



NINDS Complex Regional Pain Syndrome Information Page

Synonym(s): Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome, Causalgia

Condensed from [Complex Regional Pain Syndrome Fact Sheet](#)

Table of Contents (click to jump to sections)

[What is Complex Regional Pain Syndrome?](#)

[Is there any treatment?](#)

[What is the prognosis?](#)

[What research is being done?](#)

[Clinical Trials](#)

[Organizations](#)

[Related NINDS Publications and Information](#)

[Publicaciones en Español](#)

[Additional resources from MedlinePlus](#)

REVIEWED

By Chris at 12:18 pm, Jan 19, 2016



What is Complex Regional Pain Syndrome?

Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) is a chronic pain condition. The key symptom of CRPS is continuous, intense pain out of proportion to the severity of the injury, which gets worse rather than better over time. CRPS most often affects one of the arms, legs, hands, or feet. Often the pain spreads to include the entire arm or leg. Typical features include dramatic changes in the color and temperature of the skin over the affected limb or body part, accompanied by intense burning pain, skin sensitivity, sweating, and swelling.

Doctors aren't sure what causes CRPS. In some cases the sympathetic nervous system plays an important role in sustaining the pain. Another theory is that CRPS is caused by a triggering of the immune response, which leads to the characteristic inflammatory symptoms of redness, warmth, and swelling in the affected area.

Is there any treatment?

Because there is no cure for CRPS, treatment is aimed at relieving painful symptoms. Doctors may prescribe topical analgesics, antidepressants, corticosteroids, and opioids to relieve pain. However, no single drug or combination of drugs has produced consistent long-lasting improvement in symptoms. Other treatments may include physical therapy, sympathetic nerve block, spinal cord stimulation, and intrathecal drug pumps to deliver opioids and local anesthetic agents via the spinal cord.

What is the prognosis?

The prognosis for CRPS varies from person to person. Spontaneous remission from symptoms occurs in certain individuals. Others can have unremitting pain and crippling, irreversible changes in spite of treatment.

What research is being done?

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) and other institutes of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) conduct research relating to CRPS and also support additional research through grants to major medical institutions across the country. NINDS-supported scientists are studying new approaches to treat CRPS and intervene more aggressively after traumatic injury to lower the chances of developing the disorder.

Researchers hope to identify specific cellular and molecular changes in sensory neurons following peripheral nerve injury to better understand the processes that underlie neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to reorganize or form new nerve connections and pathways following injury or death of nerve cells). Identifying these mechanisms could provide targets for new drug therapies that could improve recovery following regeneration.

Other researchers hope to better understand how CRPS develops by studying immune system activation and peripheral nerve signaling using an animal model of the disorder.

NIH Patient Recruitment for Complex Regional Pain Syndrome Clinical Trials

- ▶ [At NIH Clinical Center](#)
- ▶ [Throughout the U.S. and Worldwide](#)
- ▶ [NINDS Clinical Trials](#)

Organizations

American RSDHope Organization

P.O. Box 875

Harrison, ME 04040-0875

rsdhope@roadrunner.com

<http://www.rsdhope.org> 

Tel: 207-583-4589

International Research Foundation for RSD/CRPS

1910 East Busch Boulevard

Tampa, FL 33612

info@rsdfoundation.org

<http://www.rsdfoundation.org/> 

Tel: 813-907-2312

Fax: 813-830-7446

Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Association (RSDSA)

P.O. Box 502

99 Cherry Street

Milford, CT 06460

info@rsds.org

<http://rsds.org> 

Tel: 203-877-3790 877-662-7737

Fax: 203-882-8362

Related NINDS Publications and Information

- ▶ [**Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Fact Sheet**](#)
Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (also called Causalgia and Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome) information page compiled by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS).
- ▶ [**NINDS Chronic Pain Information Page**](#)
Chronic pain information page compiled by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS).
- ▶ [**Pain: Hope Through Research**](#)
Chronic pain information page compiled by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS).
- ▶ [**Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy/ Complex Regional Pain Syndromes \(CRPS\): State-of-the-Science**](#)
A workshop on Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy/ Complex Regional Pain Syndromes (CRPS): State-of-the-Science, December 15, 2001.

Publicaciones en Español

- ▶ [**Síndrome de Dolor Regional Complejo**](#)

Prepared by:
Office of Communications and Public Liaison
National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892

NINDS health-related material is provided for information purposes only and does not necessarily represent endorsement by or an official position of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke or any other Federal agency. Advice on the treatment or care of an individual patient should be obtained through consultation with a physician who has examined that patient or is familiar with that patient's medical history.

All NINDS-prepared information is in the public domain and may be freely copied. Credit to the NINDS or the NIH is appreciated.

Last Modified November 3, 2015



National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
[Home](#) | [About NINDS](#) | [Disorders A - Z](#) | [Research Funding](#) | [News From NINDS](#) | [Find People](#) | [Training](#) | [Research](#) | [Enhancing Diversity](#)
[Careers@NINDS](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Accessibility Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)



NIH...Turning Discovery Into Health®