

Calf Muscle Tightness.

A common problem for football players is calf muscle tightness, especially when doing a lot of training or running (pre-season training). The symptoms are a gradual tightening of the calf muscles during training or running. These symptoms can get worse the more the player trains, or improve while training or running, only to 'tighten up' later in the day.



Figure 1: Calf Muscles

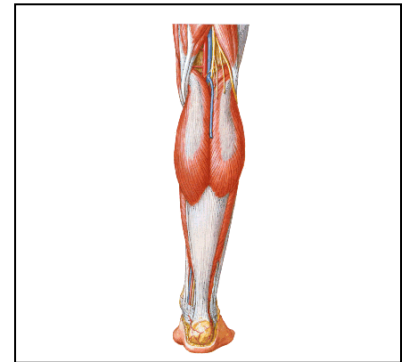


Figure 1: Calf Muscles

Why do they tighten up?

There are several reasons why a player's calf muscles 'tighten up'. A player's calf muscles may have gradually tightened up over a period of time through poor flexibility and minimal stretching, or the player may have a biomechanical problem in their running style, or a condition called 'compartment syndrome'. Players who injure their calf (a strain) and do not undertake the appropriate rehabilitation can also develop calf muscle tightness.

What can the player do about it?

If the problem is recurrent or continues the player should seek medical advice from a sports injury professional – a sports doctor, physiotherapist or podiatrist. There are a number of treatments available depending on the diagnosis - the sports injury professional will be able to make an accurate diagnosis.



Figure 2: Calf Stretches.

The player can start stretching their calf muscles (See Figure 2) and could also start a course of sports massage (See Figure 3).



Figure 3: Sports Massage.

What can the sports professional do?

Initially, the player will be assessed by a sports injury professional and an accurate diagnosis made. The player may have ‘compartment syndrome’ – this is when the muscle expands when exercising and the ‘sheath’ that surrounds the muscle prevents the muscle from expanding fully, which causes pain. The player will need to undergo some special testing by a sports doctor to confirm this diagnosis. If the calf muscles are ‘tight’, or not as flexible as they should be, a sports doctor may prescribe sports massage. A sports massage therapist will give a ‘deep tissue massage’. Depending on the severity of the condition several treatments may be required. Deep tissue massage gets deep into the muscle and releases muscle stiffness. Gentle or soft massage to the skin is not likely to be deep enough and so will be ineffective. A player will need to start a stretching program (See Figure 2).



Figure 4: Orthotics.

A sports podiatrist can undertake a biomechanical analysis of a player’s running style and could provide orthotics (See Figure 4) or a heel raise (See Figure 5), that will help prevent the symptoms from reoccurring.

Calf muscle tightness can be prevented through a number of different treatments, depending on the diagnosis and symptoms. The treatments should ultimately improve a player’s fitness and reduce their calf muscle tightness. If the player has ‘compartment syndrome’ then a sports doctor will refer the player to an orthopaedic surgeon for surgery. The time off football and training will depend on the severity of the player’s symptoms and type of surgery under taken.

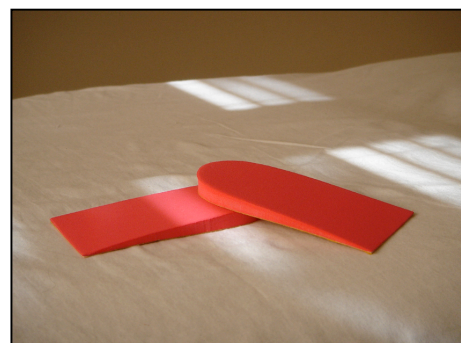


Figure 5: Heel Raise.