

Your Prosthetic Service



Opcare

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Welcome

This booklet is intended as a general introduction to your Prosthetic Service and life with an artificial limb. We hope both you and your family will find it useful. If you have any queries or would like any further information, don't hesitate to ask us.

Contents

1. Your Prosthetic Service	3
a. Introduction to the service	3
b. Our team	3
2. Appointments	4
a. Your visits to the centre	4
b. Your initial appointment	4
c. Casting/scanning	5
d. Fitting your prosthesis	6
e. Review appointments	6
f. What to bring to your appointments	7
3. Artificial limbs	7
a. Wearing your prosthesis	9
b. Caring for your prosthesis	9
c. Caring for your residual limb	10
d. Looking after your remaining foot	12
e. Changes to your stump	12
f. Phantom limb sensation	13
g. What to do if you fall	13
4. FAQs	14
5. Support	17

Introduction to the service

The Prosthetic Service provides care and support for amputees and other individuals who have a limb deficiency. We provide both lower and upper limb prostheses (artificial limbs) and maintain them throughout the life of the user, ensuring they continue to meet the user's needs. Our aim is to give you the highest quality care, helping you live life as independently as possible.

Our team

We work as a multi-disciplinary team, which means your healthcare is as all-encompassing as possible. Depending on which centre you attend, the rehabilitation team can consist of some or all of the following:

Prosthetist – fits and maintains your prosthesis, providing ongoing care for as long as you use our service.

Physiotherapist – gives you advice on exercises, wheelchair use and walking training, helping you achieve independence.

Occupational therapist – trains you to use your artificial limb and gives advice to help you perform day to day activities.

Rehabilitation consultant – medical professional specialised in rehabilitation.

Counsellor – talks with you or your family members to explore your experience of limb loss. They can help with the many difficult emotions and feelings which often occur around the time of amputation or if a child is born with a limb deficiency.

Nurse – provides nursing care, as well as on-going support and advice on related health issues such as diet, exercise and stopping smoking. The nurse is also available to advise on pain management and prescribe medications where applicable.

Reception/administrative staff - book your appointments and help with transport queries.

Technicians – create and repair prostheses.

Appointments

Your visits to the centre

You might visit the centre to have a new limb fitted, repairs and alterations carried out, or simply to check that your existing prosthesis is still suitable for your needs. You will normally be referred to our service by your surgeon, GP, or another member of your clinical team.

So what happens during your appointments?

Your initial appointment (primary assessment)

The aim of your initial appointment is for the clinical team to assess whether an artificial limb might be suitable for you, as well as for you to meet the team and ask any questions you may have. This can take up to three hours.

If the assessment is for a child it is very helpful if both parents/carers attend at least the first appointment. You will be given lots of information and advice about how your child will be treated and managed over the coming years.

During this assessment a range of factors will be considered, including:

- General medical condition
- Strength and range of movement in both of your lower limbs
- Upper body strength

- Ability to understand instructions
- Ability to move from sitting to standing independently with or without a walking aid, but with no-one helping
- Fitness and exercise tolerance
- Lifestyle

If your assessment suggests that you will benefit from an artificial limb, we will then book a series of appointments for you to be fitted with your prosthesis.

Prosthetic limbs, however, are not suitable for all individuals. Our philosophy is to enable each individual to reach their potential, and for some this will be as a non-prosthetic user. This decision is only made after considerable thought and discussion by the clinical team, who will talk you through the outcome of your assessment and advise you of alternative mobility aids. If over time you feel your situation has changed and you would like to be reconsidered for a prosthesis, please ask your GP to refer you back to our team.

Casting/scanning

In order to create a prosthesis that fits comfortably on your residual limb, your prosthetist will take measurements of your stump and either use 3D scanning technology to form a model of your limb, or take a plaster cast. This information will then be given to the technical team who make your prosthetic limb.

This process may take place during your initial assessment, or you may require a separate appointment.

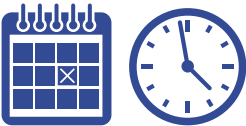
Fitting your prosthesis

When your new prosthetic limb is ready, we will ask you to come into the centre to have it fitted. This will probably be one to two weeks after your measurements were taken. Your prosthetist will ask you to try on your artificial leg, and you will help you take your first steps to assess for fit and comfort. During this appointment, the individual components of the prosthesis will be adjusted to suit you.

A check socket stage may take place, where we test the fit prior to creating the definitive socket. If this is the case, your fitting appointments will take place over two separate visits. This allows us to adjust the socket to make sure it is just right for you.

