

Lower Limb Amputees

An information leaflet for patients and relatives

This leaflet is designed to complement the verbal advice and information you will receive from the various professionals you will meet during your rehabilitation. As there is a lot of information to remember this leaflet has been written as a guide for you and for family, friends and carers.

If you have any queries or questions regarding any information in this leaflet, please do not hesitate to ask a member of the team.

How will I move around during my rehabilitation sessions?

You will probably have been supplied with a wheelchair from the acute hospital. If you have any concerns about anything to do with your wheelchair, please speak to a therapist. You may be able to bring your own wheelchair during your rehabilitation, or if not, one will be loaned to you for each day.

What will happen during my rehabilitation?

We will be working with you to help you achieve as much independence and function with your prosthesis as possible.

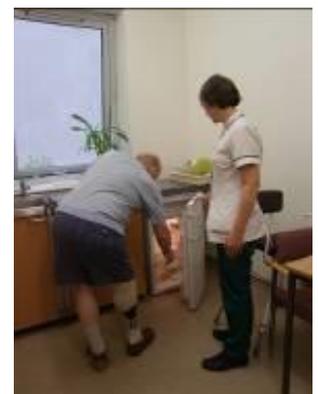
We recommend that you attend every day to make the most of your rehabilitation. If this is too hard, or you need a day off for any reason, please discuss this with your therapist. There will be days when you do not need to attend e.g. when your prosthesis is being adjusted or finished in the workshop.

Each day you will be able to practise putting your prosthesis on and see how it fits. Your prosthesis will not be finished, so the prosthetist will make any changes needed for it to fit more comfortably. You will be advised what to look for on your skin e.g. pressure marks from the socks. Please wear shorts to each appointment as this will allow the prosthesis to be fitted and removed easily. It will also allow the prosthesis to be seen when standing and walking.



You will begin to walk with the prosthesis inside the parallel bars and as you get better at this and more confident you will move on to a frame or sticks, depending on your balance and strength.

Activities may be practised within the O.T. department and other places.



When you can use your prosthesis safely and the fitting is correct, it can be finished with a temporary cover and stockings in the prosthetic workshop. You will then take it home to begin using it in your home setting.

When can I use my prosthesis at home?

When you can use the prosthesis safely and independently, you will take it home to use for normal, everyday activities, slowly increasing the length of time you wear it.

You will have been wearing the prosthesis for up to four hours in the rehab gym, so at home you can start by wearing it for two hours in the morning, and two hours in the afternoon.

Keep gradually increasing the time of these sessions by half an hour, until you are wearing the prosthesis all day.

You don't need to be walking all this time, just do what you would do in the normal day, seeing which tasks the prosthesis can help you to do. Some things will be easier to do in the wheelchair at the beginning.



If you are walking with two sticks, as you gain confidence within your home you may wish to try with one. To make sure your walking is balanced, you need to stop using the stick on the same side as the prosthesis i.e. if you are a right amputee, you stop using the right stick. If you start to limp using one stick, go back to two for a while, then try again. Repeat this until you can walk as well with one stick as with two.

Be aware as you use your prosthesis more often, your stump will continue to shrink. You may need to add more stump socks. If you find you need to use three thick socks with your prosthesis, you may need to see the prosthetist to have the socket adjusted or to have a new socket. Please ring the clinic for advice.

How do I care for my residual limb, stump and stump socks?

Wash your stump daily with mild soap and warm water. If you are worried about any scabs or unhealed areas ask the nurses for advice.

Check your skin daily for any broken areas. You may need to use a mirror or get someone else to check for you.

Dry the skin thoroughly. Avoid talcum powder. Do use a gentle moisturiser e.g. E45, but avoid open areas.



Use clean prosthetic socks each day. In hot weather you may need to change them during the day. Wash your socks according to the wash label on the packet and allow them to drip dry. Do not tumble dry them.



If you have been given a compression sock (brown sock) to reduce swelling in your stump, use this when you are not wearing your prosthesis. Follow the advice on the sheet given to you with your sock.

