

Care of your residual limb

This leaflet tells you how to look after your residual limb (stump) initially after your amputation and later as your rehabilitation progresses. It is important to care for your residual limb especially if you intend to be a prosthetic (artificial limb) user as you will need to take some weight through your residual limb when walking.

What will happen after my operation?

The Nursing staff will monitor and dress the wound regularly using sterile dressing techniques. Do not interfere with the dressings. Once the wound is healed and the dressings are removed you will be able to care for the residual limb yourself.

Once the dressings are removed it is important that you start to touch the skin on your residual limb as this will help to reduce the sensitivity. You may be advised to massage the scar tissue to prevent adhesions; your physiotherapist will advise you regarding this. You may also be advised to rub the area with different textures e.g. a towel after washing. This too helps to normalise the sensitivity of the end of the residual limb.

What is a compression sock or 'stump shrinker'?

This is a sock for your residual limb that will be prescribed by one of the clinicians and is made of strong elastic stocking material. The compression sock is generally only provided for below knee amputees.

The clinician will measure your residual limb to ensure that the stocking is of the correct size. It is used to prevent or reduce the swelling in your residual limb that occurs naturally after surgery. It also helps to shape the residual limb so that it is easier to achieve a well-fitting socket for prosthetic use.

You cannot use a compression stocking if you have:

- Weeping skin or wound
- acute dermatitis
- arterial circulatory disorder
- acute thrombophlebitis
- Congestive cardiac failure

When should I wear my compression sock?

You will be advised to wear it during the day until you are wearing a prosthetic limb. The number of weeks that you need to wear it will therefore vary from person to person depending on how you progress with prosthetic limb wearing.

How should I care for my residual limb?

It is important to wash your residual limb every day using fragrance free or antibacterial soap and then rinse and dry thoroughly.

It is best to wash your residual limb at night to ensure that it is absolutely dry when you put on your prosthesis the next morning. This will help prevent problems such as wound breakdown following surgery, and increased sensitivity.

Do not soak your residual limb, shave it, or apply certain lotions to it as this will increase the likelihood of skin breakdown.

What should I do if my skin is very dry?

- Dermoprotect is a product that will keep your residual limb moisturised - but use sparingly.
- E45 can also be used and does not cause an allergic reaction in most patients. However, this should be used less frequently and should be used sparingly as it is greasy. Apply this at night so that it will be absorbed before you use your prosthetic limb the following day.
- Do not use strongly perfumed moisturizers as they may irritate the skin.
- If you have very dry skin and you are diabetic you may be given Allpresan to trial which you can then obtain from your General Practitioner on prescription.

What should I do if I perspire a lot on my residual limb?

Keeping your skin and the socket clean and dry is very important. There are several strong antiperspirants that can be used including Driclor, Odabanin, or Sweatstop. These products can be found online or via any high street chemist.

Do not use talc, surgical spirit, standard antiperspirants or other chemicals on your residual limb. If you require further information, please discuss with the clinical staff at the prosthetics centre.

Should I check my residual limb?

- You should check your residual limb everyday and after you have taken off your prosthetic leg.
- Examine it for any blisters, abrasions, or redness.
- Seek advice from your Doctor, Nurse, Physiotherapist or Prosthetist if you notice any of these problems occurring.
- Use a mirror to view the back and/or end of your residual limb, take a picture on your phone, or ask a carer to have a look.

Will my residual limb reduce in size?

Reduction in volume happens at all levels particularly in the weeks after the operation and up to a year -18 months after surgery. More socket adjustments and re-makes are needed in the first year of prosthetic use whilst the swelling in the residual limb diminishes.

If you are wearing socks with your prosthetic limb you can increase or decrease the number of socks that you wear to cope with the fluctuating volume. Once you have reached 3 socks most of the time, you will need to contact the prosthetics department and make an appointment to come in to see the prosthetist to improve the fit of your socket.

Changes in your weight can also affect the volume of your residual limb and you may experience rubbing, redness or blisters because the socket no longer fits. If this occurs you must contact the prosthetics centre and make an appointment to attend for a review.

Do not be tempted to alter your socket in anyway and do not add pads as this will increase the pressure points and may cause more skin damage. The limb remains the property of the NHS and alterations may affect the integrity of the socket and prosthesis.

I have hard skin on my residual limb, what should I do?

The hard skin, or callus, will have formed because of pressure or rubbing within your socket. Make an appointment to come and see the prosthetist who will review your socket. If necessary they will ask our specialist podiatrist to see you. Do not try to cut the callus off yourself.

How do I take care of the socket on my prosthetic limb?

You should take care of your socket as well as your residual limb as it is the care given to these two things that will help to prevent sores, rubs, blisters and infection. The socket of your prosthetic limb (if made of laminate or polypropylene) should be cleaned twice a week or more frequently in hot weather. Use warm water and a mild soap and/or an antiseptic wipe. Do not immerse the socket in water or fill it with water. If your socket is made of leather please check with your prosthetist as to how it should be kept clean. Clean your socket at night so that there is time for it to dry and ensure it is not damp before you put on your prosthetic leg in the morning.

How should I care for socks, silicone and other liners:

Wash thoroughly in warm water with mild soap.

Do not dry over a direct heat e.g. a radiator or tumble drier.

What should I do if I am worried about my residual limb?

If you are worried about this or any other prosthetic issue, please contact the Dorset Prosthetics Centre on **0300 019 4363**.

Do not leave problems unresolved.

Remember you have open access to the team in the centre and they will be happy to advise you on the phone and/or make an appointment to see the professionals who will be able to help you.

Useful links

https://limbpower.com/application/files/9714/5571/0545/Practical_Tips.pdf

The Royal Bournemouth Hospital, Castle Lane East, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH7 7DW

Author: **Tim Randell** Date: **January 2022** Version: **Two** Review date: **January 2025** Ref: **539/21**

t: 01202 303626

w: www.uhd.nhs.uk



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