

Rehab Post- Amputation Guide

Prosthetics and Orthotics Department



CS-PIER-0215
NOVEMBER 2024



saskhealthauthority.ca

Outpatient services—Amputee Clinic

Location of Clinic: _____

Clinic Hours: _____

Contact Number(s): _____

A team of rehabilitation professionals are available to help you. At your clinic appointment, you have time to talk about your goals and progress. You might find it helpful to make a list of things you would like to talk about.

To make an appointment, call the number above. Tell the clinic nurses if your address or telephone number changes.

What is next?

If you have just had an amputation, it is normal to have a lot of questions. We are here to help you through this change. This guide will include some general information about the limb loss journey. It complements the advice from your clinical team and is a resource for you to review later.

Next steps:

- **Have your doctor assessment and meet the team:** When you come to the clinic, you are seen by the clinic team including the rehab doctor, the clinic nurse, the prosthetist and the physical therapist. The doctor will review your healing and decide on the next steps.
- **Starting compression:** After the doctor's assessment, they may decide you are ready for compression to reduce the swelling in your limb. At this point, the prosthetics team measures and provides you with the appropriate compression devices. These devices may include a shrinker sock and/or a gel liner.



Donning prosthetic limb [1]

- **Prescribing a prosthetic limb:** It is important to remember that a prosthetic limb is not the best option for everyone. This option is a decision the rehab doctor makes with you and the clinic team. If a prosthetic limb is right for you, the team arranges the steps.
- **Initial assessment and shape capture:** At this appointment, the prosthetist: completes an initial assessment and shape capture. Remember to bring your gel liner. The prosthetist asks questions to get to know your situation and completes various tests. The prosthetist takes a temporary cast or scan of your limb which is used to create your initial prosthesis.

- **Initial (check) prosthesis fitting:** Your next appointment is to fit your initial prosthesis. We usually call this a “check socket.” This initial prosthesis is adjustable and allows us to work with the team to ensure good fit and function. It is common for individuals to go through more than one check socket in the first year as your limb will likely change a lot.
- **Physical therapy or occupational therapy:** When you first receive your new prosthesis, you are referred to a physical or occupational therapist to help you learn to use your new device. The therapist works with you to understand how to safely use your new prosthesis. You do not take it home with you right away. When you are ready, your therapist teaches you how to use your device at home.
- **Definitive prosthesis fitting:** Once you and your team are happy with the fit of your check socket, you move to a more permanent device. The prosthetist will copy your check socket and create a stronger, lighter and more durable device. At this stage, you can work with your prosthetist to choose a color or pattern that you would like on your device.

Caring for your physical health

Care of your other limb

It is very important to take good care of your other limb, especially if you have diabetes or other chronic illnesses.

- Wash your limb every evening with mild soap and lukewarm water. Dry your limb well, especially between the toes.
- Keep nails short and trimmed straight across.
- Wear a comfortable, sturdy and well fitting shoe that provides support. The front of your shoe should be wide and tall enough to easily fit all of your toes and avoid any rubbing or pressure. There should be no seams on the inside of the front of the shoe. Avoid sandals, high heels and slippers.
- Avoid tight fitting socks with elastic cuffs.
- Contact your doctor if swelling, redness or open sores appear on your limb.

Care of your amputated limb

Every night when you take off your prosthesis:

- Wash your residual limb using a mild, fragrance-free soap.
- Rinse thoroughly to remove all the soap.
- Gently pat your skin dry with a towel.
- If your skin is dry, use a small amount of moisturizing lotion.
- Do not apply any medicated ointments without the advice of your team.
- Once washing is complete, put on your shrinker sock.



Residual limb washing [2]



Residual limb drying [3]

Once you are wearing your prosthesis, your skin may get irritated. It is important to check your skin frequently. When you are checking your skin, look for any new or unusual redness and check for blisters or rashes. If these marks remain for 24 hours, stop using your device and call your prosthetist or doctor. Do not wear the prosthesis until you have talked to a health care team member. Keep the sores clean and covered with a clean bandage.

