

## **Effectiveness of stretching exercises for leg cramps during pregnancy: a study at the de Soysa Maternity Hospital, Colombo**

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### **Introduction**

Leg cramps are a common complaint in pregnancy that could compromise sleep and the ability to work. Stretching is highly recommended to prevent leg cramps but supportive evidence is inadequate.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of the study was to determine the effectiveness of stretching exercises in preventing leg cramps during pregnancy. Other objectives were to determine the frequency, severity, sleeping disturbance and daytime sleepiness, and disturbance of physical/mental/social activities due to leg cramps during pregnancy and also to determine whether participants take treatment for managing or preventing leg cramps.

### **Methods**

A within subject experimental design study was carried out in uneventful, singleton, primigravid mothers with leg cramps in the third trimester of pregnancy who were attending antenatal clinics at De Soysa Maternity Hospital, Colombo, Sri Lanka. First 60 pregnant mothers who fulfilled inclusion criteria were recruited. Self-administrated questionnaires were distributed before and after one month of commencement of stretching exercises.

### **Results**

Among participants 75% experienced leg cramps twice per week or more and 40.4% of them suffered from severe leg cramps prior to intervention. Furthermore 82.7% of mothers suffered from moderate or severe sleeping disturbance during the third trimester. Moreover 46.2% of participants physical/mental/social activities were moderately disturbed. In the study population 80.8% participants were taking some form of treatment for acute leg cramps. However 82.7% participants did not take any measures to prevent further leg cramps. Following the intervention a significant reduction ( $p < 0.001$ ) in severity, frequency, sleeping disturbance and disturbances to activities was seen after introduction of stretching exercises.

### **Conclusions**

A considerable proportion of women in the third trimester of pregnancy experience sleep, physical, mental and social disturbances due to leg cramps. These are effectively mitigated by stretching exercises.

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