

## Occupational Therapy

### Upper Limb Unit: Hand Therapy

# Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)

## What is CRPS?

Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome or CRPS is a condition that sometimes occurs following an injury that leads to more pain than would normally be expected following this injury. This is due to the nerves becoming oversensitive and 'switching on' too soon. The brain can also interpret signals from the nerves incorrectly as pain. You do not need to have injured your nerves to get this condition.

## Why does CRPS occur?

No one really understands why this condition occurs and why some people suffer from it when others don't. CRPS is unpredictable in how it will affect you, but with treatment most patients will improve. It can take up to 2 years to resolve completely.

Other symptoms can include:

- reduced range of movement
- joint stiffness
- dystonia (abnormal movement and/or posture)
- swelling, altered colour and sweating
- altered perception on the limb, such as the limb may feel larger



## Patient Information

You will not cause more damage to your hand or arm by following the information below. It is likely that you will find you have more pain if you do not try to use the hand or arm.

This is a difficult condition to live with and to treat. A positive attitude, setting realistic goals, being focused in the therapy sessions, good motivation, support from family and friends will all help your recovery.

## How is it treated?

We know that nerves can be trained to 'switch on' and transmit the impulses at the correct level but this involves a lot of work on your part. It can be very uncomfortable initially but with practice it should improve.

The therapy team will concentrate on the following treatments:

- Immersion massage – this involves putting the hand into lentils or rice to get it used to touch.
- Massage – this helps with the swelling and gets you used to touch. Begin with self massage and then progress to others massaging your hand or arm.
- Sensory stimulation – this encourages you to touch the sensitive areas with different textures, identifying objects by touch etc.
- Mirror therapy – this is a technique used for patients with phantom pain following amputation. This uses an optical illusion to help reduce the pain by watching the non painful hand moving in the mirror as if it were the affected hand, the brain thinks your injured hand is moving and pain is reduced.
- Hand laterality (left-handedness/right-handedness etc.) work to improve your perception of the limb.
- Grip retraining – we will look at the movements and grips you need for everyday activities and ensure you can achieve them through a graded treatment programme
- Functional activities – you will be encouraged to use your hand if you can in everyday activities
- Relaxation – we can teach you some techniques that have proved useful to help you sleep and reduce tension in your neck and shoulders

## Patient Information

Some people respond better to some interventions than others so we will tailor your treatment to your needs. It is very important that you continue your treatment at home on a regular basis. It is better to exercise for short periods frequently with this condition so you will need to be disciplined.

Set yourself realistic goals and take small steps to achieving them, setting your sights too high can lead to feelings of failure which will make you despondent and we know that if your mood is low your pain can be worse.

## Pain Relief

It is important that you have good pain relief so that you are able to cooperate with treatment, especially in the early stages. Please discuss this with your therapist and consultant. Your consultant may refer you to the pain clinic if they feel that this would be beneficial.

## Other interventions

Constant pain can make you feel very low, it can help to speak to a psychologist. These professionals can help with thoughts and feelings about the condition and teach you non medical strategies to deal with your pain. If you feel this would help then you can speak to your GP about a referral. The therapists will be happy to write letters to support your request if they feel this will be beneficial.

**Your therapist is:** .....

**Tel: 024 7696 6016**

## We value your opinions

In order to maintain and improve this service, we need to know what you think about the occupational therapy/physiotherapy you have received.

## Patient Information

Please complete the attached form and return to:

David George

Outpatient Therapy Manager

University Hospital

Clifford Bridge Road

Coventry

CV2 2DX

Tel: 024 7696 6123

If you wish, you may send your comments without including your name and address.

If you do complete your name and address, this will enable us to acknowledge receipt and inform you of any action taken as a result of your comments. In no way will your returning this form affect your future health care provision.

**Your Name:** .....

**Your Address:**

.....  
.....  
.....

**Your Telephone Number:** .....

Please indicate whether this is a: Compliment  Suggestion  Complaint

Please give details/comments:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Patient Information

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6032 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email [feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk](mailto:feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk)

| <b>Document History</b> |                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Department:             | Occupational Therapy |
| Contact:                | 26016                |
| Updated:                | June 2022            |
| Review:                 | June 2025            |
| Version:                | 5.2                  |
| Reference:              | HIC/LFT/1039/10      |