

Compartment Syndrome – Recurrent

Compartment syndrome happens when there is an excessive amount of pressure that builds up within an enclosed space of the body, most commonly in the legs. It can result from swelling or bleeding following an injury, or can be induced by exercise/sport. Due to the dangerously high amount of pressure within the compartment, it impedes the blood flow to the tissues that are affected. In this situation, it becomes an emergency that needs surgery to prevent a permanent injury from occurring.

The condition begins when the pressure in the muscles begins to build to a dangerous level. Due to the pressure, the blood flow decreases, which will prevent oxygen and nourishment from reaching the muscle and nerve cells. The condition can either be chronic or acute. Acute conditions are a medical emergency that is often caused by a severe injury. If the condition is not treated, it can cause permanent muscle damage.

Chronic compartment syndrome, which is often known as exertional compartment syndrome, is normally not an emergency. Most of the time, this condition is attributed to athletic exertion. When compartments syndrome keeps occurring, it is classed as recurrent.

Compartment Syndrome Recurrent Anatomy

Compartments are groups of muscles, blood vessels and nerves within your legs and arms. A tough membrane covers the tissues known as the fascia. The fascia's role is to keep all of the tissues where they are supposed to be, so it doesn't expand or stretch easily.

How to Treat Compartment Syndrome Recurrent:

1. Fasciotomy

One of the main treatment options for recurring compartment syndrome is that of a fasciotomy. This opens the compartment and helps to relieve pressure in the affected area. A long incision is made into the fascia to relieve pressure by opening the tissue up. On average, you can expect to spend three months in the recovery process. After the surgery, you will need to undergo physical therapy.

2. Physical Therapy

Physical therapy will help to strengthen the muscles and joints after surgery, or this can still be useful prior to any surgery. By performing a series of exercises and routines, you can help to strengthen and improve flexibility in the area that was affected.

3. Rest

When you find an activity that is causing you pain and swelling, you need to cease engaging in that specific activity until you can see a doctor for an examination. By continuously pushing your body to do something that it shouldn't be doing, you are only going to further increase the swelling and pain in the joint and muscles.

4. Anti-Inflammatory Medication

Using an anti-inflammatory medication or muscle relaxer will help to alleviate some of the pain and swelling in the joints and muscles. When you relieve some of the swelling, it can help release the pressure in the affected area. If the condition is too severe, you may be left with no other alternative than a fasciotomy.

Tips:

- Try changing your training routine if you notice pain and discomfort. Talk to your coach to get advice on your technique, or seek advice from a sports therapist.
- Avoid over exercising.
- Severe pain that happens during exercise and goes away within an hour of stopping is not normal and should be addressed.
- Participating in sports that require running and jumping leaves you at an increased risk of developing the condition.
- Try not to exercise too intensely as it can lead to serious injury and swelling.