

Fact Sheet #11

How to care for your residual limb following an amputation



What is post-operative stump care?

Post-operative care is the medical care that you receive immediately following a surgical procedure. Usually the type of post-operative care will depend on the type of surgery you have had. In the case of an amputation, this will most likely include wound care and pain management.

Why post-operative care is important?

Post-operative care is very important because it is the type of care that helps with the healing process. If you experience any pain, you need to speak to your healthcare providers immediately.

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Who are the people that will help you with your post-operative limb care?

Usually you will be supported by the following healthcare professionals:

- Nursing staff
- Doctors
- Physiotherapists
- Occupational Therapists

What you can do to assist with your post-operative healing? Make sure you follow the instructions of the medical team looking after your care. If you are unsure of something make sure to ask questions of your medical team. In addition, you should also ensure that you have a healthy diet, are getting the right amount of sleep and also exercising.

a) Maintain a healthy diet

Make sure you eat the right food, as eating nutritious meals will help with your healing process. If you have diabetes, make sure you control your glucose levels.

b) Sleeping

Getting the right amount of rest and sleep is important to help with the healing process. It is always good to have family and friends come to visit, especially when you are in hospital, but if you are feeling tired and need to rest let them know that you are still recovering and need some additional quiet time to sleep.

c) Exercise

Your physiotherapist may give you some gentle exercises while you are recovering. It is important that you do these exercises and follow the instructions that the Physiotherapist gave you.

What are the things that you should never do?

Keeping your knee bent for an extended period of time can lead to muscle shortening (contracture), which is a poor outcome for rehabilitation and prosthetic use. Ways to avoid this are:

- Do not place a towel underneath your amputated limb/ stump.
- Do not place a pillow underneath your amputated limb/ stump.
- Do not hang your leg over the side of the bed.
- If you are using a wheelchair make sure you have a stump-rest fitted to the chair (your Occupational Therapist can help to arrange a stump-rest for you).
- Do not hang your stump over the edge of the wheelchair.



Removal Rigid Dressing (RRD)

Most below knee amputees are fitted with what is known as Removable Rigid Dressing (RRD). This dressing is like a helmet and is usually made for you by a Prosthetist. The purpose of the RRD is to:

- Protect your stump from any bumps or knocks while it is healing.
- Help with the moulding or shaping of the stump.
- Assist with the swelling of the stump.

An RRD should never cause you pain. It should feel firm but not too tight. If you begin to experience pain following the fitting of your RRD, speak to your healthcare provider immediately.

Caring for your 'good' leg

Following an amputation it is extremely important that you monitor and check your 'good' leg and foot every day. If you have trouble seeing your foot, use a hand mirror to check for any problem areas on your foot.

Pay close attention to the skin colour of your good leg and report any changes immediately to your healthcare provider or doctor.

If you are a bilateral (double) amputee, it is really important that you continue to check your limbs (stumps) for any changes. Report any changes to your skin to your Prosthetist or Doctor immediately.

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