- Foot—care

PREVENTION

HEALTH



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WHAT'S UP WITH...

FOOT CRAMPS

It's not just stilettos that can cause toe-clenching pain.

BY MARISA COHEN

GETTY IMAGES.

YOU'RE SITTING ON the sofa, feet up on the ottoman, when suddenly your big toe or the arch of your foot wrenches into a painful cramp. This happens when the muscles that flex and bend your feet contract involuntarily—it's fairly common and can occur at any time, even in the middle of the night.

WHAT CAUSES THE CRAMPS?

Age and lack of exercise can cause foot cramps, as can these frequent issues:

NOT ENOUGH WATER

"The most common reason for foot cramps is lack of hydration," says Bradley Schaeffer, D.P.M., a podiatrist and foot surgeon at Central Park Sole. When you're not getting enough H_2O, less blood may flow to your feet.

INADEQUATE ELECTROLYTES

"These molecules (which include sodium, magnesium, and potassium) have electrical charges that help the body send messages to the muscles," explains Sondema Tarr, D.P.M., a podiatrist and foot surgeon at Direct Podiatry Arizona in Tempe, AZ. Not getting enough can cause cramps.

YOUR SHOES

Shoes that are too tight, too loose, or too high are not friends to your feet. "When you wear high heels, your toes have to work a lot harder to touch the ground and maintain balance," says Tarr. The extra strain can lead to cramps.

GYM STRAIN

Overuse of muscles, especially without proper stretching beforehand, can cause cramps in legs, calves, feet, and toes.

How can I avoid foot cramps?

- **Replace uncomfortable heels** with shoes that help you walk more naturally. Schaeffer recommends ones with plenty of room in the toe box, good arch support, and a stable heel cup, with insoles for support.
- **Stretch your feet** before exercising, and be sure to drink plenty of water.
- **Eat more potassium-rich foods** such as bananas, avocados, coconut water, and almonds, and consider adding an electrolyte supplement to your water.

HOW TO GET RELIEF

For the middle of your foot, try rolling a tennis ball along the sole—it can help release the muscle and lessen spasms and cramps, says Tarr. If the cramp is in your toes, cross the affected leg over the other, then gently flex your foot back, hold for two to three seconds, and release.

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