

Fact Sheet #2

What to expect following amputation



Having an amputation is a life changing event. You will be faced with challenges and need to learn new ways of doing things. What happens after amputation and how long it all takes to recover is different for everyone and will depend on a number of different things.

This Fact Sheet explores the different phases following amputation and helps you to think about the pathways ahead of you.

The recovery time following amputation is different for everyone and can depend on a number of different factors, including:

- Your general health
- How quickly your amputation wound heals
- Whether you will use a prosthesis or not
- Whether you have a place or home to go to that is safe and accessible for you
- How easily you can get help and continue your rehabilitation outside the hospital

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What are the phases after amputation?

After amputation the care you receive can usually be divided into three separate phases but these phases will all overlap, it's just easier to talk about them this way to help you to understand the process.

1. Acute Care Phase: This is the time in hospital when you have the amputation surgery.

The important things at this stage are good pain relief, healing of your wound and preparation for the future.

Things you might do at this time include:

- Letting the nurses and doctors know about any pain you experience so they can provide appropriate pain relief.
- Keeping your residual limb elevated to help with pain and to avoid swelling.
- Asking for a Removable Rigid Dressing (RRD) and/or something to help control the swelling around your amputation to protect it from knocks, if you have had a below-knee amputation.

Staff will help you to become more independent. This can include moving in bed and between the bed and a chair, and they may also help you with exercises for your arms and legs.

Start thinking about how life will be once you can get up and be mobile again.

In some cases your rehabilitation may include in-patient, home-based and out-patient programs. Some people may go direct from acute care to a home-based or ambulatory program. This means that you will be discharged from hospital, receive care and treatment at home and on occasions return to rehabilitation for specific treatment such as physiotherapy or prosthetic treatment.

2. Rehabilitation Phase: This is the time in a rehabilitation facility where a multi-disciplinary team will start caring for you.

The important things at this stage are learning to manage any pain and seeking help if you need it as well as beginning to think about what you need to do to increase your mobility and independence levels.

Things you might do at this time include:

- Getting strong and healthy
- Increasing your levels of exercise to help with your general fitness and ability to move around
- Learning new ways of doing things so that you can be safe and independent
- Understanding how to take care of your new condition

Staff will help you so that you can look after yourself and get any help you may need to be safe, healthy and happy. It is important that you ask lots of questions about the things you don't understand. Make sure you try things (with the assistance of your therapist) before you decide you can or can't do them yourself. Don't forget about your mental health, it is just as important as your physical health.

3. Outpatient Care Phase: This is the time when you have returned home but still continue to attend the rehabilitation facility to work on your health care.

Things you might do at this time include:

- Continuing working on your health and fitness
- Increasing and working on the skills you learnt while you were in hospital
- Setting new goals and skills with your therapist and working on those goals together

Once you leave rehabilitation you will still need help from some of the therapists who have worked with you. Continue to discuss your needs with your therapist. Think about returning to work and your long term funding for the things you need to help you manage your life independently. Ask for assistance from your therapists while you are still an outpatient, this will assist you to be sure that you have everything you need prior to being discharged.

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