



CAPTA NEWS

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REFLEX SYMPATHETIC DYSTROPHY SYNDROME

(Complex Regional Pain Syndrome)

What is Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome? Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (RSD) is a disease of the neurovascular system, usually affecting a single extremity with pain, swelling, and tenderness more severe than an injury or surgery would otherwise cause. This syndrome often results in a serious functional impairment with associated changes that may eventually develop into a permanent dysfunction.

Causes: The cause of reflex sympathetic dystrophy syndrome is unknown. In general, RSD is a malfunction of the nervous system caused by injury or stress, in which the nerve "overreacts". The patient, therefore, is overwhelmed with symptoms out of proportion to that of the normal response to injury or illness.

Diagnosis: The diagnosis depends on the pain associated with body changes (i.e., sweating or vascular system abnormalities) and/or skin or bone atrophy (loss of mass), hair loss, or joint contractures.

Treatment Components: Early treatment of RSD provides the best results. Pain relief with nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and/or short term mild narcotics may be helpful. A short course of high-dose oral steroids relieves pain and suppresses inflammation. Nerve blocks are useful for pain relief and many physicians consider them first-line therapy in treating this syndrome.

Rehabilitative Treatment and Management: RSD is treated by decreasing stimulation of the nervous system, which is typically done by: 1) pain/hypersensitivity control 2) swelling control 3) functional rehabilitation consisting of range of motion activities, muscle strengthening exercises and retraining in activities of daily living.