You will be referred to a physiotherapist who will continue to help you with using your prosthetic limb after it has been fitted. Learning to increase your wear time and walk more confidently is a slow process, and will build up over time. You will need a series of sessions to ensure you can do things like climb stairs safely by yourself. Some people achieve this more quickly than others – everyone is different.

Review appointments



In the early stages, you will have frequent review appointments to make sure everything is working as it should. If you have any problems in between these appointments, please call us to arrange an earlier appointment.

Once you've had your prosthesis for a while, we will ask you to request appointments when you need one. You can contact us at any time to arrange a time, and you do not need to go through your GP. We recommend you come in at least once a year for a check-up.

What to bring to your appointments

To ensure your visits are as smooth as possible, please bring with you:

- A list of medication you are currently taking
- Any medication you need to take whilst at the centre
- Your wheelchair and its attachments (if applicable)
- Appropriate shoes and suitable clothing. If you are having a prosthesis fitted, please bring a pair of shorts.
- Snacks for refreshments and something to occupy you whilst waiting. Limb repairs can take a long time.

Artificial Limbs

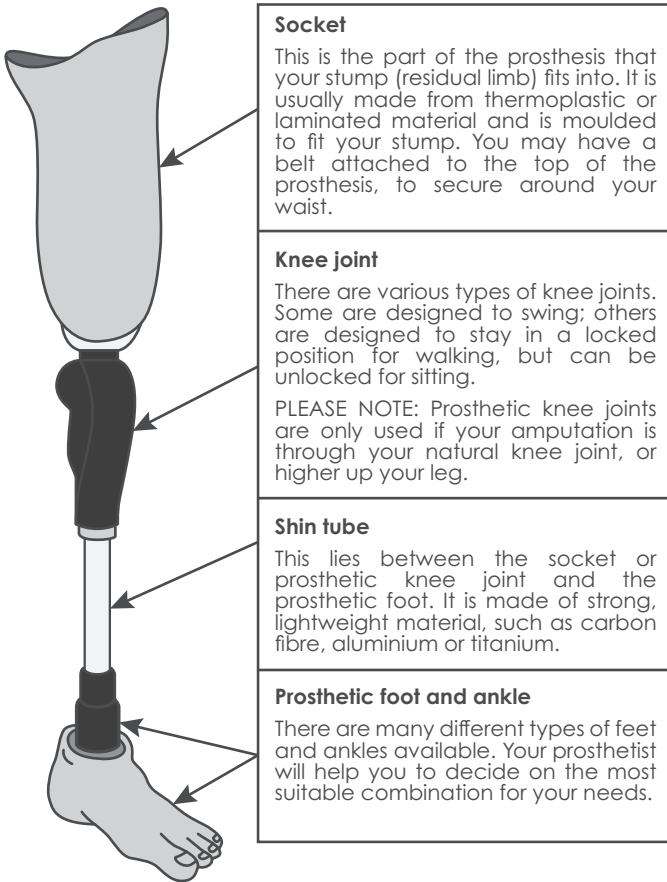
Many people have never seen an artificial limb before. They come in all shapes and sizes, and your Prosthetist will help you choose one that's right for you.

The way your artificial limb is held on is usually referred to as the suspension. This can often be a belt or strap around the knee or waist. Alternatively there are pin and lock suspension systems, where the liner you roll onto your stump has a pin on the end which clicks into a lock within the socket. We can also use suspension sleeves (elasticated sleeves/tubes) for below knee devices and suction systems to hold the leg on in some instances.

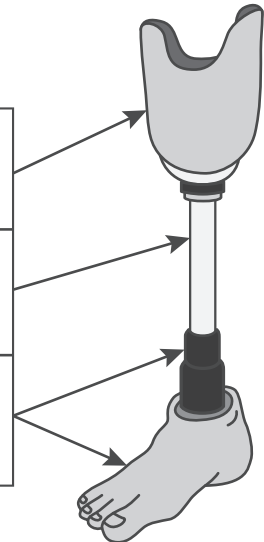
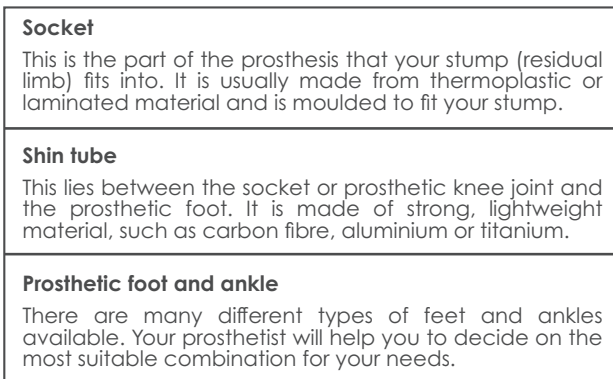
If you wish, a lifelike cover can be created for your prosthesis, which hides all the metal componentry beneath.

