

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)

This leaflet offers more information about CRPS and how it can be managed. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is CRPS and why do I have it?

CRPS is an abnormal response to an injury or trauma such as a fracture, soft tissue injury or even surgery that causes several of the body systems to malfunction. It can cause the nervous system to have difficulty detecting and sending pain signals, controlling temperature and swelling, and allowing movement in the affected area.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Patients with CRPS often experience a range of different symptoms, such as:

- Persistent, burning pain that does not settle with usual painkillers
- Swelling of the affected area or limb
- Colour changes to the skin (e.g. redness, mottled, pale)
- Temperature changes to the area (e.g. increased sweating, clamminess)
- Increased hair and/or nail growth
- Joint stiffness, decreased movement and decreased function.

CRPS symptoms can persist for a long time after the injury or surgery. Bone and soft tissue usually take 12 weeks to heal, therefore CRPS symptoms may lead you to believe you are not healing. This can be very stressful and confusing and it is important to be aware that the signs and symptoms of CRPS do not mean that the injury is not healing.

Do I need any tests to confirm the diagnosis?

There are no tests that confirm the diagnosis. Your signs and symptoms are sufficient for a clinical diagnosis.

What treatments are available?

Hand therapy can provide you with exercises and desensitisation activities to assist with reducing your symptoms and to help to increase the movement and function in your hand and arm. Your therapist will work with you to develop an individual therapy programme to focus on goals and activities specific to your needs.

If the symptoms are severe and interfering with your ability to participate in your rehabilitation programme, it is recommended that you discuss painkillers for nerve pain with your GP or consultant. This may or may not involve a referral to the Pain Management team.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

Actively participating in your hand therapy programme and taking your medication as directed will assist with your recovery. Avoiding movement or not completing your exercises regularly will most likely cause joints to stiffen up, making movement even more painful. You should follow the advice of your therapist at all times, even if you feel progress is slow.

You should continue to touch, use, look at and love your hand and arm, even if it feels uncomfortable and painful. Ignoring it and neglecting it will reinforce the message in your body that there is still an injury in that area.

Emotions such as stress, anger and anxiety are known to provoke pain, so try to stay calm, even though you may become frustrated and sad about your hand/arm at times. Other pain triggers may also include bright lights, loud noises, strong foods or smells, alcohol, caffeine, smoking and anticipation of touch to your hand/arm.

If you have any questions or are worried about your symptoms, please discuss them with your hand therapist. CRPS is a complex and confusing condition and there is no timescale for when it will improve. It can last months or even years, but with help and support it can be reversed or managed.

Useful sources of information

www.nhs.uk/conditions/complex-regional-pain-syndrome

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about CRPS, please contact Hand Therapy on 020 8725 1038 (you may leave a message). For appointment enquiries, please phone the Central Booking Service on 020 8725 0007.

Your therapist is: _____

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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