Exercise and walking

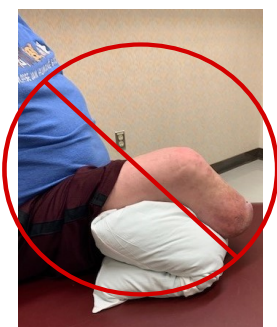
Regular movement is important to increase and maintain your strength and mobility. It will improve your stamina and energy and prevent your joints from becoming stiff. Wear your prosthesis for most (if not all) of your walking activities once you have it at home unless your team tells you something different. Walk frequently, but for short periods of time. Rest when you are tired. Your tolerance and strength will slowly improve with time and practice. Overtiring yourself or not practicing at all slows down your progress.

Prevention of contractures

A contracture is stiffness and loss of movement of the joints and muscles. Contractures can affect walking and impact prosthetic fitting. Work to maintain full motion in all of your joints as much as possible. Some recommendations include:

- Do not put pillows under your knees or thighs when lying or sitting.
- Do not lie with your hips and knees bent for a long period of time.
- Do not sit with your legs crossed for a long period of time.
- Do not sit in one position for a long period of time. Move or stretch from time to time.
- Keep your entire affected limb supported on a surface at all times. Keep your knee straight when you are sitting for any length of time.

Spend at least 20 minutes a day lying on your stomach with your head turned towards your non-affected leg. Make sure that your hips and shoulders are flat on the bed. You may find putting a small pillow under your stomach or lower chest is comfortable.



Amputee positioning A [4]



Amputee positioning B [5]

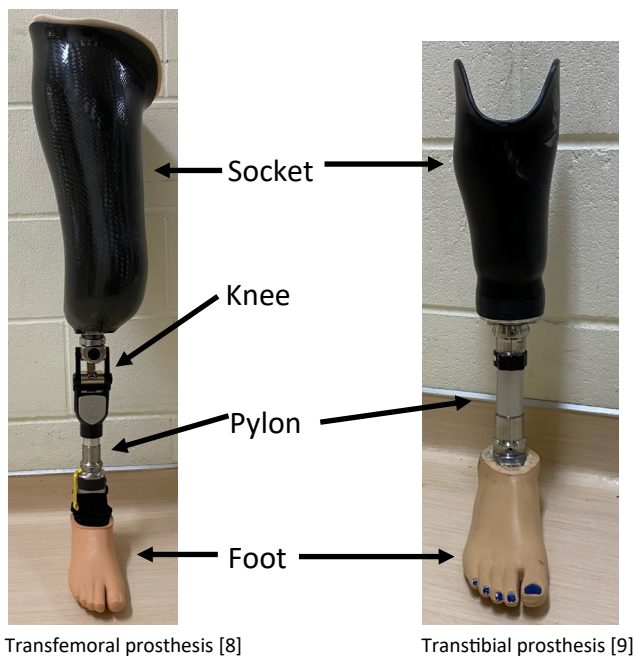


Amputee positioning C [6]



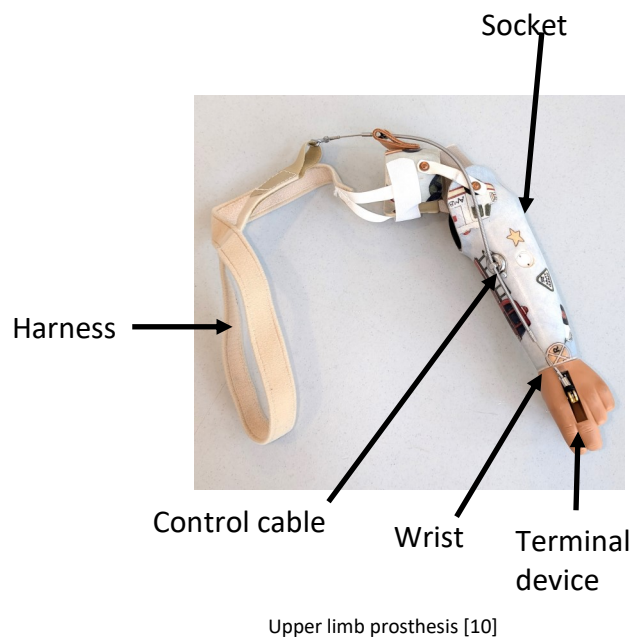
Amputee positioning D [7]

