

## Appendix 5 Desensitisation

### General patient information on therapy to help sensations to the skin feel more normal\*

This is a therapy known as desensitisation.

The goal of these activities is to make sensations to the skin of the body area affected by complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) feel more normal. The aim is to re-educate the sensory system, part of which involves areas of the brain.

#### General instructions

Many of these activities involve touch, and are suitable for the upper limbs (arms and hands) and lower limbs (legs and feet), although some are specific to one limb as indicated. These activities can be done on a daily basis and incorporated into your normal routine. Where possible, feel the sensation on a part of your body not affected by CRPS first, and remember how that normal sensation felt when then applying to the affected area.

#### Regular practice: little and often

Regular practice of these activities will increase the benefit. A short period of desensitisation (even 1–2 minutes) as many times as possible throughout the day is recommended. It might be helpful to set aside particular times during the day to perform them. A quiet, relaxed environment with few distractions will help you to concentrate on the task.

As you progress you may find other activities within your daily routine in which to incorporate these principles.

#### Discomfort

It is usual for these activities to be uncomfortable and somewhat painful while doing them and shortly afterwards. You may find that there are certain activities that you are unable to tolerate. Choose one that you feel comfortable with and gradually progress to others as you are able to do so. If you experience intolerable pain and discomfort, then stop that activity and find one that is more tolerable.

#### Concentration is important

To help normalise the system, it is important that you concentrate on the quality of the sensation. This can be done by first undertaking the activity on a limb unaffected by CRPS. Concentrate on how this sensation feels, remember it and then undertake the activity on the affected area, while looking at it and thinking about it.

---

\* Adapted from a leaflet provided by experts at the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases, with permission.