

Calf Strain (ligament injury)

What is it?

A calf strain is tearing of the muscle fibres in the lower part of the leg (the calf) that pull back on the heel and point the toes. There are two large muscles in the calf that perform this action, a deep, flat, thick muscle (soleus) and a superficial rounded muscle with 2 heads (gastrocnemius).

What are the causes?

The usual cause is an overload on the muscle fibres that goes beyond what they are able to hold, causing tearing of various degrees. This can happen with a quick stretch or contraction of the muscle with a movement such as pushing off of the ball of your foot to change direction, slow down, sprint, push something, jumping or landing. The reason for the tear can be due to inadequate warm up of the muscle or poor biomechanics in the lower limb.

What are the symptoms?

There is usually pain immediately in the calf, sometimes pain is felt shooting up or down the leg or hear a cracking sound. The calf can swell and bruise and become very tender to touch. Walking normally and pressing up onto the toes are usually too difficult due to pain.

What should I do?

Immediately it is advised that you stop activity or sport to prevent further injury and minimise the damage already done. The RICE regime for soft tissue injuries should be commenced and maintained for the first 48 hrs (note that this is the most important time for the management of this injury)

Rest, involves ceasing activity and limiting the amount of weight through the affected side.

Ice, applied to the area crushed in a wet towel for 15-20 minutes, every 1-2 hrs.

Compression, with a firm (but not tight) elastic bandage around the ankle.

Elevation, comfortably above the level of the heart.

Seeking assessment from a physiotherapist should be undertaken in the first week if possible to treat and plan a return to activity safely.

What shouldn't I do?

Return to activity or engage in any activity that will increase blood flow or inflammation. Although inflammation is needed for tissue healing too much can be detrimental to the process and lengthen recovery. Other inflammatory contributors that should be avoided are heat (hot showers, heat packs etc), massage and alcohol.

Could there be any long term effects?

Usually not if managed well, however, long term muscle tightness can hinder some activities as a result of not having the right management.

Physiotherapy treatment and management

Treatment initially focuses on soft tissue work and electrotherapeutic modalities to stimulate the healing process and reduce pain. Specific exercises and stretches are used to optimise recovery and streamline return to normal activity.

To arrange an appointment:

- call our reception staff on **(08) 82638844**
- email info@robertsphysiotherapy.com.au