Complex Regional Pain

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

This week we are talking about a condition that most patients have never heard of. It is unusual, but not rare. It actually goes by several names, but Complex Regional Pain describes it best.

O.K. What Is It?
It is a collection of symptoms that comes on usually after an injury to an extremity. The diagnosis is often difficult to make because of a confusing number of clinical symptoms. The symptoms usually come on after a fairly minor injury or even a contusion.

Symptoms

- Excessive pain for the injury
- Very sensitive to light touch
- Cold intolerance
- Transient swelling
- Skin discoloration
- Pain to bear weight

Wow, that’s a lot of symptoms for a fairly minor injury isn’t it? They are not always present, but most of them are. That is the tip off, a lot of confusing symptoms that usually don’t go together.

Making The Diagnosis
Well, you have to think of the diagnosis as a possibility before you can make it. Yes, but the doctor often doesn’t consider it because it is unusual and not encountered too often.

I won’t list all the tests that are done trying to rule out other diagnoses.

Treatment
It can be challenging. Physical Therapy is the main treatment. The earlier the condition can be identified as Complex Regional Pain the better chance that therapy can be successful. Therapy differs depending on which symptoms are present so it is difficult to be specific about treatment. Medication can sometimes help. It takes a specialized team approach. Most patients recover completely if diagnosis is made early and treated correctly.

Unfortunate Outcome
It would be nice to say that all recover, but some symptoms develop chronic pain symptoms, skin changes, atrophy and stiffness.

My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.

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Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

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