

# Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Complex regional pain syndrome is a pain condition that most often affects an arm, hand, leg, or foot after an injury or trauma, such as surgery. The pain is often out of proportion to the injury or surgery. Anyone can get this condition, but it most often occurs in young and middle age adults, and it is more common in women.

## Signs of CRPS

- Continuous pain that is out of proportion to the injury and is often described as burning, pins and needles, or squeezing pain
- Very sensitive skin in area, even to light touch
- Changes in skin temperature, either warmer or colder than other arm or leg
- Skin color may be blotchy, purple, pale, blue, or red
- Skin texture changes, such as shiny and thin or very sweaty
- Nail and hair growth may change
- Joints in area may be swollen or stiff
- May lose ability to move or have coordination problems
- May have tremors, contractures, or jerking movements
- Pain may spread to entire arm or leg or travel to other side of body.

## Tests and exams

There is no single test to diagnose this condition. Your doctor will do an exam and ask about your medical history and signs. Other tests may be done to check for other conditions.

## Treatment

Treatment may include:

- Rehabilitation therapy to exercise the arm or leg to improve movement, flexibility, strength, and function. It may include physical or occupational therapy.
- Psychotherapy to improve coping and stress management skills to deal with anxiety and depression.
- Medicines may be used to treat signs and related conditions. Medicines may include:
  - Topical anesthetic creams or patches, such as lidocaine
  - NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen or naproxen
  - Corticosteroids to reduce swelling and inflammation
  - Anti-seizure medicines to reduce nerve pain, such as gabapentin
  - Sleeping medicines
- Nerve blocks that require injection of an anesthetic to numb nerves.
- Nerve stimulation, such as spinal cord stimulation, peripheral nerve stimulation, or deep brain stimulation.
- Drug pumps that deliver pain medicine into the fluid of the spinal column.

- Surgery to relieve pressure from compressed nerves.
- Alternative therapies, such as biofeedback and other relaxation techniques, behavior modification, acupuncture, and chiropractic treatments.

Research continues to find other treatment options.

## What to expect

In some people, signs of CRPS go away on their own, and in others, they may last for months or years. Sometimes people have ongoing pain and crippling changes, even with treatment.

Early treatment seems to be key in limiting the condition.

More studies are being done to learn more about the causes and progression of complex regional pain syndrome.

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**Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.