

# The Amputation Process

An amputation is a huge life adjustment. That's why we're here to help guide you through the entire process and answer as many questions as possible. The more prepared you are for the amputation and the rehabilitation process, the smoother the transition and your recovery.



# Choosing Amputation:

Amputation is NOT the end. For many patients, it's actually the beginning to a new chapter in their lives. When a limb becomes damaged beyond repair, either by trauma, infection, or disease, it can cause your entire body to suffer.

- Amputation gives you your mobility and lifestyle back. If the need for amputation is caused by a vascular disease, there's a good possibility that your symptoms will be virtually eliminated.
- Ask your doctor if amputation is a good option for you. Talk to one of our trained practitioners about how amputation can help you regain your mobility and revitalize your quality of life.
- If amputation is the next step for you, decide ahead of time that you are going to play an active role in making sure you fully recover.

# Before The Operation:

Not every amputee has the chance to prepare for their operation. Those involved in traumatic accidents usually have to undergo amputation surgery right away and with little to no warning. If you've made the decision to amputate and have time to prepare before the surgery, take advantage of that opportunity.

- Start practicing basic mobility exercises that you know you'll have to perform in physical therapy after the amputation. This will ensure that your joints are used to the movements, give you as much mobility as possible before the surgery, and help strengthen the muscles you'll be using after amputation.
- Practice getting from your bed to a wheelchair without the limb that will be amputated.
- Talk to someone. Our staff is always here to talk you through any concerns or fears you may have, and your doctor or surgeon should be available for the same.
- Find other amputees. A support system that understands the ins and outs of exactly what you're going through is so helpful. Social media and your local prosthetic clinic are both great resources for finding other amputees.

# Amputation:

If you've ever watched a medical show like *Scrubs* or *Grey's Anatomy*, you've probably seen their version of what an amputation procedure is, but there is actually a lot more that goes into the process. Every amputation is different based on the patient's needs, the limb that's begin amputated, and the surgeon performing the operation. Always talk to your surgeon about the process and ask them any last minute questions you may have before surgery.

**Step One:** Amputations require a hospital stay, so if you aren't already admitted, you'll come in and get settled in a hospital room. A nurse or doctor will take a detailed history to make sure your medical chart isn't missing any detailed information for the operation.



**Step Two:** Before procedures, patients are required to fast for at least 8 hours. Typically, this means you can't have any food or liquids past midnight the night before the operation.

**Step Three:** Each hospital has their own protocol for pre-op care, and you should ask your nurse or surgeon any questions you have about their particular process. Pre-op is an area where they get you ready for the operation: fitting you with a gown, covering your hair, removing any jewelry, etc. Sometimes, surgeons will mark where they'll be amputating so that you can see beforehand.

**Step Four:** Loved ones are not allowed in the operating room, so they'll have to wait in your room or in a specified waiting room until you're finished and the doctors are allowing visitors. During the operation, you'll be put under general anesthesia unless your medical chart indicates a need for a different route. General anesthesia is kind of like falling asleep; it keeps you sedated and still so that the surgeons can do their job without you feeling any pain.

**Step Five: Once you wake up from the procedure, you should be back in your room or in a post-op recovery room. The amputation site will be wrapped in sterile bandaging and dressing. When the tissue is healthy and there is little risk of infection, your surgeon may go ahead and close the wound. In other cases, the surgeon may leave the wound open for what's called an open flap amputation. In this case, infected tissue will be cleared away over the course of a few days until the wound is fully cleaned and can be closed.**



- **Immediately following the amputation procedure, your doctor will monitor you closely to prevent wound infection. Nurses and physical therapists should help you with bed positioning to prevent bed sores, and they'll also be changing out your dressings periodically.**

# **Before Getting Fitted For Your Prosthetic:**

Before getting a prosthesis, your doctor, practitioner, and physical therapists will have three main goals:

- 1) Little to no pain once your incision site is fully healed.
- 2) Regained mobility.
- 3) Ability to bear weight on your residual limb.

**Step One:** To make sure your incision site is healing, follow the doctor's specific instructions for at-home care, including dressing changes, carefully washing your residual limb as directed, and taking any medicines they prescribe.

**Step Two:** The exercises that you practiced before the operation will continue, and a physical therapist should be able to assist you with getting your full mobility back. You have to make sure that you're staying limber and that your muscles are getting their strength back before you start trying to get fitted for a prosthetic.

