



Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)

Overview

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) can be a debilitating condition due to the long-lasting severe pain it causes. Formerly known as Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (RSD), this syndrome often develops from trauma, frequently of a body part that had suffered a previous injury. It usually develops in the arms, hands, legs, or feet and sometimes spreads to other areas due to the involvement of the central nervous system.

Causes

Medical science struggles to understand why CRPS sufferers do not recover from injuries that normally heal without incident. CRPS does not require significant injury and can result from a wide variety of traumas, such as sprains, fractures, burns, or medical procedures. Even immobilization (such as splinting and casting) has been shown to trigger CRPS in very rare instances. While statistics show that it is most prevalent in women between the ages of 40 and 60, no segment of the population is immune to suffering from CRPS.

Symptoms

As the name implies, CRPS sufferers experience pain, often excruciating and disproportionate to the injury or activity. Even slight contact - such as from clothing, bed sheets, shower water, or a strong breeze - can feel exquisitely painful. Many CRPS sufferers will have changes in skin color and temperature. They may also experience changes in their hair and nails, and can find it difficult to move or use their affected limb.



Treatment

Early medical diagnosis and treatment can help reduce the severity and spread of CRPS. Sadly, there is no known cure. Physical therapy keeps the affected limb mobile while psychotherapy helps the patient deal with depression and anxiety. Pain medications - by mouth, injection, or surgically implanted pump - are almost always required. Spinal cord stimulators can also benefit some CRPS sufferers.