

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)

What is complex regional pain syndrome?

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) is lasting intense pain condition in one or more body parts, most often an arm, leg, hand or foot. Pain may start with an injury or simply start on its own. The pain is too intense or lasts too long given the trauma or injury. Also, non-painful stimuli, such as light touch, clothing, or even air currents, can be very painful.

There are other changes that may occur with the pain. Skin often becomes cold, discolored, or mottled. There may be swelling and changes in how much you sweat, and in some cases even changes in hair and nail growth. Weakness, tremor, and changes in muscle tone may also appear.

What causes CRPS?

It is not known. Sometimes symptoms start after an injury such as a sprain, strain, or fracture. Limited or no use of a body part can either trigger this syndrome or make it worse. CRPS is typically thought of as neuropathic pain, meaning it happens because of a change in how the nerves work.

What are the symptoms of CRPS?

- Prolonged, lasting, intense pain in a limb
 - Extreme pain from a light touch or other triggers that are usually not painful
 - Skin changes, such as in temperature, color, texture or swelling, or sweating
 - Changes in hair or nail growth
 - Difficulty moving the limb or supporting body weight
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How is CRPS diagnosed?

A medical provider can diagnose CRPS primarily based on your child's medical history and physical exam. There are no definitive laboratory tests or imaging studies.

What treatment does Seattle Children's recommend for CRPS?

Although many methods have been tried to treat this difficult condition, studies have shown that working to regain function and normal sensation is very important. The Pain Medicine Program will evaluate your child and then make specific treatment recommendations. This typically combines medical, physical and psychological strategies.

- Physical and Occupational therapy to desensitize the affected area. This is done to help the nerves start to respond more normally. To learn more, see our handout "Desensitization Techniques for Chronic Nerve Pain" (<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1717.pdf>).
 - Psychologists help patients learn to lessen the intensity of pain and cope with discomfort during rehabilitation exercises.
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To Learn More

- Pain Medicine
206-987-1520
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

- Only when specifically indicated, consideration may be given to medications or nerve blocks.

We offer a Pain Rehabilitation Program (PReP) for youth who have not had success with outpatient pain treatment and those who need rehabilitation services in a more intensive setting. If this is recommended for your child, please see our handout “Pain Rehabilitation Program (PReP) – What to expect and how to prepare” (<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1950.pdf>).