

## Fact Sheet #6

### What to expect when trying a lower limb prosthesis



During your rehabilitation period a lot of time will be spent considering whether the use of a prosthesis will help you to regain your mobility and independence.

This Fact Sheet explains prosthetics and the process of fitting your first prosthetic limb.

#### **What is a prosthesis?**

A prosthesis is an artificial limb which is made to replace the limb you have lost. There are a number of things to think about when using a prosthesis after a lower limb amputation. These include:

- The amount of energy you will use driving the leg.
- How good your balance is.
- How good your general health and muscle control is.
- The amount of pressure that will be placed on your stump (residual limb) and amputation wound.

Not everyone will use a prosthesis or find one helpful. However, if you can use a prosthesis, there are lots of different things to think about to ensure that the prosthesis can best work for you.

Your Prosthetist (the health professional who makes the prosthesis fit and function well) will work with you to decide what type of prosthesis will be the best type for you.

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## How do you get your first prosthesis?

The steps and stages of trying a prosthesis are:

- You meet your Prosthetist to discuss your goals and what you want the prosthesis to help you do. When meeting with your Prosthetist you should think about:
  - How the prosthesis looks
  - The weight of the prosthesis
  - The things in your life that you want to achieve
- Your Prosthetist will help to shape the stump and reduce any swelling so that your first prosthesis (also called an interim-prosthesis) will fit for as long as possible.
- Once your wound is healed and the stump shape is workable, lots of measurements will be taken so that your prosthesis can be made. This usually involves taking a plaster cast of your stump, but it may also be done using a digital scanner or another piece of technology.
- Your Prosthetist will then take a few days to get your first prosthesis ready for you to use.
- Your Prosthetist and Physiotherapist will work with you to try on your prosthesis and assess how well it fits, if it is comfortable or if it is causing any pressure or pain.
- If everything is alright, you will slowly use the prosthesis more frequently and it will be adjusted as your stump and skills change.
- After a lower limb amputation you might take a few steps while leaning on parallel bars, then you might try using the prosthesis with a walking frame, then with crutches or a walking stick and then with little or no supports.

It takes time for your skin to get used to the pressure of a prosthesis. Even if you are able to use the prosthesis safely and quickly, you will need to take your time so that your skin and amputation wound doesn't get damaged. Your care team will give your information and advice about this.

## How does your prosthesis stay on?

There are different ways of holding a prosthesis on to your stump - these are called 'suspension methods'. Your

Prosthetist will work with you to decide the best method for you. Suspension methods can depend on a number of different factors, including:

- The level of your amputation.
- The shape of your limb.
- Your skin.
- How heavy your prosthesis will be.
- What activities you will be doing.
- Your ability to correctly put it on.

### **Suspension methods include:**

**Straps.** Some prostheses are held on with a strap system, there are lots of different options depending on the amputation level and the shape of your body.

**Anatomical.** Sometimes your Prosthetist can make the prosthesis one that you can pull on without hurting yourself. Once it is on, it suspends over your bones around your knee.

**Sleeve.** For some people with a below knee amputation, a sleeve which fits over the prosthesis socket at one end and onto your skin at the other can be used to hold the prosthesis on. This sleeve is sometimes used in addition to other types of suspension, particularly when people are doing activities where they need to be extra sure the prosthesis won't come off.

**Pin.** There are certain types of socks and liners (usually made of silicone or gel) that you can roll onto your stump which have a pin in the end. The pin at the end of the liner locks into the prosthesis to hold it on.

**Vacuum.** Vacuum systems are used to create an air seal against the socket. The valve in the socket lets the air out but will not let the air back in.

**Suction.** It might be possible to have the socket of your prosthesis directly against your skin. This holds the prosthesis on with a really tight fit and an air valve. This process usually requires your stump to be stable and no longer changing shape or size.

Getting used to using a prosthesis takes time. Eventually you will learn to understand what suspension method and type of prosthesis works best for you. To get the best outcome, talk to your prosthetist, ask questions if you don't understand something, and seek more information if something doesn't make sense.

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