If you have a below knee amputation, keep your stump on the wheelchair's stump board with your knee straight when you are not wearing your prosthesis, to prevent any stump swelling or joint problems.



If you get any skin breakdown or rubs, stop using your prosthesis and seek advice from the rehabilitation centre.

How do I care for my remaining leg?

Wash and inspect your foot every day with soap and warm water. Test the water temperature, preferably with your elbow, before immersing your foot. Seek medical advice if you find any cuts, blisters, or red and inflamed areas.

Always dry thoroughly especially between the toes. Avoid rubbing the skin too hard and forcing your toes apart. Use a moisturising cream such as E45 if there are no areas of broken skin.

Check your footwear regularly for rough edges or sharp areas inside. When buying new footwear check for a good fit, with plenty of room for your toes. You can get advice from your chiropodist or podiatrist.

Check your socks are not too tight around your ankle or calf and do not cause a mark on your skin.

Wherever possible get a chiropodist or podiatrist to cut your toenails and never treat corns or calluses yourself.

Continue with any circulation exercises you have been taught.

Avoid hopping as this causes excess pressure on your remaining foot.

Take care to avoid knocking your leg with your prosthesis or footplates. Remember to move your footplates out of the way when getting out of your wheelchair.

How do I care for my prosthesis?

Never put your prosthesis in water as it is not waterproof. Water could lead to corrosion of the prosthesis. Please wipe the inside of the socket with a damp cloth each night (giving the socket time to dry completely).

The stocking covering of the prosthesis can be machine washed if it gets very dirty and drip dried. If they wear out the centre can replace it.

If you are concerned about the mechanical state of your prosthesis at any time, ring the clinic straight away for advice.



Will I need to do any specific exercises?

You will be given a stretching and exercise programme tailored to your individual needs to follow both at home and within the rehabilitation department and to continue when you have been discharged.

Your physiotherapist will go through the exercise programme with you and indicate how often and how many of the exercises you should do.



When can I return to normal activities?



If you wish to return to swimming or other exercise please talk to your therapist.

A gym with cardiovascular equipment is available at the centre. If you would like more information about this please ask your therapist.

What happens when I am discharged?

When you are safely using your prosthesis at home you will be discharged from the therapy department at Roehampton.

Your therapist will discuss with you whether you need further rehabilitation at your local hospital, or from the community services and if so will organise it before you are discharged.

You will be given follow-up appointments for six weeks and six months after you have been discharged from therapy when your prosthesis will be reviewed by the prosthetist, your stump and associated conditions will be checked by the doctor and your walking will be checked by the therapy staff. Further appointments will be made as needed.

If at any time you have any problems or concerns, just contact the clinic for an appointment with the doctor, prosthetist or both.

What types of appointments will I have?

AMC - Amputee Management Clinic:

In this clinic you will see one of the rehabilitation doctors. They will check you and your progress. They will also deal with any medical problems that may directly affect the use of your prosthesis.

PMC - Prosthetic Management Clinic:

These appointments are for the care, maintenance and updating of your prosthesis and will be with the prosthetist only. You might have as PMC appointment for any of the following:

- **repairs** and **checks** of your prosthesis.
- for your prosthetist to **adjust** your current prosthesis in order to make it more comfortable. They may adjust your socket or the alignment of your prosthesis, or decide that you need a new socket.
- for your prosthetist to take a **cast** or **measurements** so a new socket can be manufactured if your current socket no longer fits correctly.
- for your prosthetist to review your progress after a few weeks, with a new socket or prosthesis.

Following discharge, you will have the following appointments booked:

- 6 week review
- 6 month review
- Annual review

If you require a review between these appointments, you can call us to request one. Otherwise, please book annual reviews for yearly prosthesis checks.

What terms will I hear being used and what do they mean?

Adjust

The prosthetist will alter either the fit or the alignment of your prosthesis as you progress through your rehabilitation process. For this your limb may need to be taken to the workshop.

Alignment

Where your prosthetist will adjust the balance and set-up of your limb in order to provide the best walking pattern possible.

Component

Any part of your prosthesis that is below your socket i.e. a knee component, an ankle component or a foot. These can be changed at a later date to suit your needs and activities.

