

Cosmetic Options



Wearing a prosthesis can present enough day to day irritations and niggles that the last thing needed is to attract other peoples attention to the damn thing. So what can be done to make it less noticeable? This article looks at the available options for the appearance, often called the cosmesis, of leg prostheses.

The most commonly used is the soft cover with stockings. These are the standard method in Australia, and are fitted to prostheses provided through the state ALS's. It consists of a lightweight foam block which is shaped to match the profile of the anatomical limb. This is then covered with a stocking. It is a cheap and effective method of providing an appearance which will at least not attract attention, but won't stand up to much more than a passing glance. They have a uniform

colour and no attempt to match skin surface definition or texture. They also leave the top of the prosthesis exposed and make no attempt to disguise the transition from prosthesis to body.

For everyday use they are quite durable and as the stockings are cheap and easy to change they can be maintained easily. However they do not stand up to rough use and will tear if snagged, for example if walking through scrub wearing shorts.

The next option is the pre-made cover, usually silicon or vinyl. These are a mid-range option, which are fitted over the same type of foam as described before. They are available in a wider range of colours which are chosen from swatches and have differing levels of surface detail. They can also be brought right to the edge of the prosthesis so make the prosthesis-limb

transition a bit less noticeable. Together with the range of colours they do improve the cosmesis but at a cost. They are not likely to be funded by ALS's though insurance companies may pay for them.

Their disadvantage is that they are not particularly durable and not practical to repair, so one snag and your dough is blown!

A secondary advantage is that they offer some waterproofing effect. Some people opt to use them for this reason rather than for their appearance.

The top of the cosmetic range is the custom-made silicon cover, possibly most famously seen on Heather Mills. These are made to match each individual's skin. The amount of detailing depends on how much you want to spend, but the results can be incredible. They are time consuming and expensive though, with the most



Cosmetic Options

elaborate costing the same as a half-decent car. They are only available privately and mainly overseas. They still don't change colour when you do, so watch out for the holiday tan.

The final option is to go commando! Increasingly, many people are having no covers on their prosthesis. This practice started among young men happy to show off their advanced componentry, but is now common right across the amputee community. The motivation varies but it certainly indicates that fewer and fewer people see any stigma in being an amputee.

Geoff Hill

First Published 2011
© Limbs 4 Life Inc.

www.limbs4life.org.au
1300 78 2231