

Q&A :

Does CRPS/RSD cause high blood pressure?

The experience of pain is stressful to the body, and one of its effects is to produce an increase in blood pressure. When an injury causes acute pain and increased blood pressure, natural mechanisms are activated that reduce both pain and blood pressure. In fact, these pain-related blood pressure increases may be a trigger for release of pain-relieving compounds produced by the body. In persons with chronic pain, it's different. There is some evidence that these natural pain and blood pressure dampening systems do not work properly in at least some individuals who experience chronic pain.

While previous studies have not examined hypertension specifically in people with CRPS/RSD, it has been shown that those with a variety of chronic pain conditions are more likely than other types of patients to have clinically diagnosed hypertension and to use antihypertensive medications. While it is not known with certainty if chronic pain is the cause of this hypertension, resting blood pressure levels are generally higher in individuals who have more intense chronic pain. For patients with any type of chronic pain condition, including CRPS/RSD, it is important to obtain a screening for hypertension. This will ensure that appropriate treatment can be started, if necessary, in order to prevent other health risks.

Stephen Bruehl, PhD, Department of Anesthesiology,
Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, Tennessee.

Is massage therapy indicated as an adjunct therapy for CRPS/RSD?

Massage typically increases circulation (oxygen, nutrient exchange, toxin release) to the area and warms and relaxes muscle tissues. It is usually contraindicated for people with certain cardiac conditions, inflammatory conditions, pregnancy, and cancer. Many people who suffer with CRPS/RSD, have vasoconstriction (constricted blood vessels), so the increase in circulation to the tissues may be beneficial — depending on the stage and severity of CRPS/RSD. With the tendency toward an inflammatory response of the tissues with CRPS/RSD, massage might not be appropriate for everyone who has the syndrome.

Massage may be a beneficial adjunct to treatment in certain cases as a way to stimulate circulation and work on desensitization. However, due to their hypersensitivity, many people with CRPS/RSD have a significant fear of being touched by others, and this may also cause anxiety. In my own practice, I have found that patients with CRPS/RSD are most successful when they take an active role in their treatment and direct their care versus receiving passive treatments from therapists (such as massage, passive range of motion, etc.). I have found that intermittent massage has been beneficial for the myofascial pain that often accompanies CRPS/RSD due to the guarded posturing that many patients develop.

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SAVE THE DATE | Friday, September 8, 2006

A Comprehensive Review of CRPS — Dispelling the Myths and Looking at Emerging Treatment

RSDSA's third conference will take place at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. In addition to updated information on diagnosis and research, there will be presentations on dealing with insurance, family issues, and other topics for people who have CRPS/RSD and their families. Free for all RSDSA members.