

Mirror Box Therapy

By James Doulgeris

Is Mirror Box Therapy effective in treating CRPS? That depends on whether it is isolated to a single limb like a hand or foot, whether you are receptive to believing it will work, and to putting in the work to make it work.

Mirror box therapy is a treatment technique that has been used to manage complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS), also known as reflex sympathetic dystrophy (RSD). While it has shown promise in some cases, the effectiveness of mirror box therapy in treating CRPS varies widely. It can be very effective on one patient and completely ineffective on another with the same symptoms.

Mirror box therapy involves using a specially designed box with mirrors to create a visual illusion. By placing the unaffected limb in front of the mirror and the affected limb behind the mirror, you see a reflection of your unaffected limb in place of the affected limb. This visual feedback aims to retrain the brain's perception that your affected limb is now healthy, reducing pain and other symptoms associated with CRPS.

Some studies and anecdotal evidence have reported positive outcomes with mirror box therapy, including reduced pain intensity and improvements in function and range of motion. The therapy may help to alleviate pain, decrease swelling, and improve motor function in some patients.

However, it's important to note that the effectiveness of mirror box therapy can vary depending on the individual, the severity and duration of CRPS, and other factors including, and in particular, whether the patient is willing to accept the premise that the brain can be retrained and that the pain in the affected limb is perceived and not real. It is often used as part of a multidisciplinary approach that includes other treatments such as physical therapy, medication, and psychological support.

If you are considering mirror box therapy for CRPS, it is essential to consult with healthcare professionals including a physical therapist, pain specialist and psychologist, each of whom can assess your specific condition and provide appropriate guidance and recommendations based on the latest research and clinical experience.

There is empirical evidence indicating that mirror box therapy can work, especially in patients who are unresponsive to other therapies. Here are a few examples:

1. A study published in the journal *Pain Medicine* in 2012 examined the effectiveness of mirror therapy in 38 individuals with CRPS. The results showed that mirror therapy significantly reduced pain and improved range of motion in the affected limb compared to a control group.
2. In a case report published in the *Journal of Hand Therapy* in 2014, mirror therapy was used to treat a patient with CRPS affecting the hand. The therapy resulted in reduced pain, improved range of motion, and increased function in the affected hand.
3. Another case study published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Pain* in 2017 described a patient with CRPS in the lower limb who underwent mirror therapy. The treatment led to reduced pain, improved mobility, and enhanced daily functioning.

While these examples highlight positive outcomes, it's important to recognize that positive responses to mirror box therapy tend to be the exception rather than the rule except with patients supported with an experienced team of professionals. Some people may experience significant pain reduction and functional improvements, while others may see more modest benefits or no significant changes. The success of mirror therapy depends on various factors such as the patient's specific condition, the stage of CRPS, their overall treatment plan and their personal buy-in to the premise.

In summary, it is crucial to work with healthcare professionals who can assess your specific situation, guide you through the therapy, and monitor your progress to optimize the chances of success.