Depending on whether you have an above knee (AK) or below knee (BK) amputation, your prosthesis will look slightly different.

Transfemoral or above knee (AK) prosthesis:



Transtibial or below knee (BK) prosthesis:



Wearing your prosthesis

You should wear your prosthesis as instructed by your prosthetist or physiotherapist.

When you are walking with your prosthesis for the first few days at home, you must check the skin over the whole of your stump regularly. This will mean taking your prosthesis off after 5 minutes and checking the skin, putting the prosthesis back on and removing and checking again after another 5 minutes. This is to see whether there are any areas that are becoming sore.

If any areas are becoming red, leave your prosthesis off until the redness goes. If it does not go away within 30 minutes, do not put your prosthesis on again until you've seen a member of the clinical team.

If your skin is tolerating the prosthesis then you can gradually increase the time you wear it by 5 minutes. Even if all is going well, do not be tempted to wear your prosthesis for longer periods without checking your skin regularly in the first few days.

Caring for your prosthesis

Looking after your artificial limb properly will prolong its life and make sure it is as comfortable as possible for you. It is a mechanical device and therefore requires regular maintenance.

Do

- Do inspect and clean your socket and liner (if you have one) each evening. Clean your socket by wiping it out with a damp cloth each night. Leave it to dry thoroughly, preferably overnight. Keeping the socket clean will reduce the risk of skin irritation.
- Do bring your prosthesis into the centre for an 'MOT' once a year, to make sure it is working properly – even if you are experiencing no particular problems.

- Do use soap and a damp cloth to clean the outer covering of your prosthesis. If a stain will not wash off, or if the cover is damaged, we will be happy to fit a new one for you.
- Do clean belts, straps and liners according to manufacturers' instructions or on the advice of your prosthetist.

Don't

- Do not attempt to repair or adjust your own prosthesis in any way, including cutting, trimming or inserting pads. This can cause serious damage to the prosthesis and could result in an accident causing you injury. If you have a problem with your prosthesis, contact the Prosthetics Service. We can advise if you need to come into the centre for a repair.
- Do not put oil, grease, or any other chemicals on your prosthesis, as this can cause damage. If your prosthesis is noisy, damaged or broken please contact the Prosthetics Service.
- Do not lean your prosthesis against or on a radiator, as this may damage it.
- Do not position your prosthesis near naked flames.
- Do not immerse the socket or artificial limb in water Unless you have been advised that your limb is waterproof by your prosthetist.

Caring for your residual limb

It's one thing caring for your prosthesis, but you need to be caring for your residual limb too! If you have had an amputation, it is very important that you look after your residual limb carefully – especially if you have diabetes.

1. **Keep your stump clean.** You should wash your stump at least daily. Dry well after washing, especially before putting on your prosthesis. Pat dry rather than rubbing to avoid skin irritation.

2. **Check for sore areas.** Every time you remove your artificial limb, you should carefully inspect your stump to check that there are no rubbed or sore areas. You may have reduced feeling in your stump and not realise that an area is sore, so it is worth getting into the routine of visually checking regularly. If necessary, use a mirror to check the areas you cannot easily see.
3. **Treat sore areas.** If you do discover a sore patch, clean it carefully and apply a simple dry dressing. Try to avoid wearing your artificial limb at this time as it may make the sore worse. You can get in touch with your district nurse, GP or prosthetist if the pain persists.
4. **Look after your skin.** You may find the skin on your residual limb is very dry. If that is the case, apply a cream or lotion, such as Vaseline® or E45™, at night only. Do NOT put cream on your stump before putting your prosthesis on. Avoid perfumed creams which are more likely to irritate your skin.
5. **Manage any sweating.** It is very common and normal for excess sweat to build up inside your artificial limb, however over time this can cause spots or rashes which can be uncomfortable. Speak to your prosthetist if you are experiencing problems, as there are various solutions that can help regulate temperature in your prosthesis.
6. **Massage your stump.** Stroking and handling your residual limb regularly will improve your circulation. It will also help you identify any sore patches (see point 2 above), help to ease phantom limb sensations, and stop scar tissue from sticking to the bone underneath.
7. **Wear clean stump socks in good condition.** You should wear clean prosthetic socks every day, and make sure that there are no wrinkles or creases in the socks when you apply them. Never mend or darn prosthetic socks as these seams can damage your residual limb.
8. **When you are not wearing the prosthesis, rest with your stump raised to about level with your hip to prevent it swelling.**

Looking after your remaining foot



Whilst your stump will need a lot of care and attention, don't forget about your remaining foot!

