able, stand on the injured leg without holding onto the support.



2. Rise up and down on your toes. Repeat eight to 12 times, or as much as pain allows.



3. Standing on your affected leg. Rise up and down on your toes. Repeat eight to 12 times, or as much as pain allows.



4. Gently perform the calf stretches. This should only create a mild stretch sensation in your calf and should not be painful. Hold for 15-30 seconds. Repeat two to three times per day.



Return to sport

You should be able to squat, hop, jump, and run pain-free before you return to sport. If you are unable to do this or need further guidance, see your GP, and ask for a physiotherapy referral.

Return to driving

You should be able to perform a full emergency stop confidently and pain-free before you consider returning to driving.

What happens next?

We do not routinely follow up patients with this type of injury as it usually heals well. However, if you are still experiencing significant symptoms after six weeks, please contact the virtual fracture clinic at the hospital you first visited.

This clinic is run by a team of physiotherapists and orthopaedic doctors who can review your scans and notes to provide you with the further information or support you may need. If appropriate, they will make an appointment for you to be seen face-to-face in a fracture clinic.

Contact us

Barnet Hospital, Chase Farm Hospital, Finchley Memorial Hospital, and Cheshunt Community Hospital

Tel: 020 8216 4445 (voicemail service only)

Email: rf-tr.barnethospitalvfc@nhs.net

Edgware Community Hospital and Royal Free Hospital

Tel: 020 7472 6222 (voicemail service only)

Email: rf-tr.royalfreehospitalvfc@nhs.net

Acknowledgements and references

We would like to thank Glasgow Royal Infirmary and Leeds Teaching Hospitals for allowing us to reproduce part of their leaflets.

More information

For more information about the cancer service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website: www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/trauma-and-orthopaedics

Your feedback

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email:

rf-tr.communications@nhs.net

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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