Prosthetics Information Handbook

For lower limb amputees
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1. What to expect when visiting our centre

During your appointment

Regular clinic appointments are scheduled with our Medical and Prosthetic staff. These help to give a picture of your overall health, including your prosthetic care. If you have a prosthetic issue you will see your Prosthetist who will assess the problem and carry out any work required. This may involve adjustments or repairs which can take time, so it is advised that you plan your day around your visit.

Often you will be observed walking to check alignment of the prosthesis. To make observation easier it is recommended you bring shorts to wear during your visit.

Your Prosthetist

During your appointment it is important to talk with your Prosthetist. Your Prosthetist is there to listen to your requirements and will be able to gather information about your hobbies, family and social interests, which can be used in providing the most appropriate prosthetic treatment.

You will see your Prosthetist regularly for the rest of your life if you use a prosthesis so it is important that you share any questions or concerns with your Prosthetist regarding your treatment.

As your prosthesis wears out after a period of time you will need repairs done. When it has worn out completely a replacement will be made.

Rehabilitation Consultant

You will have appointments with a doctor that specialises in Amputee Rehabilitation. In the first year you will see the doctor as often as needed and then at least once a year in the future to monitor your health and prosthesis. Speak to them about any concerns you have with your health.
Physiotherapy

In order to use your prosthetic limb safely and efficiently you will require physiotherapy. This may take place at the centre or may continue in your local area.

The Physiotherapist’s initial role is to ensure you have a safe mobility option for when you are not wearing a prosthesis. This is most commonly a wheelchair and it is part of their role to make recommendations about this.

A Physiotherapist will be involved in your rehabilitation. They will assist with mobility and functional goals.

The Physiotherapists can also help you get back to your recreational activities, such as swimming, bike riding, golf etc.

Your treatment plan is individualised for you. It will include how to put your leg on and off safely, how to transfer with the prosthesis, how to get up off the floor if you have fallen and walking practice.

It will also include specific stretching, strengthening and balance exercises.

If you are a new amputee, your prosthetic limb will be kept in the department until you are able to safely use it unsupervised.
Occupational Therapy

Occupational Therapy assists you to be independent with functional tasks that are relevant to you in your daily living. This may include domestic and community tasks as well as work, leisure and school activities. By engaging in purposeful tasks, patients develop confidence and independence, which will improve their health and wellbeing.

Treatment may include providing advice on compensatory strategies, using adaptive aids and education on how to use the prosthesis during functional tasks. Often treatment is provided in the most appropriate setting (e.g. home or work) to realistically assess function.

Recommendations can be made for ongoing treatment, provision of specialist equipment or environmental modifications.
2. Rigid Removable Dressing (RRD) and shrinker sock management

Swelling in your stump must be minimised before a prosthesis can be made for you.

This is done by fitting an RRD that is moulded to the shape of your stump. This will protect your stump, reduce and limit oedema (swelling) and desensitise your residual limb to decrease pain and tenderness.

A shrinker is an elasticised sock that provides compression to the stump to help reduce the swelling. It is usually fitted once your scar has healed sufficiently and can be worn in conjunction with an RRD.

Your Prosthetist will instruct you on how to put on the RRD or shrinker and give you instructions on wearing duration.

If you have any questions please ask anyone in the team.
3. Residual limb care

Once your scar has healed, your residual limb should be washed daily to avoid skin irritations and infection. Chemical free soap and warm water are recommended.

Check your stump daily for skin breakdown or redness. When you take off your prosthesis, any redness that disappears after 10 minutes is normal, if the redness remains longer please notify your Prosthetist.

A newly fitted prosthesis should be worn initially for short periods. The wearing time increased each day depending upon individual situations. You should check your skin regularly for evidence of excess pressure after wearing your prosthesis.

Do exercises and stretches as directed by the team to prevent your knee and hip joint from getting contractures. Contractures occur when the muscles become tight and prevent you from straightening your joints normally. Contractures can cause problems in your prosthesis fit and make walking more difficult.
4. Socket fit

Prosthetic socks and liners must be applied carefully to avoid wrinkles.

Reductions in stump size can be accommodated by adding one or more prosthetic socks to keep the socket fit tight.

There may be periods of 'settling in' when you first put on your prosthesis for the day. Allow time for this before you consider adjusting your stump socks.

If your socket feels loose, try adding another sock to improve fit. Likewise, if it feels tight, try removing a sock if possible. If in doubt, ask your Prosthetist to check the fit.

Frequent adjustments are often required in the first year. If you put the prosthesis on and it is not comfortable, take it off and try again. Arrange a review appointment if the discomfort persists.

