**Pickles, mustard and muscle cramps!**

There is nothing more irritating than muscle cramps at night. Since I started dating my fiancé, I’ve watched him go through bouts of nighttime muscle cramping. It seems to come in cycles, lasting a few weeks and then stops on its own. It’s so frustrating, because nothing changes in his world. He’s a simple eater, works out regularly, no changes with medications or with his daily schedule.

My experience and knowledge of muscle cramping has always led me back to the same basic diagnostic process beginning with, poor hydration, low potassium, over exertion, tight or unfit muscles, poor circulation and/or a change in medications.

When I’ve consulted other professionals, I discover that no one really knows what causes muscles to cramp. It’s a very individual thing and there’s not a one quick answer with a single solution for any person.

Online from the Mayo Clinic website states that the sudden and involuntary contraction of one or more of your muscles is generally harmless. Usually, treatment for muscle cramps can be done at home with self-care measures.

Risk factors for muscle cramps include:

Age. With age comes changes in muscles.

Dehydration. Becoming fatigued and dehydrated can lead to the development of muscle cramps.

Pregnancy. Muscle cramps are common during pregnancy.

Various medical conditions. You might be at a higher risk of muscle cramps if you have diabetes, or nerve, liver or thyroid disorders.

“Although most muscles cramps are harmless, some may be related to an underlying medical condition, such as inadequate blood supply, nerve compression or mineral depletion.”

When inadequate blood supply and nerve compression are involved typically the muscles will cramp during activities and will subside soon after the activity stops. Contact your physician if this happens to you.

Also keep in mind that diuretics often prescribed for high blood pressure can also deplete minerals from your system and too little potassium, calcium or magnesium have been found to contribute to cramping.

Lifestyle and home remedies.

Hydration. I know, this increases the sleep deprivation caused by needing to go to the bathroom more often. However, it might be the first step to stopping the severe, sleep depriving cramps.

Stretching and massage. Always stretch away from the cramped muscle. For a calf cramp, put your weight on your cramped leg and bend your knee slightly forward. Or you can extend the leg flat and try to gently pull your toes (with a strap or towel) towards you. This will also help relieve hamstring cramps. If the cramp is in the quadricep muscle group, you’ll need to pull your knee up behind you somehow in order to stretch that muscle properly.

Gently rub or massage the muscle to help it relax.

Apply heat or cold by using a heating pad or warm towel on the contracted muscles. Sometimes taking a warm bath or the water from a warm shower. Alternating warm massaging and ice can also sometimes help reduce muscle spasticity and provide relief.

Pickle juice. There’s good evidence that drinking pickle juice can help stop muscle cramping immediately, especially if you are actively involved in an activity. The acetic acid of the pickle juice helps the body make acetylcholine, which is a neurotransmitter that stimulates the muscles.

Magnesium, which is also plays a role in neuromuscular transmission, may cause muscle cramping when there’s a deficiency in your system. The evidence is inconclusive on the use of magnesium oils or sprays for immediate relief. Orally ingested supplements would be a better preventative thought process.

Lavender oil has been shown to have anti-inflammatory properties and promotes blood flow. Probably more of a preventative method rather than an instant relief.

Potassium certainly appears to play a role in cramp prevention and is an essential and often lacking element in modern diets. Bananas, broccoli, sweet potatoes, yogurt and electrolyte beverages with potassium, sodium and chloride are good sources. V8 juice contains twice the potassium of a banana.

Mustard works like pickle juice. The body takes a little longer to break down and metabolize mustard, but if you can stand the taste it’s a convenient way to get rid of cramp immediately.

Lastly, get moving. Movement before, during and after a cramping session is essential to overall muscle health.