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Complex regional pain syndrome

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Symptoms

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Signs and symptoms of complex regional pain syndrome include:

- Continuous burning or throbbing pain, usually in your arm, leg, hand or foot
- Sensitivity to touch or cold
- Swelling of the painful area
- Changes in skin temperature — at times your skin may be sweaty; at other times it may be cold
- Changes in skin color, which can range from white and mottled to red or blue
- Changes in skin texture, which may become tender, thin or shiny in the affected area
- Changes in hair and nail growth
- Joint stiffness, swelling and damage
- Muscle spasms, weakness and loss (atrophy)
- Decreased ability to move the affected body part

Symptoms may change over time and vary from person to person. Most commonly, pain, swelling, redness, noticeable changes in temperature and hypersensitivity (particularly to cold and touch) occur first.

Over time, the affected limb can become cold and pale and undergo skin and nail changes as well as muscle spasms and tightening. Once these changes occur, the condition is often irreversible.

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Complex regional pain syndrome occasionally may spread from its source to elsewhere in your body, such as the opposite limb. The pain may be worsened by emotional stress.

In some people, signs and symptoms of complex regional pain syndrome go away on their own. In others, signs and symptoms may persist for months to years. Treatment is likely to be most effective when started early in the course of the illness.

When to see a doctor

If you experience constant, severe pain that affects a limb and makes touching or moving that limb seem intolerable, see your doctor to determine the cause. It's important to treat complex regional pain syndrome early.

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