Keep your foot clean, washing daily and drying thoroughly, especially between your toes. This will help prevent irritation and infection. Wear clean socks or stockings ideally made of natural fibres like cotton, avoiding nylon if you can. You should also make sure the top of your sock is not too tight.

It's a good idea to examine your foot daily as well, checking for any changes in colour, swelling, pain, blisters or red patches. Make sure you check the whole foot, using a mirror if you need.

Changes to your stump

If you are a new amputee you should expect your stump to change in shape and size.

After your surgery your stump will be swollen. As this swelling subsides you will need to put on extra stump socks to maintain a comfortable fit in your socket. Your prosthetist will tell you the number of socks you need to wear to start with. If you find you have to put on 4-5 socks to make your socket fit, please speak to your prosthetist.

As your stump shape begins to change you may find the socket is less comfortable. When this starts to happen, you will need to make an appointment with the prosthetist, who can alter your socket fit. If your stump has changed significantly you might need to have a new socket made.

Ongoing swelling (oedema) may be kept under control by elevating your stump or using a compression sock – a member of the clinical team will advise you on how to use these.

Phantom limb sensation

Phantom limb sensation is an extremely common occurrence. Although the body has lost a limb, the brain still has the old geography wired in and therefore it still transmits pain signals. This sensation can be painful, or can simply feel that your limb is still there. If you are experiencing any pain, please discuss this with the clinical team.

What to do if you fall

The most important thing if you fall is to remain calm and give yourself some time. Check yourself for possible injuries, and don't move until you feel ready.

There are two techniques you could use to get up from the floor:

Place a cushion or low stool in front of a chair, which has its back to the wall so it won't move. Sitting on your bottom with your back to the stool/cushion, bend your intact leg and place your foot flat on the floor, and place your hands behind you on the stool/cushion. Push with your leg and hands to lift your bottom from the floor onto the stool/cushion. Repeat technique to lift yourself onto the chair.

Roll over onto your knees and face a chair that is in a stable position and will not move. Bring your intact foot forward and place flat on the floor. Hold the arms of the chair and use your arms and leg to push yourself up, turn and sit down.

If you think you may have an injury or are unable to get up off the floor, ring for help. Remember to keep warm whilst you're waiting for assistance.

How will my artificial leg stay on?

There are lots of different ways of holding a prosthetic leg on – we call these suspension methods. Belts and straps either around the knee (below knee amputation) or around the waist (above knee amputation) may be used in many cases. Suspension sleeves are another common prescription option for below knee amputees. These work like a tight elasticated band which covers the top of the socket and pulls up around your thigh to hold the leg in place. Liners (gel-filled socks) with locks and suction techniques can also be used in some instances once the wearer has a fairly settled residual limb shape/size. You will work with your prosthetist to find the best option for you on an individual basis.

How long does it take to make a prosthesis?

Once a cast or scan has been taken, it usually takes 1 to 2 weeks to make a prosthesis ready for fitting. If multiple fittings or additional cosmetic finishing is required then this can be slightly longer.

Do I have to pay for my prosthesis?

If you are eligible for NHS care, the NHS provides you with a prosthetic limb free of charge. Private firms do exist separately to this, but they require payment for the care and prescriptions they provide.

What do I do if my prosthesis breaks?

If your prosthesis breaks, then remove it immediately. Call your local prosthetic centre and arrange a review appointment with your prosthetist for the repair work to be completed.

Can I wear my prosthesis in the shower?

Most prosthetic limbs are not waterproof due to the metal parts involved in their build. It is important that you wash your residual limb as you would the rest of your body, and therefore it is essential that you remove your limb to do so. Where necessary, there are options – such as LIMBO bags – which can enable prosthetic use in the shower/wet environments. Speak to your prosthetist if this is something you feel may be beneficial to you.

Do I wear my prosthesis in bed?

No, you should never wear your prosthesis to bed. It is important to let your skin breathe aside from anything else!

Is wearing a prosthesis painful?

Wearing a prosthesis should never be painful when used correctly. It is very important to follow guidance from your clinical team on wear times and gradually increase these to avoid any potential problems. If you experience pain or discomfort then you should rest, remove your prosthesis, and wait for this to subside before using it again. Building up wear time gradually and weaning on to the leg is very important as it does take some getting used to!

Do I always have to wear the same shoes?

You don't necessarily have to wear the same shoes all the time but shoes with a similar heel height will make switching footwear easier. If you put on shoes with a higher or lower heel than those which the leg was originally set up on, you may feel slightly off balance – tipped forwards or backwards when standing. If this is the case then you should contact your limb centre. They can alter the alignment of your prosthesis to your new shoes if you are likely to be wearing them for extended periods.