Parts of your prosthesis



Above the Knee

Below the Knee



Upper Limb

Phantom Limb Sensations

A **phantom sensation** is a feeling that a body part is still present even after an amputation. This sensation is common and occur in nearly all amputees. They are usually not painful but may be uncomfortable, and may feel like your limb is itchy or stuck in a certain position. They usually improve over time, especially with fitting of a gel liner or other compression.

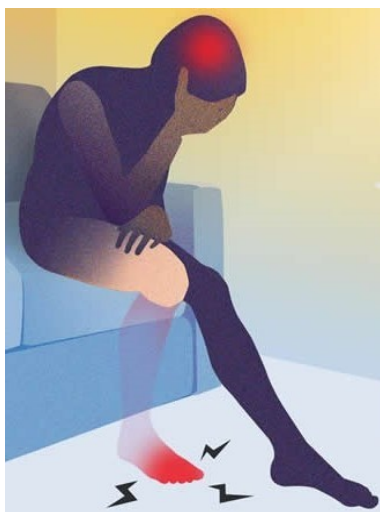
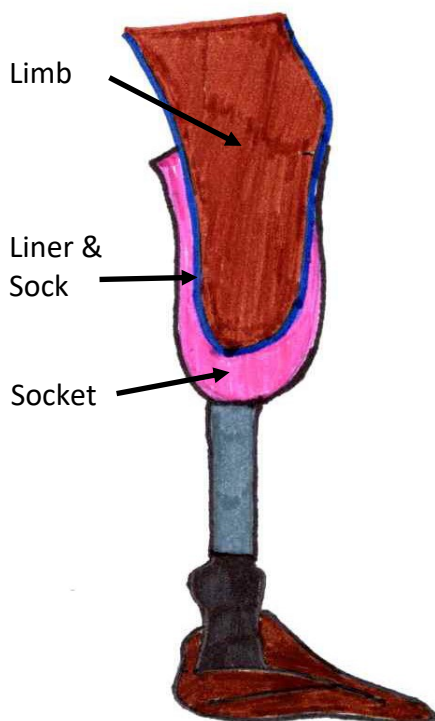


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Phantom limb pain can occur for some amputees. These are painful sensations in your missing body part. They are often experienced as burning, aching, or sharp/shooting pain, but can be different for everybody. If you experience phantom limb pain, your team can help you with different management options. These may include massage, relaxation and mindfulness techniques, mirror therapy exercises, TENS, or medication.

Managing volume changes in your residual limb

It is normal for the size and shape of your residual limb to change. You may notice that your limb is larger in the morning and shrinks throughout the day. Shrinking can occur over time because of a natural decrease in swelling and muscle mass. When the residual limb changes in size and shape, the socket of your prosthesis may no longer fit well. You may notice this if you feel more movement of your limb in the prosthesis, it does not stay on properly, there is lasting redness on your skin, or it may feel uncomfortable. It is important to adjust for this size change to prevent other problems from happening. The best way to deal with these size changes is to adjust the number of ply of prosthetic socks you wear. Prosthetic socks come in many different ply; the ply number indicates the thickness of the sock. Wear your socks over the top of your liner (between the liner and the socket). You may have to add socks if it is too loose or remove socks if it is too tight throughout the day. Limb changes may continue for many months after an amputation. If you are noticing you are frequently requiring more than 12 ply of socks, changes to the socket may be necessary. Call your prosthetist for an appointment.



