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Non-drug and drug therapies of nocturnal leg cramps in patients over 60 years old

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Background and Aim: Nocturnal leg cramps (NLC) are involuntary painful muscle contractions affecting older people, occurring mainly during the night. NLC may cause severe pain, quality of life alteration and sleep disturbance. NLC affect almost one in two people over 60. To our knowledge, no study evaluated patients' symptomatic treatment of this common symptom. Our aim was thus to describe non-drug and drug therapies for NLC in patients over 60.

Method: We realized a cross sectional study including patients over 60, suffering from NLC consulting their Family Doctor. We collected prospectively the non-drug and drug therapies used to relieve the symptoms of NLC.

Results: We included 632 patients with 56% of women. Median age was 70 years (60-92). Among the 80 participants using drug therapies, 24 were using magnesium, 20 quinine, and 14 homeopathies. Sixteen different drug treatments were described. Among the 55 participants using non-drug therapies, 18 laid soap in their bed, 9 were practicing stretching exercises and 8 were applying cold or hot on their legs. Thirteen different non-drug therapies were described.

Conclusion: With 29 different strategies used to relieve NLC symptoms, our results identify an important need for clinical research of non-drug or drug therapies for NLC.