



Seniors often suffer sudden charlie horse cramps while jammed into a crowded aircraft seat for six- or eight-hour flights. The agony can be eased with quick action. When the pain hits, first try to stand and flex your legs.

The medical reasons for charlie horses are often blood clots, with the most severe called deep vein thromboses, that hit around the calf muscle. Usually, after two or three minutes of acute pain, they dissolve, followed by dull leg throb for another 10 minutes or so.

Worse, particularly for seniors, there's always the danger the clots will travel up to the heart and cause a coronary attack. Before going on a flight and you're having frequent leg cramps, check with your physician about relieving them. There are over-the-counter quinine pills that may be helpful. Also, drinking a glass of quinine water or soda before flights may help avoid cramps. Instead of that last beer at the airport bar, try some quinine water straight or in cocktails.

To fight cramps, always find a minute or two to exercise throughout long flights, at least once every half-hour. While seated, stretch your legs out as far as possible, twist ankles back and forth. Then bring your knees up and down slowly as if riding a bicycle, and pump a dozen times per leg.

Get up hourly and stroll the aisle for several minutes. Find a bulkhead (not a door) where you can do some standing push exercises. Stretch arms back and forth, while flexing legs, and do five minutes to relieve aching muscles.

If you can do those simple exercises during flights, you'll be able to say whoa to inflight charlie horses.