

Mirror therapy for patients with complex regional pain syndrome

This leaflet explains more about mirror therapy, including how you can use it as a treatment technique and what you can expect when you use it as part of your hand therapy treatment programme. If you have any further questions, please speak to your hand therapist.

What is mirror therapy?

In complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) there is a mismatch between the instructions that your brain sends to move your joints and the sensations and feedback that you would expect to get when doing so (we call this sensory feedback). Research tells us that this 'mismatch' is one of the causes of pain in CRPS.

Mirror therapy is a treatment technique which is thought to 'trick' the brain into thinking that the painful and stiff limb is moving normally. With repetitive daily practice, it is possible to reduce the symptoms of pain.

What do I need for mirror therapy?

Ideally, you will need either a mirror box or a medium to large free standing mirror that can be placed next to a chair. The mirror must be large enough that you can see the reflection from at least your forearm to your hand.

Find a quiet room, free from any distractions.

You will need to keep a daily diary of each session. You should record:

1. The number of sessions completed.
2. The length of each session.
3. Any effects, such as an increase or decrease in pain or changes in sensation.

What should I do?

- Remove any jewellery/watches.
- Sit or stand with your unaffected arm and hand reflected in the mirror and your painful arm and hand behind the mirror, out of sight.
- To start, look at the reflection without moving. Concentrate on the reflection for a couple of minutes.

- When you are comfortable with this, start to slowly move **both** hands/arms in exactly the same way. Your therapist will advise you on which movements to undertake. Try to make sure you use slow, smooth and controlled movements.
- If at first your affected hand or wrist is too painful to move, keep your unaffected hand moving on its own. While doing this, try to imagine that you are moving your affected hand in the same way as your unaffected hand.
- If pain or stiffness becomes a problem while you are exercising, **STOP** and go back to looking at the mirror image while both limbs are still. Then try the exercises again if you are able to.

As you start to improve, your therapist may give you specific exercises to try whilst using the mirror.

How often should I do mirror therapy?

You should aim to complete four to five sessions a day, for five to ten minutes at a time. We recommend that you should keep a daily diary of your sessions and that you try to do your mirror therapy programme 'little and often' throughout the day.

Will I experience any pain, sensations or side effects?

Some people may experience unusual sensations in the arm and hand behind the mirror such as heaviness, lightness, and floating, or a change in temperature from warm to cold or vice versa. If you find a sensation uncomfortable, stop the exercise and look at both limbs without the mirror. The sensation should quickly pass.

Further hints and tips

- Always move your affected and unaffected hand and arm in the same way.
- It doesn't matter if the hand behind the mirror does smaller movements than the one in front of the mirror, as long as the movements are done together.
- Throughout your mirror therapy session, try to remain relaxed and calm by taking slow, deep breaths.
- Remember not to use the mirror levels for long periods as your concentration levels will drop and this may increase your pain.

Contact us

Your therapist is: _____

Treatment enquires: 020 8725 1038

Appointment enquiries: 020 8725 0007

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 Wing (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



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