

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)

“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

Marybeth Ezaki, MD, Past President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand

What is Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)?

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS), previously known as Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (RSD), is a pain condition that can be the result of an injury or may occur without an injury. The pain associated with CRPS is generally in the area of an injury or can spread over the entire arm. People with CRPS can have an unusual response to something painful or a painful response to something that usually would not be painful.



Stiffness, swelling and color changes in the hand can occur with CRPS.

What are the symptoms of CRPS?

Pain is the main symptom of CRPS; however, a person may also have the following:

- Swelling
- Stiffness in the joints of the hand or fingers
- Sensation changes in the hand
- Color changes in the fingers or hand
- Temperature changes in the hand
- Cold sensitivity
- Abnormal hair growth in the hand or forearm
- Abnormal sweating in the hand
- Abnormal nail growth

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist will work with the doctor and other healthcare professionals to develop a plan of care with you. Your hand therapist will educate you on how to perform daily activities with less pain and teach you techniques to manage pain. Hand therapists will also teach you exercises to reduce joint stiffness as well as provide techniques to reduce swelling. A hand therapist may suggest the use of an orthosis or edema glove to decrease the symptoms.

Early treatment is the key to regaining maximum functional use of your hand. Attending therapy sessions consistently and keeping up with your home exercise plan is important for optimal results.



Example of a compression glove with a supportive wrist and thumb orthosis

To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit the American Society of Hand Therapists at www.asht.org or call 856-380-6856.