

Self-Esteem: Isolation, Alienation, and Loneliness

by Ellen Winchell, PhD

Following my initial trauma and amputation, I often felt alone. Nobody else could have known what I was going through as I struggled to stay alive; no one else could have experienced the myriad of changes wrought by my amputation.

No one could have gone through my surgeries or the gruelling physical therapy sessions for me. No one could have relearned to walk for me, or make the emotional adjustments that I needed to get on with my life. Despite the fact that I was blessed with a loving family and friends who rooted for me and encouraged me, I felt isolated, burdened, and very much alone.

These feelings of isolation cause you to feel cut off from fellow human beings and those who care for you. Help yourself through this period of isolation by doing the following...

Recognise destructive self-talk.

What are you telling yourself about the way things are that is causing you to feel alienated from others? You may, for example, be distorting reality-making things worse than they really are. Correct yourself, then replace the negative self-talk with more positive thoughts and encouragement.

Recognise your human need for connection with others and reach out.

Examine what you feel you are lacking friendship, someone to care about you, intimacy, etc. Let your friends and family know what it is you need. Spend time with loved ones and those who care for you. Even if they do not know exactly what you are experiencing, their love and caring should nurture your spirit.

Join an amputee support group. The people in such groups can truly empathise with you. Contact with others who have limb loss can greatly decrease your feelings of isolation and provide invaluable support.

Do what nurtures you. You know what best soothes your soul. Stay active, Laugh, Play. Get plenty of rest. Do something to contribute to others.

Get support through professional counselling, if necessary.

While it is true that no one can step inside you and experience exactly what you are going through following the trauma of amputation, you need not feel alone. By opening yourself to the empathy and compassion of others, you will feel nurtured during this difficult time. So, reach out to others, and allow them to reach out to you.

