

Calf Pain

Introduction

Calf pain is commonly seen in long distance runner, hiker or people participating strenuous exercise required repeated contraction of lower limb muscles. There are several muscles surrounding the 2 calf bones (tibia and fibula) and these muscles are surrounded by interosseous membrane and fascia which is known as “compartment”. During vigorous sports activities, repeated contraction of calf muscle may result in muscle injuries and the athlete may suffer from pain and swelling of the calf. Some of the long distance runner may suffer from calf pain after running and this may be due to the swollen muscle was compressed by the tight fascia which is known as “Compartment Syndrome”. There may be other causes of calf pain such as Achilles tendon tendonitis, rupture of Baker’s Cyst, cramps, etc.

Diagnosis

A clear history about the calf pain may help the physician to find out the cause of calf pain. The athletes can try to identify the onset, severity of calf pain and the relation between calf pain and exercise. The orthopaedic surgeon will then do a physical examination to look for any local tenderness, integrity of the Achilles tendon, assess any asymmetry etc. Further investigation such as x-ray, CT and MRI may be useful for us to find out the causes. If “Chronic Compartment Syndrome”, the physician may ask the athlete to do exercise until the calf pain arise, a needle may be inserted to measure the compartment pressure.

Treatment

For any acute onset of calf pain after exercise, the athlete should start the “RICE” therapy which includes Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation. The treatment will depend on the cause of calf pain, for those suffering from chronic calf pain, non surgical treatment such as stretching exercise and physiotherapy. Sometimes, surgery may be required for those chronic compartment syndromes.