



Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)

What is it?

CRPS is a very painful condition, usually affecting the arm, hand, leg or foot. The nervous system (Sympathetic Nervous System) appears to be more sensitive, irritable and upregulated. Many patients have very severe burning pain, even with light touch. There may be skin color changes (often red or purple), swelling, abnormal sweating and skin temperature changes of the affected area. CRPS can become a chronic condition. Even though CRPS can be very painful, it does not cause damage to the body.

What causes it?

The exact cause is unknown. Many cases occur after an injury or surgery. Occasionally, it occurs spontaneously without any trigger. CRPS may be aggravated by stress, anxiety.

How is it diagnosed?

CRPS is a clinical diagnosis. There is no blood test or Xray that can accurately diagnose CRPS.

How do I treat CRPS?

Patients recover faster when treated early. CRPS is best treated with a multidisciplinary approach:

- Mobilization - use the affected limb. Try not to baby the area.
- Massage the area
- Apply hot or cold compresses
- Medications: Amitriptyline, SSRIs, Gabapentin (Neurontin), Lyrica, Capsaicin cream, Prednisone burst, NSAIDs, topical analgesic creams, etc.
- Physiotherapy: desensitization treatments, stretches, exercises, TENS, mirror therapy, guided motor imagery
- Acupuncture
- Aquafit or Stationary bike
- Quit smoking (when indicated)
- Counseling – help cope with stress & pain
- “Recognize” phone App
- Cortisone injections
- Nerve blocks

