



RSD

Have you ever suffered a simple broken wrist that has left you with unbearable pain? The problem could be RSD. Read on to find out more.

What is RSD?

It stands for Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy. You may also see it written more commonly now as CRPS – Complex Regional Pain Syndrome

It is a condition that is not very well understood and is often difficult to diagnose. The main feature is PAIN, which is persistent and often described by patients as burning in character.

Certain factors can trigger the development of RSD, for example, it may start after a fracture or injury. Most people recover normally without any complications, but in others, RSD can develop for no apparent reason.

What causes it?

It is thought that a group of nerve fibres called the “sympathetic nervous system” is in some way involved. This system has several functions including regulation of blood flow and skin temperature.

What parts of the body are affected?

Usually the hand, wrist, foot or ankle. Sometimes a whole limb can be involved.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The most common complaint is pain. Some people can become depressed and frustrated, especially if they do not know what is causing the pain. In severe cases, it can have a profound effect on a person’s life, interfering with every day activities.

The area affected by RSD is often extremely sensitive to touch, even with light stroking.

There can be skin colour and temperature changes also. For example, initially the affected part might be red, warmer to touch and swollen. (The area can often have an increase in darker body hair). Over the course of time, this might change to the affected part being colder to touch and bluey or mottled in colour. When RSD has been present for a long time, the affected part becomes weak, making movement difficult.

How can Physiotherapy help?

The main objective of physiotherapy is to keep the limb mobile to prevent loss of movement and muscle strength and therefore promote function.

This can be very difficult initially as pain is the worst factor to overcome. We help people to realise that a fracture or other such injury has not gone horribly wrong and that normal use and movement will actually be beneficial and prevent the problem becoming chronic.

Seeking your Doctors advice on adequate medication for pain control is also a sensible step to take.

Lastly, if it thought that the sympathetic nervous system is involved, you can have a temporary or permanent nerve block.