

Seven Things to Know for New Lower Extremity Amputees



An amputation, whether planned or not, is a physical, mental and emotional loss, one that requires time to adjust. A wide range of emotions occur while undergoing the process of amputation and are completely normal as you begin to process and adjust to this life-changing event. Understanding what you are feeling and why will help you to process the situation and overcome negativity and hurdles.

No matter what circumstances have brought you here, NovaCare Prosthetics & Orthotics can help and is devoted to meeting the special needs of those with all levels of amputation. As you embark on this unique journey, keep these seven tips in mind:

1. You are not alone.

The Amputee Coalition estimates there are two million amputees in America and 185,000 leg amputations each year. This leads to a challenging period of physical recovery and complex psychological, emotional and social issues. While everyone's path in life is unique, you should not feel as if you are alone.

Support groups, peer mentors and online forums are all available if you are looking to connect with others in a similar situation as you. In your physical rehabilitation program, you have the potential to form strong bonds with your peers through shared challenges and successes. Your friends, family and caregivers can also provide a tremendous amount of support.

2. If using a prosthesis will improve your function, then you are considered a candidate for a prosthesis.

At a minimum, you must be able to tolerate standing. It is OK if you need help to stand. A strong desire to walk with a prosthesis will help you overcome any physical challenges along the way. No matter what your physical condition, motivation is the single biggest factor to your prosthetic success.

3. Your previous lifestyle and abilities are the best indicators of success with a prosthesis.

For below knee amputees, it is expected you will be able to return to all the activities you were participating in prior to the amputation. If you were dealing with sores and infection prior to your amputation, your quality of life will likely improve as an amputee.

Many factors also affect success, like general health and the length of your amputated limb. If you have multiple conditions or injuries, they may limit your potential. Generally, the higher the amputation level, the more energy is required to walk. If your amputated limb is short or above the knee, you can expect to be able to participate in most of the activities you were participating in before your amputation.

4. Take ownership of your care.

Rehabilitation is a team effort, and your participation is essential to your success. At the core, no one is more invested in the quality of your life than you. Physicians, therapists, prosthetists, patients, family members, friends and caregivers are all part of your team. Spend time picking the right people for your team. It never hurts to do a little research, or seek a second opinion.



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Be honest with your team members about your rehabilitation goals. They will work with you to set up small, achievable goals to help you gain momentum, stay motivated and get you back to your best.

Follow instructions and guidelines, and ask plenty of questions. Seek out solutions rather than making excuses. The more informed and proactive you are the better patient you will be, and the better choices you will make about your future care.

5. It's OK to smile and have a little fun.

Sometimes life can get too serious, especially when it takes unexpected turns. It's OK to have fun and let some joy into your life. Laughter is great medicine, too!

Some patients take it a bit further and get creative with the design of their prosthetics. Prints and fun fabrics can be laminated in the socket; patients have chosen designs like butterflies, camouflage, tie-die, lightning and American flag patterns.

6. Your prosthesis will be custom designed for you. The socket is the most important part.

Each prosthesis is unique and tailored to meet your lifestyle and abilities. Your prosthetist will spend time with you to understand your needs and goals and use that information to design your prosthesis. Many different styles and componentry options are available.

The most important part of your prosthesis is the socket, the portion that interfaces with your body. The socket is the part that translates your body movement to the componentry. To provide the most benefit, the socket must be snug and supportive. Your prosthetist will work with you to come up with the fit for you.

7. Receiving your prosthesis is a really big milestone, but it is not the end goal.

Learning how to walk or function with your prosthesis, returning to your lifestyle, work, family, home, sports, etc., are all the end goals.

After amputation surgery there is a lot of emphasis placed on receiving the prosthesis. So much so it is easy to mistake the prosthesis itself as the end goal. But really, much of the work begins after you receive the prosthesis.

Participation in a formal gait training program after you receive your prosthesis is an investment in the quality of your life. It takes time and practice to adapt to your new lifestyle and be confident with the prosthesis.

Keep up the hard work and, before you know it, you will reach your goals in no time!

At POSI, we consider it part of our job to be your advocate. If you have questions, concerns or would like more information specific to prosthetic devices and/or other organizations and resources that can help you, please contact a POSI center near you today. We're here to be your partner for life.

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