

# What is Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome (RSD/CRPS)?

Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome (RSD), also called Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) is a chronic neurological disease affecting an estimated 1.5 to more than 6 million Americans.

RSD/CRPS is a malfunction of part of the nervous system that usually develops in response to a traumatic event such as an accident or a medical procedure. A minor injury such as a sprain or fall may trigger RSD/CRPS causing nerves to misfire, sending constant pain signals to the brain.

The term Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) was adopted by the International Association for the Study of Pain to define two kinds of CRPS.

## CRPS Type I (RSD)

- The presence of an initiating event or injury, such as a sprain or fracture
- Continuing pain, including allodynia (pain resulting from a normal stimulus, like the breeze from a ceiling fan) or hyperalgesia (increased sense of pain); the pain is disproportionate to that associated with the original injury
- Evidence at some time of edema (swelling) changes in skin blood flow (skin color changes, skin temperature changes more than 1.1° C

or abnormal sweating in the region of pain

- This diagnosis is excluded by the existence of conditions that would otherwise account for the degree of pain and dysfunction

## CRPS Type II (Causalgia)

- The presence of continuing pain, allodynia, (pain resulting from a normal stimulus, like the breeze from a ceiling fan); or hyperalgesia (increased sense of pain) after an identifiable nerve injury, not necessarily limited to the distribution of the injured nerve
- Evidence at some time of edema, changes in skin blood flow (skin color changes, skin temperature changes more than 1°C, or abnormal sweating in the region of pain
- This diagnosis is excluded by the existence of conditions that would otherwise account for the degree of pain and dysfunction.

## Symptoms (any combination)

- Pain: constant, moderate to severe
- Muscle spasm, loss of motion and use of the affected area
- Swelling that may come and go
- Skin Changes: Color, dryness, excessive sweating, excessive or

decreased hair growth, changes in the nails

- Circulatory changes— cold or hot in the affected areas
- Insomnia and depression due to the other symptoms and life changes

## Who can get RSD/CRPS?

Anybody! Anyone can get RSD/CRPS at any age, but studies show that it is more common in people between the ages of 25 and 55, and is more frequently seen in women than in men. It used to be considered rare in children, but there has been a recent increase in the number of cases among adolescents and young adults.

## RSD/CRPS is a physical disease

RSD/CRPS affects the nervous system, bones, muscles, skin and the circulatory system. The symptoms may not be easily seen. RSD sufferers may develop psychological problems because of the constant pain, the changes in their life style, and the fact that others do not believe their pain is real. RSD/CRPS is a physical, not a psychological disease

## Diagnosis

A physician must make a clinical diagnosis of RSD/CRPS using patient history, a thorough examination and the results of numerous

tests. There is no single test for RSD/CRPS.

**Early** diagnosis and treatment with anti-inflammatories, pain control and physical therapy dramatically improve the chances of remission.

## Treatment

Treatments may include: medications; nerve blocks; physical therapy; psychological support; sympathectomy; or implantable devices such as dorsal column stimulator or intrathecal medication pumps. Treatment is highly individualized. Each patient should have a treatment plan that includes pain control, psychological support and physical, occupational or massage therapy.

## If you think you have RSD/CRPS

If you have an injury that isn't healing as it should or if the pain and/or swelling is more severe than it should be for the injury

- Ask your doctor if this could be RSD/CRPS
- Make sure that you are getting treatment for the pain
- Try to keep the affected area moving
- Get another medical opinion if you feel that your physician isn't taking your complaints seriously.

## Is there a cure?

No, but there is hope! Advances in research on pain and RSD/CRPS have helped find some new and effective treatments. More money and more research is needed to achieve the dual goals of

- No new patients with RSD/CRPS
- Effective treatment and/or cure of those living with RSD/CRPS.

Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Association of America promotes public and professional awareness of RSD/CRPS and educates those afflicted with the syndrome, their families, friends, insurance and health-care providers, on the disabling pain it causes. We encourage individuals with RSD/CRPS to offer each other emotional support within affiliate groups. And finally, we are committed to raising funds for research into the cause and cure of RSD/CRPS.

For more information on RSD/CRPS, please call us for an information packet or go to our website.

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## Do You Have Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy/ Complex Regional Pain Syndrome?

**A potentially disabling, chronic neurologic syndrome also known as:**  
**RSD**  
**CRPS**

**[www.rds.org](http://www.rds.org)**