

# COMPLEX REGIONAL PAIN SYNDROME (CRPS)

**CRPS (Complex Regional Pain Syndrome)**, formerly known as RSD (Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy), is a medical condition that affects the sympathetic nervous system and can cause severe chronic pain in an affected region, usually an arm or a leg. CRPS typically develops after an injury, but the pain is out of proportion to the severity of the initial injury. In fact sometimes the initial may be so slight that the patient may not recall the injury.

The **sympathetic nervous system (SNS)** regulates bodily functions such as blood vessel tone, heart rate and blood pressure. Activation of the SNS following an injury is the body's normal "fight-or-flight" response to an emergency situation. Usually, the response ceases within minutes or hours of the injury. For unknown reasons, the SNS in those with CRPS seems to work abnormally after the injury. Many believe that CRPS is caused by too much excitation and irritation of the patient's nervous tissue.

**Signs and symptoms** of CRPS include:

- Continuous burning or throbbing pain, usually in the arm, leg, hand or foot
- All light stimulation of the skin (e.g. wearing clothing, a light breeze) may be perceived as painful (allodynia)
- Repetitive stimulation (e.g. tapping on the skin) may cause increasing pain and possible prolonged pain sensation after stimulation stops (hyperpathia)
- Swelling of the painful area
- Changes in skin temperature, color, and/or texture
- Changes in hair and nail growth
- Joint stiffness, swelling and damage
- Muscle spasms, weakness and loss (atrophy)
- Decreased ability to move the affected body part

There is no known cure for CRPS. However, a number of **treatments and therapies** exist to help relieve CRPS symptoms, including: physical therapy, anti-inflammatory medications, sympathetic-nerve blocking procedures, pain medications, anti-depressant medications, topical medications, application of hot packs, TENS unit, ketamine infusion, and spinal cord stimulation.

#### **Useful Websites:**

<http://www.rsdhope.org/crps.html>

[http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/reflex\\_sympathetic\\_dystrophy/reflex\\_sympathetic\\_dystrophy.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/reflex_sympathetic_dystrophy/reflex_sympathetic_dystrophy.htm)

<http://www.bodyinmind.org/topics/research-2/complex-regional-pain-syndrome/www.massgeneral.org/plasticsurgery/assets/pdfs/RSD.pdf>