

Wound Advice

Dorset Prosthetic Centre Patient information

Will I have a wound after my surgery?

Everyone who has an amputation will have a wound after their surgery. Every person will heal at a different rate after their surgery. Your wound healing time will depend on your general health.

Other health conditions you have, and your lifestyle may affect your wound healing.

How long will it take for my wound to heal?

Our reviews have shown average wound healing takes about 6 to 8 weeks.

Your residual limb will also change in size and shape. This takes roughly 12 to 18 months to settle down.

What can affect my wound healing?

There are a few factors that can affect wound healing. Here are some of the key factors:

Diabetes

Having diabetes can slow down the wound healing process. Our results show that those with a diabetes diagnosis took longer to heal than those who did not. Higher blood sugar levels can cause damage to the nerves and blood vessels. This can cause disruption to blood flow. This will affect how the body heals itself.

Smoking and vaping

Smoking is a key factor in poorer wound healing. It can raise the risk of problems such as infections. This can lead to longer healing times. The chemicals found within tobacco and vaping products, such as nicotine have many effects on wound healing. They can reduce blood flow by constricting blood vessels. This then reduces the amount of oxygen and nutrients needed for wound repair. This can increase the time it takes for wounds to heal. This then increases the risk for infections. Also, the scar tissue formed is likely to be weaker. This means wounds have a higher chance of breaking down or reopening.

Falls

Having a lower limb amputation greatly raises your risk of falls. Falling on to your residual limb can cause further injury. This can damage your amputation site. It can cause the wound to reopen. This will likely delay wound healing. It also increases the risk of infection. You may then need further surgical treatment.

Diet

Diet can play an important role in wound healing. Having a poor diet and being underweight or overweight can slow down healing. Patients who are obese heal four weeks slower on average. This shows how important weight and diet are.

Infection

Some people will get a wound infection after their amputation. This is a risk of surgery itself but may happen after.

A wound infection can delay the wound healing processes. Our results show on average it can take up to 13 weeks longer if a wound infection develops.

You should check your wound for any signs of infection such as:

- spreading redness
- warmth
- swelling
- worse or new pain
- lots of discoloured fluid leaking from the wound. This may be yellow or green in colour.
- A bad smell coming from the wound site.
- you feel unwell or have a fever.

Sometimes the wound can develop into a serious infection which will need urgent treatment. If you think your wound is infected, you should seek medical advice as soon as possible.

What can I do to help wound healing?

If you are diabetic, having good control of your blood sugar levels is important. This will help wound healing.

If you smoke, quitting will improve healing. Stopping smoking will improve blood flow to the wound. Quitting smoking will also have long-term benefits. These include lowering the risks of heart and vascular disease, stroke and lung problems. It will also reduce your risk for further amputation.

As an amputee you are at higher risk of falls. Plan ahead to lower the risk of falling. For example, many patient falls can happen overnight. Having the wheelchair next to your bed is a good idea. It is a reminder of your amputation and change in abilities.

If you have had a below-knee amputation, you may be offered a soft cast amputation protector. This is a rigid shell worn over your residual limb. Your residual limb is more at risk after the amputation. If you fall, the soft cast protector can help protect your wound.

Your residual limb will be swollen after your amputation. Too much swelling can delay wound healing. You will 'likely' be given a compression sock after your amputation. This can help wound healing by reducing swelling and boosting blood flow. The compression sock will also prepare your residual limb for prosthetic fitting. It may also reduce phantom pain (pain appearing to come from your missing limb) and nerve pain in your limb.

At first the compression sock may feel tight or uncomfortable. Slowly build up the amount of time you wear the sock for. Keeping your residual limb up on your support board will also help reduce swelling.

Will I get wounds once I have a prosthetic limb? How is this managed?

You may get a wound, rub, or blister when wearing your prosthesis. This is due to the close fit needed to wear your prosthesis. Your residual limb will also change in shape and size. If this is not managed correctly it may cause a wound.

We will probably advise you to stop wearing your prosthesis. This will let any wounds or blisters heal. This can take a few days or sometimes weeks. We know this can be frustrating. This might mean returning to wheelchair use. However, if you keep on wearing your prosthetic limb, the wound may get worse. This will cause wound healing delays and risk further problems such as infections.

Who will look after my wound?

After discharge from hospital a district nurse will review you. If you can get to your GP surgery, you will be asked to see the practice nurse.

We are always happy to look at your wound if you are worried. This can be done face-to-face, or you can send photographs to our e-mail address. We can talk with your district or practice nurses if needed.

How else can I care for my residual limb after it has healed?

Once healed, you can keep your skin in good condition by moisturising daily. This will help the skin stay healthy and not become too dry. Over-dry or cracking skin can lead to wounds and infections. Showering and moisturising at night after prosthetic limb removal is always suggested. This will let the cream soak in well to your skin. It will also let your skin dry. Wearing a wet liner will raise the risk of skin damage.

We also urge you to do regular skin checks of your residual limb. This is very important if you have loss of feeling to your residual limb.

You can do this in a few different ways:

- using a handheld mirror
- using the reverse camera on your phone
- asking somebody to have a look for you

Many people sweat a lot in their socket. This can be worse in hotter weather. Keeping your skin and socket clean and dry is important to protect the skin. Changing your residual limb socks more often will also help. Wiping liners often with non-fragrant wipes will keep them clean.

There are a few antiperspirants that can be used. These can be found online or in high street chemists.

Where can I go for further support?

You have open access to our department. You can contact us by phone or e-mail if you have any concerns.

If you feel you need further support with changes to your lifestyle such as:

- weight management
- stopping or reducing smoking
- increasing exercise
- reducing alcohol intake

Then please seek this information from the staff within the Dorset Prosthetic Centre.

You can also phone us on: **0300 019 4363** between 8.30am-4pm.

You can also e-mail us on **uhd.prostheticscentre@nhs.net**.

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