Socket

The part of the prosthesis that is made to fit you by your prosthetist. All measures will be taken to ensure that it is as comfortable as possible.

Suspension

The means by which your prosthesis is held onto you.

Workshop

Where your prosthesis will be built, set-up and adjusted. It is next door to the amputee rehabilitation gym. Depending on the work required it might take 20 minutes or one to three days for any adjustments to be carried out by the technicians.



What is the psychological and emotional impact of amputation?

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. Some of the most common ones are listed below, but everybody is different and your reactions and concerns may not be the same as these.

Early on you may have feelings of shock, disbelief, bewilderment or, perhaps, relief. Many people feel sadness and for some the sense of loss can at times be overwhelming. You may experience anger about what has happened and frustration as you begin to adjust to doing things in different ways. You may worry about how you will cope and how your life will be from now on. It is also natural for your self-confidence and self-esteem to be lower for a while. Over time you will hopefully begin to adjust to the new situation by learning new skills, adopting new roles and setting new goals for yourself for the future.

Having an amputation may also change your relationships with other people including partners, family members, friends or strangers. The way you see and feel about yourself affects how you interact and it is natural to feel worried about how other people may react to your limb loss. It is normal to avoid talking to family members and friends about the amputation due to fear of how they will feel and react, or to avoid further painful emotion for them or yourself. Other people may also avoid talking about the amputation with you because they do not know what to say or are afraid of saying the wrong thing and this may feel uncaring and hurtful to you. You may find that discussing issues and feelings like these will help with any relationship problems, even though it can be upsetting and difficult at first.



You may also 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 and with themselves. New feelings or concerns about this are natural following amputation.

Making sense of your own reactions and concerns can be hard. They may feel very personal and you may only have your own experience to go by. It can help to talk to a partner if you are in a relationship, or to a close friend or family member or to one of the clinicians caring for you. If at any time you feel that you would like to have someone independent to talk to in confidence about how you are feeling, please ask your doctor, physiotherapist, occupational therapist or nurse to arrange for you to meet with the clinical psychologist based at the rehabilitation centre who specialises in working with amputees.

Useful local sources of information

Limbless Association

Tel: 01277 725182/4/6

Website: www.limbless-association.org

Roehampton Limb User Group (RLUG)

RLUG is a recognised limb patient user group run by the service users and partners. We welcome limb inpatients and outpatients to our bimonthly meetings with expert speakers and social events. This makes for a relaxed way to meet together and be better informed on living life with limb loss and gives you a voice on the issues that affect the NHS service that we receive on our prosthetics and orthotics. Look for our dates on our posters and website.

Tel: 07713 357410

Email: secretary@rlug.org.uk

Website: <http://rlug.org.uk>

STEADY (Sharing The Epsom Amputees Daily Yomp)

Steady is a local amputee support group based in Epsom. We meet locally several times a year and are a small friendly sociable group that does trips and lunches nearby. We also meet three times a week at The Rainbow Leisure Centre, Epsom, to swim and afterwards to have a coffee and chat. Do come and join us, we can offer support and shared experiences for amputees, their carers, partners and families. We look forward to meeting you.

Tel: 01372 739233

Email: steady@geniums.co.uk

Queen Elizabeth Foundation, Mobility Centre

for advice on driving, adaptations to cars and purchase of outdoor electric buggies and wheelchairs

Tel: 020 8770 1151

Website: www.qef.org.uk/mobilitycentre

For information on specific national organisations please talk to your treating therapist who can advise.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about lower limb amputee rehabilitation, please use the following contact details (Monday to Friday, 9am – 4pm). Out of hours, please leave a message on the answer phone of the relevant department.

Queen Mary's Hospital	020 8487 6000
Douglas Bader Main Reception - for appointments and transport	020 8487 6001
Nursing Staff - Vitali Clinic	020 8487 6030
Physiotherapy – Rehab Gym	020 8487 6042
Occupational Therapy	020 8487 6139
PROSTHETICS	020 8487 6045
Bader Gym	020 8487 6040

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111



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