

Hazel - Complex Regional Pain Success Story

About 7 years ago I had Carpal Tunnel in my right hand. After having the surgery my hand started to swell and the burning was intense. I went back to the hospital and I was diagnosed as having Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS). It was very alarming as I had never heard of this condition before. I was told at that time “use it or lose it” and was advised to get intensive physiotherapy. Over a period of about 6 months I had intensive physiotherapy but the condition did not seem to improve nor was it getting worse.

A referral was made to a Pain Clinic and I had a few nerve blocks carried. What I did find that stress did not help. This condition was totally new to me and even although I read about it I still did not really understand the condition fully. Although I was aware that stress did not help, as far as I was concerned there was a problem with my hand. Over a few years I was in and out of hospital having physiotherapy and stellate ganglion blocks which helped for short periods of time. I would get small windows of relief so I could get the limb moving. My hand and wrist always felt stiff and the burning would flare up periodically.

Three years ago I was in part time work and a light fitting fell, hitting me on the shoulder and neck region; this flared up my CRPS. My hand was more swollen and the burning was intense. I had been managing the pain before this flare up but it started to worsen. I went back to the anaesthetist and had a few more stellate ganglion blocks. He recommended intense physiotherapy.

I attended physiotherapy for 18 months. During this time I was also referred for Hydrotherapy and I started to notice a huge difference in my condition. I set up a mirror so that several times a day I would make various movements with my unaffected left hand. This included moving and rotating the wrist and clenching a fist. I got cut out pictures from magazines and then I would determine whether it was the right hand or the left hand.

In May 2011 I think that the biggest help of all was when I got my Belgian Shepherd. Night after night I would stroke her with my right hand not hard but just gentle movements. Going out for walks with her and training her gave me a purpose for staying active; it also encouraged me to move my limb. This time I was determined to push through the pain boundaries. Around about this time I also changed my whole way of thinking. Whereas before I thought there must be some kind of damage in the hand, I now believed had a perfectly good limb and I was not prepared to lose it.

When I attended my neurologist he advised that I had to break through this pain barrier and read through information on chronic pain.

My interpretation of CRPS now is that the problems are to do with the brain and mind, not the arm or hand (which I had thought for a long time). The condition is powerful thing but

my story proves that with the correct support from the medical experts and support, CRPS can be beaten.

My advice to people who have this debilitating condition would be keep an open mind about what is causing it, to take up some form of physical activity, keep stress levels down, and try a new hobby to occupy the mind so distracting the pain.

I had to work really hard to improve my symptoms. I don't think this would have been possible without a proper understanding of the condition, all the work I put in to it, and the support of my physiotherapist.

I know have no pain at all in my right hand and can use it to do anything I want even though I had symptoms for seven years.

I do hope this helps people with CRPS have some hope that their symptoms can improve.