SYMPTOM

Muscle twitching

Muscle twitching is a brief, involuntary flutter or jump in a small area of muscle.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
A small muscle fluttering, jumping, or pulsing by itself

WHERE IT IS FELT
Often eyelids, calves, thighs, arms, hands, or feet

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Fatigue, stress, caffeine

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Twitching with new weakness or trouble swallowing

USUALLY LASTS
Minutes to weeks, based on the trigger or underlying cause

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Twitching lasts over two weeks or keeps returning

Overview

Muscle twitching is a small movement that you do not control. It happens when a group of muscle fibers tightens briefly. The medical term is a fasciculation .

You may see the muscle move under your skin or feel a flutter without seeing it. Twitching often affects one small area at a time, such as an eyelid or calf.

Most isolated twitches are linked to everyday factors such as tiredness, stress, caffeine, or exercise. They often settle without treatment. Twitching can also be related to a medicine, a problem with body salts called electrolytes, or a condition affecting nerves or muscles.

A twitch is different from a cramp, which is usually painful and holds a muscle tight. It is also different from a tremor, which causes repeated shaking of a joint or body part.

What it may feel or look like

A twitch may feel like a quick jump, ripple, flicker, or pulse beneath your skin. It can happen once or repeat every few seconds. Some twitches come and go for several days.

The movement is usually limited to part of one muscle. It may be more noticeable when you are

sitting still, resting after exercise, or trying to sleep.

Pay attention to whether the twitching comes with other changes, including:

These details can help a healthcare professional decide whether further assessment is needed.

- Muscle weakness or loss of grip
- A muscle becoming smaller
- Stiffness, numbness, or ongoing pain
- Difficulty speaking, swallowing, walking, or breathing
- Jerking that moves an entire limb or affects awareness

Common causes

Common causes include too little sleep, emotional stress, anxiety, recent exercise, and drinking a lot of caffeine. Alcohol and nicotine may also make twitching more noticeable in some people.

Muscles sometimes twitch while recovering from strenuous or unfamiliar activity. Eyelid twitching is especially likely when you are tired or under stress.

Less common causes include dehydration, low levels of certain electrolytes such as calcium or magnesium, and thyroid or kidney problems. Some prescribed medicines, stimulants like methylphenidate or lisdexamfetamine , and supplements may contribute. Do not stop a prescribed medicine without medical advice.

Persistent twitching without weakness can sometimes be described as benign fasciculation syndrome . "Benign" means that it is not damaging the muscles. This diagnosis is made only after other relevant causes have been considered.

Nerve and muscle conditions can also cause twitching, but they usually produce other signs, such as progressive weakness, muscle wasting, abnormal reflexes, or problems with movement. Twitching by itself does not show that you have one of these conditions.

When to seek medical care

Arrange a routine appointment if the twitching lasts longer than two weeks, keeps returning, affects several areas, or is interfering with sleep or daily life. You should also book an appointment if you have cramps, numbness, stiffness, unexplained weight loss, or concerns

about a medicine.

Seek same-day medical advice if twitching occurs with new or worsening muscle weakness, visible loss of muscle size, difficulty swallowing, or a clear change in walking or hand function.

Call emergency services if you develop:

These symptoms need urgent assessment even if the twitching seems mild.

- Trouble breathing or an inability to swallow saliva
- Sudden weakness or numbness on one side
- A suddenly drooping face or difficulty speaking
- Repeated whole-body jerking, loss of awareness, or a seizure

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when the twitching began, where it happens, and how often it occurs. They may ask about sleep, exercise, caffeine, alcohol, stress, recent illness, medicines, and supplements.

An examination may check muscle strength, muscle size, sensation, balance, and reflexes. This helps distinguish an isolated twitch from a broader nerve or muscle problem.

Tests are not always necessary. If the twitching is persistent or accompanied by other symptoms, blood tests may check electrolytes, thyroid function, kidney function, or signs of muscle injury.

An electromyogram , often called an EMG, records electrical activity in muscles through a small needle. Nerve conduction tests measure how well electrical signals travel through nerves. These tests are usually reserved for cases where the history or examination suggests a nerve or muscle disorder. Imaging may be considered when there are specific neurological findings.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on what is causing the twitching. An isolated twitch often needs no medical treatment.

You can try reducing likely triggers for one or two weeks:

Avoid taking potassium, magnesium, or other electrolyte supplements solely for twitching unless a healthcare professional recommends them. Too much of some electrolytes can be harmful.

If a medicine may be contributing, speak with a pharmacist or prescriber. The medicine may not be the cause, and stopping it suddenly could be unsafe.

When testing finds an underlying problem, treatment is directed at that cause. This might involve correcting an electrolyte imbalance, treating a thyroid condition, or reviewing medicines.

- Get regular sleep and allow recovery after strenuous exercise
- Reduce caffeine, particularly energy drinks and large amounts of coffee
- Drink enough fluid during illness, hot weather, and exercise
- Eat regular, balanced meals
- Use relaxation, breathing exercises, or gentle activity to manage stress

What to expect

Twitching linked to fatigue, stress, caffeine, or exercise often improves after the trigger settles. It may stop within minutes or return intermittently over days or weeks.

Some people have harmless twitches for longer periods. Symptoms can become more noticeable during stressful times or when you focus on them. Keeping a brief record of the location, timing, triggers, and other symptoms may help if you need an appointment.

Follow up if the pattern changes, spreads widely, or begins to occur with weakness, muscle loss, swallowing difficulty, or problems with movement.

Common questions

Does muscle twitching mean I have a serious nerve disease?

Usually not. Isolated twitching is common after stress, tiredness, caffeine, or exercise. Nerve diseases generally cause additional changes, especially steadily worsening weakness or muscle wasting.

Can anxiety cause twitching?

Stress and anxiety can make nerves and muscles more active. They may also disturb sleep or increase caffeine use, which can add to twitching. Physical symptoms should not automatically be attributed to anxiety if they are persistent or accompanied by weakness.

Why does my eyelid twitch?

Eyelid twitching is often associated with fatigue, stress, eye strain, or caffeine. It usually settles

on its own. Arrange an assessment if the eye closes completely during episodes, other facial muscles move, or you have eye pain, swelling, or vision changes.

Should I stretch a twitching muscle?

Gentle movement, stretching, or massage is reasonable if it feels comfortable, although it may not stop the twitch. Stop if it causes pain.

Sources

- NHS. Twitching eyes and muscles
- MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia. Muscle twitching
- Cleveland Clinic. Benign Fasciculation Syndrome: Symptoms and Treatment
- American Academy of Family Physicians. Muscle Weakness in Adults: Evaluation and Differential Diagnosis
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis