Is There a Connection Between COPD and CRPS?

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How Are COPD and CRPS Connected?

Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) is a relatively rare form of chronic pain that develops after a trauma, stroke or a heart attack. Is it possible you could have a respiratory condition such as COPD and CRPS at the same time? Yes, in fact scientists are now listing COPD as one of the possible complications of CRPS.

CRPS often affects a leg or arm and it is very intense — out of proportion to the severity of the initial injury or trauma. CRPS is broadly classified into type I (when no nerve lesion can be identified) and type II (when a nerve is damaged).

Research

A 2012 review of studies published in *Neuroscience and Medicine* indicates that CRPS can potentially affect any tissue, organ or system in the body. For example, CRPS was associated with cardio-vascular complications, as well as symptoms and conditions affecting the lungs, muscles, joints and bones, hormones, skin, and urinary and digestive tracts.

In terms of respiratory complications linked with CRPS, this study showed that 15.5 percent of patients with CRPS complained of shortness of breath, which was due to lung atelectasias, low lung volume and COPD. Lung tests also revealed restrictive lung diseases in some cases.

Managing COPD and CRPS

Get the right diagnosis. The diagnosis of CRPS is typically based on physical examination and medical history, although your doctor may order some tests (i.e. bone scans, X-rays, MRI, sympathetic nervous system tests) to rule out other conditions.

The earlier the disease is diagnosed, the faster you will respond and improve with therapy.

Get the right treatment. A variety of therapies can be useful to manage CRPS; for example, heat and cold applications can help with pain and swelling. A physiotherapist can recommend an individualized exercise plan just for you, with a goal to decrease pain and improve range of motion and the strength of the affected limb.

Biofeedback techniques can help as well, because they will help you to become more aware of your body and how to relax it and relive the pain.

Two therapies involving electrical impulses (targeting nerve endings and spinal cord to provide pain relief) are used for CRPS: transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) and spinal cord stimulation. Your doctor may also prescribe painkillers (either over the counter or stronger, prescription drugs), anti-depressants, anticonvulsants or corticosteroids.

You will also want to:

- **Avoid exposure to the cold and intense emotional stress.** These trigger both COPD and CRPS symptoms. To manage CRPS recurrences, a doctor may recommend small doses of antidepressants or other medications.
- **Take care of yourself physically and mentally.** Try to maintain normal daily activities, including work, staying connected with friends and family, and pursuing hobbies. Pace yourself and get the rest you need. All these simple measures will help your COPD symptoms as well.
- **Consider prevention methods.** Some studies show taking vitamin C after a wrist fracture, and getting out of bed and moving as soon as possible after a stroke, are two things that can reduce the risk of developing CRPS.