**Step 3:** Shaping your residual limb is also a large part in getting you ready for a prosthetic device. Once your incision site heals, you can begin tenderly massaging your residual limb. This helps get the blood flowing while toughening your limb for the pressure of a prosthetic socket.



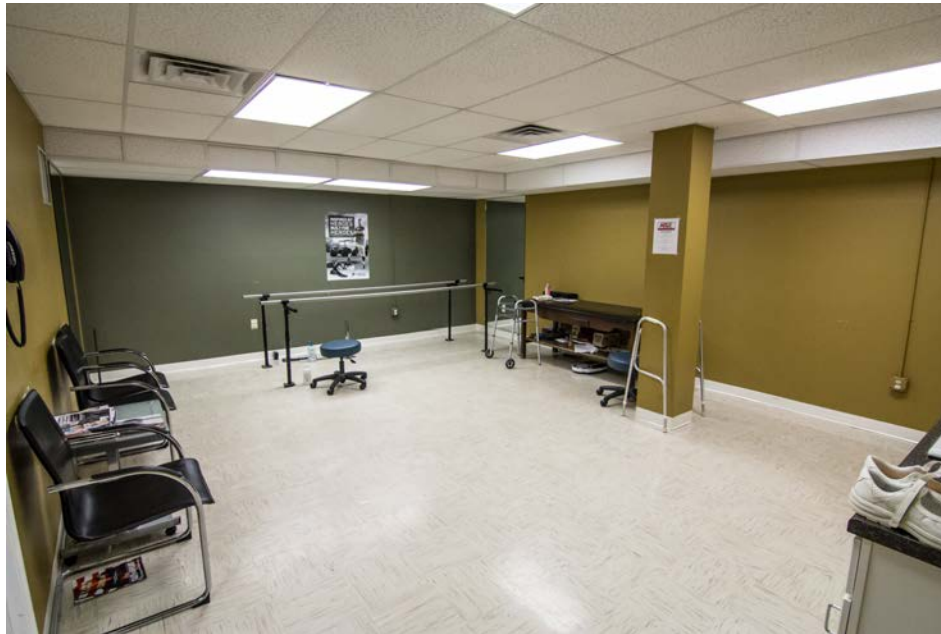
# Getting Fitted For A Prosthesis:

Once your incision site is fully healed and ready to go, we go in and hand-craft a prosthesis by hand to fit your needs.

**Step One:** First, you'll be fitted for an interim device so we can identify the right fit and type of device for you. Some patients with certain amputations don't require an interim prosthetic, but it's a safe bet to assume your final device won't be the first one you're fitted for.

**Step Two:** We mold your device socket by hand to make sure you get the perfect fit. A clinician and practitioner will feel your residual limb by hand, getting familiar with where your bone ends, how much muscle and tissue you have around your incision site, if there is any scar tissue, and how your limb shifts when pressure is applied. This process isn't something a scan can approximate, which is why we've always done it by hand.

**Step Three: Once we've determined the kind of device you need and formed your socket, you'll start exercises with the prosthetic. During this step, we'll align the prosthesis and make sure it's optimized for your gait and mobility needs before finalizing your device and sending you home with it.**



**Remember that in order for us to get the best fit, you have to be honest with us. Tell us if there's pain, talk about your discomfort, ask us about how certain devices will allow you to do certain activities. Getting fitted is a process. It takes time and patience, but the payoff is completely worth it.**

# The Rest Of Your Life:

Being an amputee is permanent. There are aspects of your life that will change from here on out, and you'll have to constantly check to make sure your prosthetic is still fitting like it should.

- Come and see us. We want to see you in the office! If you're worried about your device, if you see a skin irritation that your sock or sleeve is causing, if you're experiencing pain from a loose device... better safe than sorry.
- Don't stop counselling. Your need for support doesn't end when you've accepted your new life as an amputee. Having people to lean on to help you through the frustrations or hard times is essential to a fully successful recovery.
- Hygiene is important. You have to learn how to care for your limb and your prosthetic properly. This lowers your risk of complications and ensures that your prosthetic device lasts a long time.
- Your residual limb will change over time. With those changes comes the need for socket adjustments. When your device hurts or starts to feel loose, it's time to schedule an appointment to see if you need a new socket or new device to fit your needs.

**Amputation does not have to mean the end to your mobility or quality of life. If you know the process going in and make a decision to play an active role in your recovery, you'll be back on your feet before you know it!**

**New Hope**  
Prosthetics & Orthotics

