

What is 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 is 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, all the time in every person who has this problem.

Other symptoms that may occur:

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

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

Cause

The exact cause of CRPS is unknown, but often follows a minor injury.

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 pain, touch and pressure.

Why have I got it?

We don't know why one person gets this problem and not another although the immune system likely plays a role. 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?

Physiotherapy and Occupational therapy can help with many elements of CRPS and may also help you to sleep better. 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 providing some pain control. However, our current medications are only partially effective to reduce pain.

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 after injury

- 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?

There is no cure for CRPS at the moment.

We don't know how long it will last **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.