

# Physiotherapy department:

## Using your prosthetic leg

This information sheet has been given to you to help answer some of the questions you might have about using a prosthetic leg. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak with your prosthetist or physiotherapist.

### What is a prosthetic limb?

A prosthetic limb is an artificial limb (arm or leg), which is designed to help you move around after you have had an amputation. The artificial limb is called a prosthesis.

### When can I start to use a prosthesis?

You will be ready for your prosthesis when:

- your surgical wound has healed
- you have successfully used a walking aid with the physiotherapist
- your consultant has agreed that you can use a prosthesis.

You will be referred to a prosthetist (someone who specialises in making and fitting prostheses). The prosthetist will make a cast of your stump and use it to make a prosthesis that is specifically designed to fit you. Your prosthesis will be ready about four to seven days after meeting with the prosthetist. Please have a pair of walking shoes ready for your second appointment so that you can start your walking practice with the physiotherapist.

### How does the prosthesis work?

There are many types of prostheses and the prosthetist will talk to you about the one most suitable for you. The prosthetist will explain how your prosthesis works when you are fitted with it. Please feel free to ask questions.

Many people worry that when they stand, their weight will be on their stump wound. However, the prosthesis is specially designed so that this does not happen – other areas of your leg will tolerate the pressure well.

If you have a **trans-tibial (below the knee) prosthesis**, the weight from your body will be taken by:

- an area just underneath your kneecap (the patella tendon)
- either side of a bone in your lower leg (the tibial flares)
- an area behind your knee joint (the popliteal fossa).

If you have a **trans-femoral (above the knee) prosthesis**, the weight from your body will be taken mainly by a bone in your bottom that you would normally sit on (the ischial tuberosity). This is part of your pelvis and you can feel this bone if you sit with a hand under your buttock – it feels very hard. Some of your weight will also be distributed around the top of your thigh.

## **What if I find it difficult to use a prosthesis?**

It will take a lot of effort to use your prosthesis in the beginning, however it will get easier the more you practise and become confident using it.

You will find it takes a lot more energy to walk with a prosthesis regardless of whether the amputation occurred due to an unfavourable blood supply to your limb (vascular amputation), or because of a serious injury (traumatic amputation).

You will use:

- 90% more energy with a traumatic trans-femoral (above the knee) prosthesis
- 100% more energy with a vascular trans-femoral (above the knee) prosthesis
- 25% more energy with a traumatic trans-tibial (below the knee) prosthesis
- 63% more energy with a vascular trans-tibial (below the knee) prosthesis.

## **Who will teach me to use the prosthesis?**

Your physiotherapist will help you get used to your prosthesis during rehabilitation sessions in the gym. These sessions might include other patients who are also learning to use a prosthesis. Please speak to your physiotherapist if you are unhappy about this.

You will first start to walk using parallel bars, which will allow you support your weight with your arms. The next stage is to start walking with a frame or elbow crutches, and then to use walking sticks, if appropriate.

In the beginning, you will only wear the prosthesis during your sessions with the physiotherapist, and your prosthesis will be kept in the gym. You will gradually start to increase the amount of time you use the prosthesis, under the supervision of the physiotherapist. The physiotherapist will decide with you when it is best to start to use the prosthesis on the ward.

## **How will the prosthesis affect my stump?**

Your physiotherapist will carefully monitor your stump for any changes and teach you how to check it for any problems before and after using the prosthesis. It is important that you monitor your stump – you will know it best and recognise any changes. Please ask questions if you are uncertain.

When you use the prosthesis, you will need to wear one or more special socks on your stump to protect it and to make sure the prosthesis fits correctly. The socks come in a variety of sizes – your physiotherapist will make sure you are given the right ones.

Your stump will change in size during the 18 months after your operation and it is important that you check it daily. The fit of your prosthesis will change as your stump changes and it might be necessary for you to change the number of the socks that you wear to make sure the prosthesis fits correctly. If the prosthesis does not fit you correctly, too much pressure might be put on your stump, which could cause a sore to develop.

## At home

Your prosthesis will be adjusted for you and to the pair of shoes you wear during your visits with the prosthetist at your local prosthetic centre. Please wear these same shoes when you use your prosthesis as the heel height varies on different shoes and changing them will alter the fit of your prosthesis.

If you see a sore on your stump, please see your GP immediately and contact your prosthetic centre. You can also contact the prosthetic centre for more socks, if needed. Your physiotherapist will give you the details of your local prosthetic centre before you leave hospital.

Check your prosthesis daily for loose parts, a clicking sound at the knee, or any other noises. If there is a problem with your prosthesis, do not try to fix it yourself. Your prosthesis has small and complex parts that need to be checked by an expert. Please take it to your prosthetic centre if there are any problems.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your prosthesis whilst you are in hospital, please ask your physiotherapist. Once you leave hospital you will be under the care of your prosthetic centre for life and should contact them directly.

### Pharmacy medicines helpline

For information about any medicines that you have been prescribed at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals, you can speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

**Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** – To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:  
**t:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)** – For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital. **t:** 020 7188 3416

**Language support services** – If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

**NHS Choices** – Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

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