Common problems are rubs on the skin. This is caused from excessive movement or pressure inside the socket. It may be necessary for you to limit wearing the prosthesis until your skin recovers. Adjustments can be made by your Prosthetist to prevent further skin breakdowns.

Be mindful of your body weight. Increase in body weight changes your stump shape and affects how well your prosthesis fits. Conversely, a decrease in body weight may make your prosthesis loose.

Let your Prosthetist know if your weight has changed as adjustments may need to be made. Components are rated to particular weight limits and activity levels. It is important for your Prosthetist to know any changes so we can make sure that it is safe for you.
5. Looking after your prosthesis

Look after your prosthesis and keep it in good condition.

To keep it clean:

• Wash the inside of the liner and/or socket each day by wiping it with warm water and chemical free soap, then leave it to dry overnight.

• Avoid using detergents and do not put near the heater.

• Put on a clean sock on each day.

• Do not sleep with your prosthesis on.

• Do not leave your prosthesis in the car on hot days.

• Do not get your prosthesis wet or submerge it in water, as this can cause rust and damage the inner components. If this happens try to dry it out and organise a review with your Prosthetist.

You should return at least once a year for an appointment to get your prosthesis components checked. Like your car, a prosthesis needs regular maintenance to keep it working well so make sure you have a review every year.

Do not adjust the prosthesis yourself as your Prosthetist finely tunes it to suit your walking. Any alteration will impact on your ability to walk safely and efficiently.

If you have any concerns about the fit, alignment or condition of the prosthesis, please contact your Prosthetist immediately.
6. Care for your other limb

It is important to check your foot every day for a change in skin colour, skin breakdown, callouses and any other changes. Diabetic patients and those with Peripheral Vascular Disease need to be extra careful.

Wash feet daily in warm, mild soapy water. Dry your feet carefully, especially between your toes.

Wear appropriate and comfortable footwear.

Have your toenails cut regularly by a Podiatrist (for diabetics).

Speak to the Rehabilitation Consultant if you develop foot, ankle or knee pain.

If you are concerned about the condition of your remaining limb contact your GP.
7. Changing your shoes

When your prosthesis is fitted it is adjusted for your footwear (A).

Changing to shoes that have a different heel height affects the way
the prosthesis works.

If you change to a lower heel your prosthesis will lean backwards
and you will feel like you’re walking uphill (B).

Or if you change to a higher heel your prosthesis will tip forward
and you will feel like you’re walking downhill (C).

Take care to select shoes that are a similar pitch if you wish to change
shoes.

Speak to your Prosthetist if you encounter any difficulties as your
prosthesis alignment may need to be changed.
8. Cosmetic covers

A cosmetic cover on your prosthesis is entirely your choice.

For your first (interim) prosthesis a cover is not generally fitted as easy access is needed to make adjustments over the initial few months.

Once you are wearing your prosthesis for longer periods and are prescribed your definitive prosthesis by the Rehabilitation Doctor it is possible to have a foam cover added, which is shaped to match your leg.

Stockings or silicone covers can be added to provide an improved cosmetic appearance. Alternatively, you can have colours and/or pictures applied to customise the look of your prosthesis.

Speak to your Prosthetist if you would like to know more about the options available to you.
9. Phantom sensation and phantom pain

Phantom sensation

This is the term given to any sensory phenomenon which is felt in an absent part of the limb. Research reports that over 80% of amputees experience some type of phantom sensation. This is a normal sensation to experience.

Sensations may include feeling like the foot is moving, sensation of touch, temperature, pressure and itchiness.

Sometimes amputees experience telescoping which is a feeling that the phantom limb is shortening over time*.

Phantom pain

This is the term used to describe pain in the absent part of the limb. Common types of pain felt include cramping, burning or squeezing pain*.

This experience varies in duration and intensity between individuals. Phantom pain may lessen over time with wearing your prosthesis.

Some patients find that wearing a shrinker or gentle stump massage can help when they experience phantom pain.

Keeping a diary is a useful way of detecting patterns or causes of pain. Learning relaxation techniques can be helpful. There are specific medications that can help reduce this type of pain*.

Stump pain

Is the term used to describe pain originating in your residual limb and can be caused due to damaged nerves near the site of the amputation*.

* Please discuss any of your concerns or questions with your Prosthetist and Rehabilitation Consultant.
10. Psychological wellbeing

Having an amputation is a life-changing experience. As you adjust to this change it is normal to have a range of emotional reactions that come and go.

