

Pain Service

CRPS - Complex regional pain syndrome

What is complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS)?

Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) is a condition in which a variety of symptoms occur together in a painful part of the body, most often a single limb or area of the body. Symptoms other than pain may include:

- The affected limb being extra sensitive, for example, just lightly brushing the skin can provoke intense pain.
- Changes in the skin colour of the affected limb; it may look paler, have a blueish tinge or appear blotchy or streaky.
- Changes in the skin temperature of the affected limb; it may be sweaty or feel cold and clammy.
- Changes in the way the hair grows on the affected limb; hair may grow more quickly, change colour or not grow at all.
- The affected limb may swell for no apparent reason and the joint may feel very stiff.
- Changes in the speed of nail growth and texture; nails on the affected limb may grow faster, thicker, be more brittle or not grow at all.

Commonly affected areas are the hands, feet, knees and elbows.

CRPS is usually, but not always, triggered by an injury or trauma to a part of the body. There are two types of CRPS:

Type 1 – is triggered by an apparently trivial injury (such as a sprained ankle), where no nerve damage has occurred.

Type 2 – is triggered by more serious injury, such as a broken bone, operation or serious infection, where damage to the nerves has taken place.

The most common type of CRPS is Type 1.

The symptoms of CRPS range from mild to severe. Some people gain relief from their symptoms after a few months, but other people may experience repeated episodes of CRPS throughout their lives.

What causes CRPS?

The precise reason why some individuals develop CRPS and others do not remains unclear, but it has been a recognised condition for over 150 years. Due to the complex nature of the symptoms of CRPS, it is thought to be caused by a combination of factors rather than just one single cause. Both women and men of all ages, including children, can be affected by CRPS.

How is CRPS treated?

A multi-disciplinary approach to treatment is recommended due to the challenging, complex nature of CRPS. Treatments may include:

- medications
- specialist physiotherapy sessions
- occupational therapy
- self directed pain management strategies
- psychological therapies can also be helpful, enabling some people to cope with this condition and take an active part in their own treatment
- nerve block injections may be offered if appropriate.
(Nerve block injections are not appropriate for everyone).

Following your assessment with the consultant and diagnosis of CRPS he/she will suggest and discuss with you a plan of treatment such as those from the list above. You will then begin to receive appointments which will implement your treatment plan, some will be in clinic and others, such as medication reviews, by telephone.



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Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Polish

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Portuguese

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Arabic

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Cantonese

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Turkish

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Urdu

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Bengali

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Authors	Pain Service
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