

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome

A Progressively Painful Condition Affecting Arms or Legs

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Condition Sheet



Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) is a chronic, painful, progressive condition that affects the skin, muscles, joints, and bones. It most often occurs in adults aged 20 to 40 and generally affects women more than men. Potential causes of CRPS range from minor injuries, such as a sprain, to severe injuries, such as damage to a nerve. Even relatively long periods of immobility, such as would occur with a broken leg, can result in CRPS. It's important to seek early intervention. Our network of pain management physicians is skilled in accurately diagnosing CRPS and customizing non-surgical treatment plans that offer relief.

Understanding CRPS

CRPS, also referred to as Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (RSD) and Causalgia, is usually caused by an injury to the bones, joints, tissue, or nerves. The original injury can be severe, such as a broken bone, or minor, such as a sprain. In the case of an injury, CRPS symptoms may not appear right away. As described above, these symptoms can result in extreme discomfort. Stress often increases the severity of pain. As with any injury or condition, paying attention to the messages your body sends you and seeking treatment from knowledgeable medical professionals are critical.

Why CRPS occurs

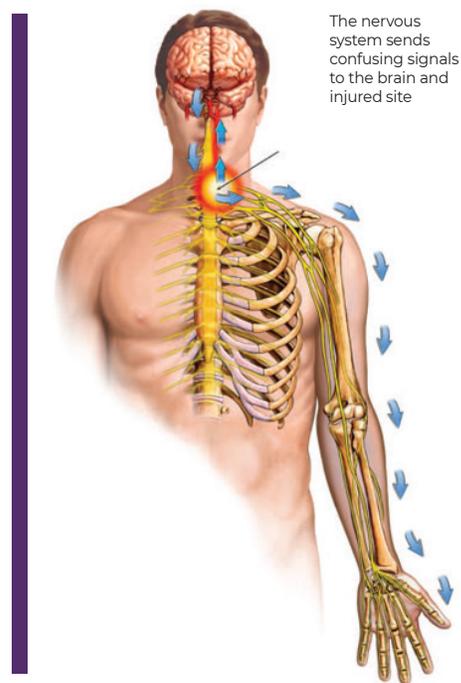
CRPS can result from several different causes. Research suggests that the symptoms may result from an injured nerve or nerves. The nerves send normal pain signals

that pass through the spinal cord and are then transmitted to the brain. The problems occur because the spinal cord begins to send confusing signals to the brain, as well as to the injured area itself. These confused signals interfere with normal blood flow and sensory signals, resulting in extreme pain. In some cases, an immune response is triggered, causing sweating, redness, inflammation, warmth, and/or muscle spasms.

The symptoms of CRPS

CRPS is a multi-symptom condition, beginning with a persistent or near-constant burning pain that is more intense than it should be for the injury. The symptoms include:

- Warm, red-looking skin at the injured area initially, changing to cool, bluish-looking skin later
- Swelling



The nervous system sends confusing signals to the brain and injured site

- Tenderness and stiffness in joints
- Abnormal sweating
- Extreme sensitivity to even mild stimuli, such as clothing or a light touch
- Muscle spasms
- Loss of motion

Symptoms may spread upward from the initial injury site (e.g., hand to shoulder) and may be heightened by emotional stress. The unrelenting pain causes many people extreme emotional and physical duress and, left untreated, can lead to permanent changes in muscle and bone. Early detection and treatment are key.

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The importance of accurate diagnosis

Detecting CRPS requires the knowledge of experienced physicians who understand that early intervention is crucial to faster relief and to preventing progression that can cause permanent problems. Our network of pain management physicians is experienced in treating people with complex pain issues. Experts in recognizing and distinguishing the symptoms of CRPS, they perform a thorough examination and select tests to pinpoint the source of your pain for an accurate diagnosis.

Effective pain relief without surgery

Many patients gain relief from pain and other symptoms with

the right therapies. Everyone responds differently to the various therapeutic options for CRPS, which is why our affiliated physicians develop a comprehensive treatment plan that's customized for you. The sooner treatment begins, the better the response. Epidural nerve blocks* are the most effective intervention when used in the earlier stages. Because CRPS is tenacious, multiple injections may be needed to achieve the full treatment benefit. Physical and/or occupational therapy are essential to help restore normal movement to affected limbs. Standard treatments include ultrasound, electrical stimulation, contrast baths, desensitization, and pool therapy. Your doctor will more than likely prescribe a variety of

medications that have been shown to be effectual. In some instances of chronic, incapacitating pain, spinal cord stimulation* is often very effective.

Proven to be safe and effective, these office-based procedures offer a non-surgical approach to alleviating your pain without general anesthesia, hospital stays, or prolonged recovery.

**For more details, ask for an information sheet specific to this condition or procedure.*

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