Early on, you may have feelings of shock, disbelief, bewilderment and perhaps, even relief. Many people feel sadness and for some the sense of loss can be quite strong. You may experience anger about what has happened and frustration as you begin to adjust to doing things in different ways. You may have anxieties about how you will cope and about how your life will be from now on.

It is also possible, and natural, to experience reduced self-confidence and self-esteem. However, everybody is different and your reactions and concerns may not necessarily be any of the above.

You may find that how you feel about intimacy, sexuality and having sex is affected by amputation. A person’s sexuality is a unique part of who they are. It includes how they feel about their body, how they relate to others, and how they feel about physical contact with another person. Feelings or concerns about these aspects of yourself are natural following amputation.

Making sense of your own particular reactions and concerns can be difficult. They may feel very personal and you will have only your own experience to go by. It can help to talk to your partner if you are in a relationship, or to a close friend or family member. You may find it helpful to speak to one of the clinicians in your care.

If you wish to discuss your concerns in more detail your GP may refer you to a counsellor.

See list of useful organisations on page 15 for details of support networks.
11. Driving after amputation

Following an amputation your ability to drive may be affected. Driving is a demanding and complex activity, and a thorough assessment of your driving skills following an amputation may be required.

It is important that you do not resume driving before it is safe to do so.

It is also very important to notify your insurance company of your disability so that you are covered by their insurance policy. Failure to do so may void your insurance.

A medical report that provides information to VicRoads on the nature and extent of the disability is required, to ensure that there are no other medical concerns that may prevent you from driving safely. For further information contact VicRoads Medical Review on Ph: 13 11 71.

An Occupational Therapist Driver Assessor can evaluate your ability to drive a car safely. The aim of this assessment is to assist you to return to driving.

A gradual return to driving is recommended.

Disabled Motorists Australia is a not-for-profit group that can provide more information about driving with a disability.
http://home.vicnet.net.au/~dismotor/
12. General information

Speaking to other amputees

It is a good opportunity to talk to other amputees when you visit the centre to share experiences. There are a large range of patients that attend and it is likely that they will be able to offer advice or you may provide some to them.

We can provide a ‘buddy’ system at your request. This involves putting a new amputee in contact with an experienced amputee in similar circumstances to provide advice and support. Please speak to your Prosthetist for further information.

Remember to exercise

Exercise is an important aspect of maintaining both physical and mental health. Swimming and riding an exercise bike are great activities that provide good cardiovascular exercise without needing to fully weight bear on your stump. Refer to list of useful organisation for details of support groups.
13. Useful organisations

**Limbs 4 life**
Amputee support network providing information and support to amputees and their families while promoting an inclusive community.
Phone: 1300 782 231
Website: [www.limbs4life.org.au](http://www.limbs4life.org.au)
Email: info@limbs4life.org.au

**Beyond Blue**
For information regarding depression and anxiety.
Phone: 1300 224 636
Website: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

**Diabetes Australia**
For information and support for people with diabetes and those at risk. Their mission is to turn diabetes around through awareness, prevention, detection, management and cure.
Phone: 1300 136 588
Website: [www.diabetesaustralia.com.au](http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au)

**QUIT**
For information to quit smoking.
Phone: 13 78 48
Website: [www.quit.org.au](http://www.quit.org.au)

**SANE Australia**
For information regarding mental illness.
Phone: 1800 187 263
Website: [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)
Disability Sport & Recreation
This is the health-promoting peak organisation for the disability sport and recreation sector in Victoria.
Phone: 1800 234 648
Website: http://www.dsr.org.au

Caulfield Community Health Service (CCHS) - Healthy Living Centre
CCHS provides the following physical activity programs for adults including active, hydrotherapy and strength training programs.
Phone: 9076 6666
Website: http://www.alfredhealth.org.au/cchs

Amputee Golf Australia
Acts to promote golf as a form of physical and social rehabilitation.
Hosts an annual tournament open to all amputees.
Website: www.amputeegolfaustralia.com
Email: kenyonfamily@bigpond.com.au
14. Contacting the Prosthetics Department

By post:    Prosthetics Department
           Building 19 Caulfield Hospital
           260 Kooyong Rd
           Caulfield VIC 3162

In person:  A campus map is available online.

           Enter via Gate 1 and follow signs to the department for
           car parking. You must either display a disability permit
           or obtain a temporary pass from reception.

By phone:   (03) 9076 6261

By fax:     (03) 9076 6246

By email:   AHPO.admin@alfred.org.au

Online:     www.alfredhealth.org.au/caulfield/services/prosthetics/

Reception Hours of Service:
           8 am until 4.30pm
           Monday to Friday

A medical referral is required for any patient to access the service.