

You don't have to be a senior to suffer those painful Charley horses while jammed into an aircraft seat for those six- or eight-hour flights. I first got them as a teenager as a member of the school swim team. I can remember once being in a movie theater, with seats in the row in front of me just as close as they are on airplanes.

When the cramps hit in both legs, I could only try to stand and stamp my feet, while screaming in agony. Of course, people around me didn't appreciate the interruption to John Wayne's latest battle against the bad guys. First, the medical reasons for Charley horses. They're leg cramps, often blood clots, with the most severe called deep vein thromboses, that suddenly hit around the calf muscle. Almost always, after two or three minutes of acute pain, they usually dissolve and leave behind a dull leg pain that lasts another 15 minutes or so.

However, there's always the danger that the clots will travel up to the heart and cause a coronary attack. If you're having frequent Charley horses, check with your physician about relieving them, especially before you go on a long flight.

Now decades after my school athlete days, I still get Charley horses. To prevent it, on long flights I do everything possible to avoid it from happening. Maybe my routine can help others who're afflicted in the same way.

Medical opinion on drugs to relieve such attacks is mixed, and still undergoing research. However, there are over-the-counter pills that contain quinine I find helpful. Also, drinking several glasses of quinine water before flights seems to have a positive effect for me. So, before you board your flight, instead of that last beer at the airport bar, try some quinine water straight or in cocktails.

Throughout long flights, at least once every ten minutes, while in your seat, stretch your legs out as far as possible, twisting your ankles back and forth and pointing your toes. Then bring your knees up and down slowly as if riding a bicycle, and pump a dozen times per leg.

Then, at least once an hour, get up from your seat and stroll the aisle for several minutes. If you can find a bulkhead (not a door) where you can do some pushing exercises for your arms and back, while flexing your legs, do another five minutes of those exercises.