Drawing of a prosthetic leg socket [12]

If your residual limb has shrunk, you may feel pain on the bottom of the limb. Adding a ply of prosthetic socks to regain a snug fit should make this better.

If your residual limb has swollen (usually in the morning), the socket may be too tight. To deal with this swelling:

- Put on the liner as usual (or your shrinker sock).
- Lie down and place a pillow under your calf or thigh. Keep your limb elevated for 15 to 20 minutes and then try the prosthesis on again.
- If you still are having trouble with the fit of your prosthesis, call your prosthetist or the Adult Outpatient Clinic.

Clothing

Clothing for people with arm amputations

- A thin t-shirt under your harness may be more comfortable and help absorb sweat.
- Loose pullover t-shirts and sweaters are easier to put on. Vests can be worn for extra warmth without the extra bulk. Short or 3/4 length sleeves keep cuffs from being caught in the terminal device.
- Pants with an elastic waist eliminates the need to do up zippers or buttons.
- Shoes that slip on or have Velcro™ tabs are easier to put on than shoes with laces.

Clothing for people with leg amputations

- Buy clothing with a leg wide enough to fit over your prosthesis
- You may want to sew a zipper into the inner pant seam to make it easier to remove your prosthesis to check your skin or adjust your socks.

Tips for buying shoes

- **Heel height:** All of your shoes should have a similar heel height as the shoes that you wore at your fitting. If you need to change the heel height of your shoes, check with your prosthetist. Changing the heel height will affect the way your prosthesis fits and the way you walk. Remember this when you are choosing winter boots.
- **Fit:** Buy a shoe that fits your foot on your non-amputated limb. Your shoe should not feel tight when you are standing. Choose shoes that support your foot and have lots of room to move your toes.
- **Sole:** the sole of the shoe should be firm. Soft foam will wear out quickly and make you feel unstable. This can also change the alignment of your prosthesis.
- **Material:** The material of your shoe should be durable but comfortable. Leather shoes are the most durable and can adjust to your foot shape.
- **Lacing:** The shoe should be easy to put on (example: laces or Velcro™ closure). This type of shoe is easier to put on your prosthetic foot and can allow for some swelling of your other foot.



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Prosthesis care

It is important to have regular maintenance of your prosthesis. The socket should be cleaned daily with warm water and mild soap. Make sure it is dried well. Parts of the prosthesis may loosen or break. Do not attempt home repairs. Call your prosthetist for repairs as soon as possible.

Returning home

After an amputation, everyday activities will need more energy. You may find this frustrating. Managing well at home means you may need to prioritize tasks, plan ahead, have rest breaks, ask family and friends for help, and make changes to your home.

Tips for safety at home:

- Remove unneeded obstacles in your walking path such as rugs, decorations or furniture.
- Keep walking areas well lit.
- Use a sturdy chair, preferably one with arm rests. Make sure it will not slide away from you as you sit down or stand up.
- It is a good idea to have railings or grab bars by your stairs, toilet and shower/tub. Ask your clinical team for information about this if needed.

Returning to work

Your team may be able to help support your return to work. There are also private and government agencies that can help you with job skills evaluation, looking for a job, or other options for employment activities.

Driving

You must report any change in health status to Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI) in order to maintain proper insurance coverage. This means that you must tell them that you have had an amputation. SGI is responsible for all licensing decisions and will give you the information about returning to driving if needed.

Your mental health

A significant health challenge such as an amputation can affect your mental health. Your clinical team can help. Please reach out with any questions or concerns that you have.

Further information and resources can be provided as needed. A separate booklet on mental health ([CS-PIER-0211](#)) in amputees is also available.



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Healthy People, Healthy Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Health Authority works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Saskatchewan as the traditional territory of First Nations and Métis People.

PIER—Patient Information and Education Resource

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