

WHETHER YOU ARE IN A FORMAL THERAPY program or not, a home program can make a great difference in your condition. While in a structured therapy program you only have two to three hours per week with your therapist, the other 165 hours are under your control. The idea of setting up a home program seems easy, knowing that you have so many hours available, but time surprisingly slips away, things get in the way, and before you know it, it has been three or four days since you did your home program.

Sometimes pain, fear of pain, or even anticipation of pain can deter even the best of intentions. In efforts to treat the immediate condition, therapists might often focus exclusively on the primary area. However, the rest of your body has also been affected by CRPS, because your other extremities have been bearing the load of carrying, walking, and moving. Necks, shoulders, low backs, and hips often bear the brunt of the load. Therefore, a home program should also address these areas.

By addressing these secondary areas, you may find less pain and more confidence to continue your efforts in the affected extremities.

Given these factors, here are a few suggestions that might help you get started. You may need to modify this list, based on your abilities.

1. Take a deep breath—making it last for a count of 4. Then exhale for a count of 8. Repeat a few times just to relax.
2. Let your head bend to the right, allowing gravity to slowly stretch the

head further to the side. Slowly return to upright, and repeat to the other side.

3. Roll your shoulders in a circle 5 times backwards, then 5 times forwards.
4. Lying on your back, bring one knee toward your chest, using your hand(s)



## The Possibilities of a Home Program

*By Anita Davis, PT, MSM, CA-AAPM, CEASII*

Disclaimer: If you are a patient, consult with your physician about treatment options that might be appropriate for your condition. Consulting with your physician is recommended prior to beginning any exercise program. This article is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Never disregard professional medical advice, or delay in seeking it, because of something you have read. The author disclaims any liability whatsoever for any claims or damages from this information. Although pain may accompany any movement, if you experience a worsening of your symptoms, stop and consult your medical professional. If you think you may have a medical emergency call your physician or 911 immediately.

to help add to the stretch, if you can. Pause and hold while taking another relaxing breath.

In order to progress to other activities with the affected areas, there must be some degree of tolerance to movement and touch. If you have not already started a desensitization program, now is the time. This involves touching the affected area with soft textures, like silk, and then progressing to more course textures, like cotton, terrycloth, and burlap. To be successful, the activity

must be repeated for 3 to 5 minutes, 3 to 5 times a day. Some resources suggest hourly self-treatment for the best results.

If those went well, then you can try a few of these.

For upper extremity involvement:

1. Sit at a table with your arms resting on top. Slide your arm forward as you reach with the shoulder, elbow, and even let the fingers stretch in the reach. Pause and slide the arm back to your starting position. This will allow movement in the whole arm that may have gotten stiff.
2. Prop your arm on the table, or with pillows in your lap, and hold the

hand up so you can watch the movement. Bend the wrist forward and backward. Slowly repeat the motion to lubricate the joint surfaces and allow the muscles to learn the movement again. It may even be helpful to let the other hand move at the same time.

3. Stand at a wall with a tennis ball or other ball. Place the ball on the wall and let the palm of your affected hand rest on the ball.

Now “palm” the ball on the wall, like rolling up a ball of play dough. You can vary the amount of pressure you use on the ball.

For lower extremity involvement:

1. Sit in a chair with your foot on the floor. Slide your foot forward and backward, keeping your foot in contact with the ground as much as possible. This allows you to move the ankle.

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Make sure not to talk with overbearing emphasis, like C-3PO from *Star Wars*, when you use Dragon, because it's built to understand your natural patterns of talking. You need to talk without emotion, but in full phrases and even sentences.

Definitely do the tutorial, which shows, for instance, how to tell Dragon to "Go to sleep," and then say, "Wake up," to begin dictating again. Dragon types faster than most fingers can, up to 160 words per minute. Dragon's performance can handle multisyllabic words. In a flash, it even spelled "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious."

You'll need to speak as clearly as possible to achieve the desired effect. Dragon often confuses prepositions and drops the "ed" endings of verbs. Dragon does take some effort to master. You need to make sure the microphone is in the proper position because if it is too close to your mouth, Dragon sometimes spells "the" when you breathe.

You must spend the time to learn the proper commands. If you don't review Dragon's command words before using the program, you'll be surprised by what the program will do when you think you are asking for something easy. Remember this is a computer and software. The more you train it, the more vocabulary words you add, and the more you correct mistakes, the better the program will work interpret your speech.

Dragon™ NaturallySpeaking® 9 Preferred's support offerings are extensive, and include an online knowledge base and user forums. There is also a built-in tutorial and performance assistant. Despite Dragon's learning curve, no other software lets you ignore the keyboard so much, both to type while you talk as well as to command your web browser. If you learn and train this program carefully, it will allow you to run your computer verbally.

### Windows® Vista™

Windows® Vista™ has a voice dictation program built in. This voice dictation program uses discrete speech (one word at a time). If you pause a lot, it may work better than the continuous speech programs such as Dragon™ NaturallySpeaking®.

Vista dictation has a few drawbacks, and you should really consider changing or upgrading to the full program. First, sometimes when you go to correct a word, instead of going to that word and bringing up on the list, it just types the word correctly followed by the word, instead of allowing you to spell out the word. Second, when you want to correct something you dictated, or when it doesn't understand what you said, you tell the program to spell it and this program will put a better spelling in. Third, Vista dictation doesn't have an efficient way to train new vocabulary words.

### Other Options

You can get voice-activated programs for free at Free Downloads Center ([http://www.freedownloadscenter.com/Search/voice\\_recognition.html](http://www.freedownloadscenter.com/Search/voice_recognition.html)), but they will not be as advanced as Dragon™ NaturallySpeaking® or the Windows® Vista™ program.

Living with CRPS takes "chutzpah," or courage and spunk. We often need to find unusual solutions to our challenges. For many of us, the computer and Internet enlarge and enrich our lives, so we need to use voice dictation software and assistive hardware devices for the keyboard and mouse. There are many other devices that I could not cover here, but you can search the Internet for a product that meets your specific needs. ■

*\*These prices are from Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>).*

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2. Stand with the affected foot on a stool or step. Hold on to furniture or the wall for support. Slowly lean forward, shifting your weight into the forward foot on the step. This facilitates mobility and gradual exposure to weight bearing that you need for walking.
3. Stand between two work surfaces, such as a kitchen counter and a table. One surface will be on your right, the other on your left. Prepare a stack of books, canned goods, or other household items on one surface. Keep both feet on the ground, facing forward. Now move the items from one surface to the other. This exposes the leg to the feeling of weight shifting from side to side with modified weight levels.

Each of these should be repeated for a timed duration of 3 to 5 minutes, to allow the body to accommodate and learn the motion. Frequently performing these tasks is more helpful than occasionally performing them. Less frequent exposure to these types of activities only "confuses" the nervous system, and tends to get interpreted as a flare-up. Consistency is essential. Once you see a little improvement, your confidence will increase, and you will agree that possibilities do exist with a home program. ■

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*Anita Davis, PT, MSM, CA-AAPM, CEASII, is a physical therapist at a comprehensive pain rehabilitation program at Brooks Health System in Jacksonville, Florida. She has been practicing for over 20 years. She has presented on CRPS to various groups, including the State Occupational Nurses Association in Florida..*