

## What can I do to prevent my hand becoming useless?

When we feel pain in the hand it is natural to avoid using it. This is the body's way of preventing further injury. However, in the case of CRPS, the pain is not due to body tissue damage. Therefore, injury through use of the hand is highly unlikely. In fact, it is proved that avoiding using the hand actually makes the pain worse and over time the arm/hand becomes weaker and increasingly disabled.

- ✓ Please feel free to keep asking questions.
- ✓ Please discuss your concerns and symptoms with your Therapist, no matter how strange they may seem.

Your Occupational Therapist is:

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Tel no: 01926 600818 option 5

Monday – Friday, 8am – 4pm

As a key provider of healthcare and as an employer, the Trust has a statutory obligation to promote and respect equality and human rights. This is set out in various pieces of legislation including: Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Act (2005), Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Age Discrimination Act (2006)

Our information for patients can also be made available in other languages, Braille, audio tape, disc or in large print.

### PALS

We offer a Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS). This is a confidential service for families to help with any questions or concerns about local health services.

You can contact the service by the direct telephone line on 01926 600 054 or using the phone links which are available or by calling in at the office located in the main entrance at Warwick Hospital.

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**South Warwickshire  
NHS Foundation Trust**

**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

**Hand & Upper Limb service**

***Complex Regional Pain Syndrome***

*Patient Information*

## What is Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)?

CRPS is a condition that is usually triggered by trauma such as a wrist fracture. There is a combination of unpleasant symptoms such as:

- persistent and often burning pain that doesn't settle with normal pain killers
- swelling
- severe sensitivity to touch
- colour changes in the skin (red, blanched or mottled)
- temperature changes
- increased sweating
- increased hair and nail growth
- joint stiffness
- difficulty initiating movement
- difficulty using the hand,

CRPS involves multiple and complex body systems involved with normal healing:

- the nervous system (including the brain)
- the immune system
- the inflammatory system
- the circulatory system

The symptoms of CRPS can persist long after the original injury has healed which can be very confusing. In a healthy person bone and soft tissue injuries take about 12 weeks to heal completely. This remains true even in the presence of CRPS.

## What causes CRPS?

Nobody knows what causes CRPS. It is thought to affect approximately 26 in 100,000 of the general population, maybe more.

There are more females affected than males, there is an increased incidence of CRPS among smokers and there are suggestions that there may be a genetic link.

## Is there a cure?

Unfortunately, there is no known cure for CRPS. The aim of treatment is to reverse and manage the symptoms with a combination of medication, physical therapy/rehabilitation, self-management strategies for pain and stress, plus others as required.

The ultimate goal of all intervention is to restore function to the hand.

## What can I do to help?

- ✓ Learn about the condition and try not to be afraid of the symptoms. If you choose to use the internet please remember that the effect of CRPS ranges from very mild to severe. Web sites tend to present the worst case scenario and suggest treatments and drugs that are not necessarily appropriate.
- ✓ Actively participate in your therapy program and use your medications routinely, even if your progress seems painfully slow.
- ✓ Continue to touch, look at, use and love your arm/hand regardless of how it feels.

## What can make it worse?

Keeping your joints still and inactive for long periods or over exerting yourself with exercises and activity will increase the symptoms.

Ignoring and disusing your arm/hand reinforces the message that there is still an injury.

Heightened emotions such as stress, anger and anxiety are known to exaggerate and provoke pain. This is because, in CRPS, the nerve system becomes highly sensitive to the substances your body makes in relation to stress.

Other symptom triggers might be: Bright light, loud noise, strong food, alcohol, caffeine, smoking, frustration, threat of others coming near to limb etc.