

Skin Care

One of the challenges of being an amputee is learning how to maintain skin integrity. In other words, learning how to look after your skin in all conditions. Some people have few such problems whilst others seem continually challenged. Most people, through trial and error develop both preventative measures and treatment, which suits them. These thoughts may be useful for those of you who are reasonably new amputees. There are many causes for skin breakdown. The following is not a complete list but some of the more common causes.

- A poorly fitting limb
- Heat and perspiration
- Loss or gain in weight affecting the fit of a limb
- Underlying debilitating condition eg. diabetes, peripheral vascular disease etc
- The aging process where the skin is not as elastic and takes a while to heal
- Abrasions through injury

What can you do about it?

Problems with skin on the residual limb can have quite an impact on mobility for some people, particularly if you need to take the limb off for any period of time. The following are some thoughts, which focus on how to retain skin integrity.

A critical aspect is ensuring that the limb you have fits well. If you are suffering from reddened areas and/or skin breakdowns an important first step is to visit your Prosthetist who can assess whether the skin breakdown is related to the fit of the limb. Many skin problems are able to be successfully resolved at this stage.

You may need to leave your limb off for a while to allow the area time to heal.

Ensuring that your residual limb is clean and dry. This is more a challenge when involved in sport or in hot weather. Taking a wet and dry towel and the powders and potions you usually use with you when you are involved in this activity so that you are able to take your limb off to wash and dry it, is important.

Applying parantal powder to the residual limb to reduce the perspiration. In New Zealand this is free from the Limb Centres.

Taking additional precautions eg. when you know that you may at risk to skin breakdown through an activity, apply a protective pad over the area which is most likely to be affected eg. blister block to prevent this occurring. In NZ these can be bought from the supermarket or chemist

If skin breakdowns persist for no apparent reason, another avenue, which could be explored is to be seen by a Dermatologist (skin specialist). There may be some underlying condition which causing the skin breakdowns and needs to be treated.

Tea Tree oil has been found to be effective for small superficial breaks in the skin which you may be reluctant to cover. It has antifungal and disinfectant qualities, which facilitates healing.

There is also a range of skin preparations, which sports people use to prevent chaffing and some of these may be beneficial. It is important to first trial a small amount of any untried skin product on your skin (not on your residual limb) and leave it for a day or two to see whether you have any reaction to it. If there is a skin reaction no further applications should be made.