



FIT FOR LIFE

The agony of cramp

It's a painful condition, but it can be easily solved - if you don't mind the pain, says Carol Westmorland

It is a question I am asked frequently and always give the same reply. The fact that I can't help the person writhing in pain means they only half listen anyway. The remedy is simple but not always the answer they want to hear or believe.

Most commonly it is the toes that are affected. This short-lived agony is, of course, cramp. A very misunderstood (and annoying) condition that some of you are more prone to than others, but why?

There is simple reason you get cramp. You have a confused mechanism of the muscle. This doesn't mean to say you have stupid muscles; they are just a bit uptight. Highly strung. Instead of the muscle relaxing after, for example, pointing your toes, it stays in a contraction causing the spasm that is cramp. Ouch! It is not, as commonly believed, that you are dehydrated.

A new, unfamiliar exercise is often a trigger, and it hurts. A lot. It is also more likely to happen if you are tired or tense - something that can go hand in hand with a new exercise regime. The muscle is confused and fatigued, poor thing.

The urge (while possibly squealing) to unlock said muscle by grabbing the offending area then trying to stand up - hopping from side to side on the spot - is correct, if a little unseemly. You may feel a bit of a twit but everyone will have seen this happen before. It does the job nicely but, remember, you are likely to stay sensitive for a little while. Avoid rushing back into the very movement



'A NEW, UNFAMILIAR EXERCISE IS OFTEN A TRIGGER, AND IT HURTS'

that was the trigger - unless you enjoy being the centre of attention! Just chill (have a chat) and wait for it to settle. You could share your knowledge.

The good news is that it is easy to remedy. Just practice. The receptors get the correct message in time and you stop getting cramp.

Just don't be put off. Look around and you will see few get cramp once they have practiced and, until then, may I recommend something to bite into.



Carol Westmorland lives in the Eden Valley. She is a Cycling Time Trials national champion, clocking up 445 miles in 24 hours. She also teaches pilates. www.pilates-cumbria.uk