

Maintaining independence

Maintaining independence is one of the greatest challenges facing amputees. The following are some of the things which impact on our ability to remain independent

- Acceptance of our altered circumstances and remaining positive.
- Having sufficient sleep and adequate pain relief.
- Being mobile.
- Keeping fit.
- Being motivated to get out and about and be an effective, valued member of the community.
- Accessing good services, which meet our needs.

Acceptance and remaining positive:

The most important step that an individual takes is accepting what has occurred. You need to accept and come to terms with what has happened and how it may have altered or affected your life.

Acceptance of what has happened then frees you up to look at all the options and allows you to move forward in a positive frame of mind. Support of family & friends and the compassionate competent care of health professionals can facilitate this process.

Pain Relief, Sleep

Sleep is a great healer. A good sleep means that you are able to cope more effectively during the day. There are many factors, which affect sleep. Positioning is one of these, as often people find that the side of amputation is the side, which they generally sleep on, so habits of a lifetime need changing and this takes both time and perseverance. Just the simple act of rolling over in bed may take a considerable amount of manoeuvring initially until you devise the most effective comfortable way to do this. Pain management/relief is central to being able to relax sufficiently and sleep. Generally, pain relief is well managed in the acute hospital setting and often people are reluctant to seek medical treatment, on discharge, when pain persists whether it is limb or phantom pain. In the 4 main centres there are Pain Management Centres, which provide specialised assessment and treatment of this complex issue. There is a range of treatment options available including clinical reassessment to ensure that surgical intervention would not improve the situation e.g. in the event of a neuroma. Other options may include medication, massaging the effected limb, TENS (transcutaneous nerve stimulation) and acupuncture. To be able to take control of your pain places you back in charge of your life again. It is worth it

Being Mobile

Many of us have an independent streak, which we fiercely protect. When something like this affects your life, for a time you may be reliant on others in order to do what you want to do. If you are a new amputee, persevering with your physio exercises will improve your flexibility, strength, balance

and co-ordination. You may require a walking aid such as a frame, crutches or walking stick to move around safely. Some amputees find they need to use a wheelchair for part of the day. A well-fitting prosthesis is absolutely essential in maintaining function. If you cannot use your prosthesis, due to pain, pressure or skin problems, see your prosthetist immediately so that your mobility isn't compromised. Whatever your level of mobility, keeping mobile is the key to getting fit. This in turn improves our health and sense of wellbeing.

Amputee Visitor

Being visited by another amputee who was the same age gender, and level of amputation can be an extremely positive experience. When you see someone in a similar position working fulltime and getting on with life it provides a wonderful feeling of hope and knowledge that you are able to achieve. The need for information regarding what to expect is paramount and it is good to be able to share with someone who understands what is happening to you.

Prosthetists

Suddenly life becomes full of prosthetists and limb fittings. The Prosthetist who is willing to take the time and patience to be positive, encouraging and motivational provides such an excellent foundation for the rehabilitation process. When the knocks come and they will, the individual is better able to cope with them and know that everything is being done which can be done. Prosthetists have some amazing achievements when you think that they are attempting to match nature. Once fitted with a limb, the fit, function and aesthetics of that limb are the key to success in leading a normal life.

Supportive Well Informed Health Professionals

This is the phase when you begin dealing with the reality of events. The impact of learning to use an artificial limb and/or adjusting to altered mobility. Physiotherapists play an important role in the rehabilitative process particularly with lower limb amputees, through assessment, exercise regimes- assisting with the whole mobility process. Assessing the strength and range of movement of the residual limb, other limbs and trunk.

Developing an exercise regime whereby the individual is able to optimise their functioning providing walking aids to assist the rehabilitation process.

Assisting people to learn to effectively walk with their artificial limb.

Occupational Therapists provide:

Assessment of ADLs (activities of daily living) and advice on appropriate aids.

Home alterations, rails, bath and toilet seats etc

Back to work assessments through ACC

Driving assessments

Your doctor:

Your GP is an important part of your rehab team. He/she is often your first port of call when things go wrong. You may need his/her advice on healing, skin problems, medication and referrals to appropriate specialist providers.

Podiatrist:

For those amputees who have lost their limb due to vascular problems, it is absolutely essential to look after the remaining limb well. Changes in sensation often means that you can unknowingly damage your skin when cutting the toe nails. It is very important that you consult a podiatrist for ongoing treatment and foot maintenance.

Psychologists:

In the acute stages, Psychologists have an important role in helping some amputees come to terms with their limb loss and how it impacts on them and their family and friends. Some amputees are referred to a psychologist when they are in hospital. Once discharged from hospital, amputees can access a psychologist through their GP. Costs vary for these services, so make enquiries prior to your first appointment.

Pain Management Clinics:

Pain management clinics are staffed by specialist doctors, psychologists, physios and OTs who provide an interdisciplinary approach to managing pain.