

Patient information

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)

Therapies Department

What is Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)?

Usually develops after an injury to an arm or leg, it can affect people of all ages, including children.

It is:

- **Complex** - affects nerve, skin, muscle, blood vessels and bone and may be difficult to resolve.
- **Regional** - usually affects one area e.g. hand or foot.
- **Pain** is always present and is usually burning in nature.
- **Syndrome** as it is a group of symptoms and signs.

How do I know that I have CRPS?

The only symptom everyone with this problem has is pain. Other symptoms vary and are not all present in every person who has this problem.

Other symptoms that may occur:

- Swelling.
- Skin changes like dryness or colour changes.
- Temperature changes.
- Joint stiffness / difficulty moving limb.
- Increased sweating in the affected area.
- Increased hair / nail growth.
- Skin oversensitive to light touch (referred to as allodynia).
- Limb may feel "strange."

People who have this problem, sometimes understandably, feel anxious or concerned.

Cause

CRPS is a reversible reaction to injury that occurs in both the limb and the brain. The way that the brain communicates with the affected limb is altered causing some of the movement problems.

The nerves in the affected limb become much more sensitive which can cause some of the problems with touch and pressure.

Why have I got it?

We don't know why one person gets this problem and not another. It can happen with an identical injury on one side and not the other side. Genes may have a role in developing CRPS but are not the only factor. It is unlikely that anyone else in your family will ever develop CRPS.

How can it be treated?

Good pain relief medication is essential to allow you to have effective Physiotherapy and Occupational therapy, which helps most people. They may also help you to sleep.

Sometimes medication such as antidepressants and anti-epileptic drugs can help. This does not mean that you are epileptic or depressed, as these drugs are often used successfully in pain control.

How can I help myself?

- Eat a healthy balanced diet.
- There is some evidence that taking Vitamin C and E supplements and not smoking help faster recovery.
- Take the prescribed pain medication and be prepared to revisit the doctor if this needs adjusting, as this is common.
- Do your best to follow the advice given to you by your therapists.
- Keep as active as possible using your affected limb with the rest of your body as normally as possible.

How long will it last?

We don't know **but** we do know that if you detect and treat this problem as soon as possible, even if it is only suspected, it is more likely to improve quickly.

Some people have problems for many months or even years.

Further Appointments

Your Physiotherapist/Occupational Therapist will telephone or send you your first and following appointments.

If you are under the care of a consultant you should make a follow up appointment at the clinic reception desk before you leave.

Please note: Sometimes the consultant will discharge you to the care of the therapists but a further appointment can be made through the therapists if this is needed.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

Therapies Department

Tel: 0151 706 2760

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2760

www.arthritisresearch.org.uk

www.crpsuk.org

<http://rsds.org/index2.html>

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