Can I drive whilst wearing my prosthesis?

Lots of people who use a prosthesis drive with or without adaptations. Often using an automatic car or a car with hand controls can make this easier. You should discuss this thoroughly with your occupational therapist who can advise on what is right for you. It is also important to notify the DVLA of your amputation as well as your insurance company.

What will I be able to do with my artificial limb?

What everybody wants and is able to do with a prosthetic limb is different. Depending on your needs and previous level of function, you will set goals with your prosthetist and physiotherapist and then work towards these. The range of activities possible with a prosthesis varies drastically from high level sports to recreational hobbies, as well as walking, standing and transfers – everybody is different.

How long can I wear my limb for?

Gradually increasing the length of time you wear your limb for is very important. You should start by keeping it on for minutes and then removing it to check your skin for any signs of unwanted pressure or rubbing. This can then be incrementally increased.

How long will it take before I can walk again?

As above, this varies greatly between people. It is very important that you don't rush this, however, and risk developing a sore. On the other hand, attending scheduled physiotherapy appointments and doing any recommended exercises is important to help ensure you can get going with your prosthesis as soon as is appropriate for you.

What will my prosthesis look like?

Some people want their prosthesis to look as similar to their other leg as possible and have a cover applied over the components inside. Some people like to see all of the components of their prosthetic leg without a cover. This is a very individual choice and depends on your preference. A prosthesis is ultimately made up of a socket which encompasses your residual limb, a pylon (pole) and a foot. Above knee prosthetic limbs will also have a mechanical knee joint. It is up to you and your prosthetist whether these remain on show or not.

Can I still go on holiday with a prosthesis?

Yes you can still go on holiday with a prosthesis. It is worth thinking about luggage restrictions and wheelchair access ahead of any trips however. If you are worried about travelling with a prosthetic limb then you can speak to your limb centre about this, and contact your holiday provider with any queries.

Will I be able to do activities like cycling or running?

Some people do take part in activities such as running and cycling with their prosthetic limb, yes. What you are able to do with your prosthetic limb will depend on a few different factors including what you were able to do before your amputation and what is a reasonable expectation following your surgery.

You and your clinical team will set goals when your prosthetic limb is prescribed.

How often will I attend the limb centre?

In your first year or two you are likely to attend more often than established users. This is due to your residual limb changing shape and settling down following your amputation. If you have any problems with your prosthesis then you should book a review appointment. It is recommended that you attend at least once a year to ensure everything is still ok for you and functioning as it should.

Support

There is a range of charitable organisations and groups to support your life as a prosthetic user.



Limbless Association

The Limbless Association

Charity providing information and support for amputees and the limb-loss community.

Website: limbless-association.org

Email: enquiries@limbless-association.org

Tel: 01245 216670



LimbPower

Charity dedicated to engaging amputees and individuals with limb impairments in physical activity, sport and the arts to improve quality of life and aid lifelong rehabilitation.

Website: limbpower.com

Email: info@limbpower.com

Tel: 07502 276858



Reach

The Association for Children with Hand or Arm Deficiencies, providing resources, support and practical information.

Website: reach.org.uk

Email: reach@reach.org.uk

Tel: 0845 130 6225 or 020 3478 0100

Blesma



Military charity that supports servicemen who have lost limbs whilst representing their country.

Website: blesma.org

Email: chadwellheath@blesma.org

Tel: 020 8590 1124

The Douglas Bader Foundation



Charity providing information and support, as well as grants and activities for younger children.

Website: douglasbaderfoundation.com

Tel: 020 8748 8884

Disabled Living Foundation

National charity providing impartial advice, information and training on equipment and solutions for independent living.

Website: dlf.org.uk

Email: info@dlf.org.uk

Tel: 0300 999 0004





Diabetes UK

The leading UK charity that cares for, connects with and campaigns on behalf of all people affected by and at risk of diabetes.

Website: diabetes.org.uk
Email: helpline@diabetes.org.uk
Tel: 0345 123 2399



Motability

Help with exchanging your mobility allowance for a car, mobility scooter or electric wheelchair.

Website: motability.org.uk
Tel: 01279 635999



Age UK

Charity dedicated to helping everyone make the most of later life.

Website: ageuk.org.uk
Email: contact@ageuk.org.uk
Tel: 0800 055 6112



Steps

The National Association for People with Lower Limb Abnormalities, working for all those whose lives are affected by childhood lower limb conditions.

Website: steps-charity.org.uk
Email: info@steps-charity.org.uk
Tel: 01925 750271

