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- Ayres, S.
- Mihan, R.

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Leg Cramps (Systemma) and “Restless Legs” Syndrome — Response to Vitamin E (Tocopherol)

Samuel Ayres, Jr. and Richard Mihan

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Abstract

A clinical investigation into the therapeutic value of vitamin E (tocopherol) in certain dermatological conditions of obscure etiology led to the incidental observation that this compound produced beneficial effects in some of the patients who were suffering from frequent and severe nocturnal leg cramps. Nearly all of the patients with leg cramps received prompt and gratifying relief from their symptoms while taking vitamin E in the form of d, alpha-tocopheryl acetate, 100 I.U. three times a day before meals. The group included 24 private patients with leg cramps and two with the “restless legs” syndrome, probably a related condition. One of the patients with leg and foot cramps also had severe nocturnal rectal cramps which were also relieved.

Nocturnal leg cramps constitute a relatively common complaint in the general practice of medicine and may be very distressing to the patient. Not only is the cause obscure and the treatment relatively unsatisfactory, but even its proper medical name, systemma (anything twisted up together), is unknown to most physicians.

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