

## ***Upper Limb information for new patients***

The emotional responses to limb loss or absence are as complex and unique as each individual. Your emotions are running riot and your mind is racing with all sorts of questions. This leaflet is intended to try and answer at least some of those questions by giving you an idea of the rehabilitation process that will take place over the next few weeks, and of the team of people who are part of the process.

### ***Congenital Limb Absence***

If you have given birth to a child with a limb absence, you will know only too well the shock you have experienced. It is widely recognised that parents experience complex emotions when a child is born with an impairment which becomes more obvious during the child's development. Parents may experience feelings of powerlessness, "I don't think I can cope with this," or even guilt, "Was it something I did, or something I didn't do?" Associated with these feelings are often anger with themselves, the medical profession or with the world in general.

***REACH; Association for children with arm or hand deficiency***  
**PO Box 54, Helston TR13 8WD, Tel: 0845 130225**  
**[www.reach.org.uk](http://www.reach.org.uk)**

### ***Acquired Limb Loss***

Within Scotland there are approximately 850 amputations per year, but the majority of these are lower limb amputations and are due to PAD (Peripheral Arterial Disease) - hardening of the arteries and/or diabetes. Most upper limb amputations are as a result of trauma, meningitis or tumours.

The most common level of upper limb loss/absence is transradial (below elbow - B/E) closely followed by transhumeral (above elbow - A/E). Other levels include partial hand, wrist disarticulation, elbow disarticulation (through elbow - T/E) and shoulder disarticulation.

### ***Immediately after amputation***

During amputation some nerves have been disconnected which may result in you feeling that the amputated limb is still there. There may be strange sensations in the limb, it may feel as if it is in an awkward position or you may even experience pain in either the stump or amputated limb. This **Phantom Sensation** or pain should diminish over time.

### ***Prosthetic Service: First Visit***

You will generally be referred to the Limb Fitting Centre about 3-4 weeks after amputation, provided your stump is healing well. In some cases you may be in a ward which is an integral part of a Limb Fitting Centre, and may have already met with the rehabilitation team.

The team consists of the **Consultant**, a doctor who specialises in vascular/ orthopaedics/ rehabilitation, the **Prosthetist**, who will be responsible for provision of your artificial limb, the **Occupational Therapist** who will advise on daily living activities and the **Physiotherapist**, who will advise on general fitness and mobility.

Again you may have had previous contact with the occupational therapist to discuss either your own condition or that of your child, and she may have been able to put you in touch with others who have undergone a similar experience.

They will decide if you are ready for limb fitting. Not all patients who undergo amputation go on to be fitted for an artificial limb - this could be because of other medical conditions, personal circumstances or choice.

They will also decide which type of limb would be most suitable for you at this time, by taking into consideration a number of factors such as age, weight, fitness, build, lifestyle, range of activities (especially if you intend to continue with or become involved in sporting activities) and, if applicable, your occupation.

The Prosthetist then takes both measurements and a plaster cast of your stump. The cast takes about five minutes and is done using a plaster bandage only a few layers thick. It is cold when first applied to the skin, generates heat when hardening, and is then removed as soon as it has set.

They will also take measurements and drawings of the sound limb to try and ensure as close a match as possible. All of this may take about an hour as the Prosthetist must gather as much information as possible.

## ***The Next Stage***

About one week later you will return to the limb centre to try on your new limb. A socket will have been made from the plaster cast taken, and the limb assembled to the measurements recorded. During this session you may be aware of pressure over certain areas of your stump. The Prosthetist will explain why you are feeling these areas of pressure - but if you are experiencing discomfort or pain, you **must** tell the prosthetist during the fitting. Your finished limb should be ready within two to three weeks, at which time you will return once more to the limb centre.

## ***Early days with your new limb***

When you first receive your new limb you will be taught how to use it under careful supervision, usually by the Occupational Therapist. How to put it on and off correctly and how to use your limb for day-to-day functions.

This programme may take some weeks to achieve with the new limb feeling difficult and awkward. but you must learn to pace yourself and expect things to happen slowly and differently.

The occupational therapy will continue over the next few weeks after which you will be recalled to the Limb Fitting Centre to ensure that the socket is fitting correctly, as the stump may have changed significantly since the limb was fitted.

## ***Follow Up***

Over the next year you will continue to have appointments every few months to check on your progress and also the fit of the limb. New sockets may be required at this time - but it is highly dependant on the changes in stump size which you experience.

## ***Care of Your Stump***

You will be given a supply of stump socks when you receive your limb. This may include terry-towelling; wool/woollen mix; cotton; nylon. These are worn next to the skin to provide some cushioning and also to absorb perspiration. The socks should be changed daily (or more frequently if required) and preferably hand washed to ensure that they are clean and soft at all times. Additional socks are available from the Limb Centre.

***If you are using a sleeve or liner, take advice from your prothesist on caring for it.***

The condition of the skin on your stump can have a significant affect on your level of comfort when wearing the limb. The environment within the socket can become quite damp due to sweating, so to avoid problems you should change your socks frequently and also wipe out the liner and/or the inside of the socket and allow them to air overnight.

Your stump should be kept clean like the rest of your body and also a daily check made for any abrasions or sore pots. Make sure that any lotions or creams you use on your stump have been approved by the medical staff.

## **Care of Your Artificial Limb**

If any part of your limb needs attention or adjusted - please contact the Limb Centre - don't try to do it yourself. It may cause damage and make the limb unsafe to use.

Once again, don't ever be scared to ask any questions about what is happening, especially if you are unsure or unhappy about what is going on. Everyone will try to give you as much information as they can. Please ask - they will be only too happy to help.

## **Talking About It....**

If you find that you are agonising over what has happened, you may find it useful to make contact with one of your local support groups, or talk on an individual basis with a trained counsellor. This can either be arranged for you, or you may wish to make contact with them personally. Remember, any way that can help you find some peace of mind at this difficult time can only be of benefit to all concerned. This will most likely be a situation that you have never faced before, so you will have no idea of what the future may hold. If you are a parent, you may find it difficult to imagine your child experiencing a normal childhood, and worry about what limitations may be imposed upon their development. Again this is where talking to other parents should help ease those fears.

## **Please see our Counselling and Support information leaflet for details**

*All parents worry about their children, but when you have a child with a limb loss or absence, it highlights many questions about their future and about how both you and your child will cope.*

*As an adult, losing a limb through trauma or illness is a very personal matter as everyone reacts to such a loss in a different way. Your body has been permanently altered and almost all aspects of your life have been affected*

You are probably feeling that no one else could possibly understand what you are experiencing. Your emotions are running riot and your mind in racing with all sorts of questions such as: -

*What is expected of me?  
How can you lead a normal life?  
How do you cope with all of this?*

There may also be a number of more practical issues that concern you such as: -

*What happens now?  
How do they decide if you get an artificial limb?  
Who is involved in the process?  
What will the limb look like - how will it work?  
Are there different types of limb -is there a choice?*

**Please ask the team - they will be only too happy to try and help.**

## **Scottish Limb Centres**

### **Aberdeen**

Mobility & Rehabilitation Services  
Woodend Hospital  
Eday Road  
ABERDEEN AB15 6XS  
01224 556 843

### **Glasgow**

WESTMARC  
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust  
1345 Govan Road  
GLASGOW G51 4TF  
0141 201 2620

### **Dundee**

TRES Prosthetic Services  
Tayside Orthopedic & Rehabilitation  
Technology Centre  
Ninewells Hospital & Medical School  
DUNDEE DD1 9SY  
01382 496296

### **Edinburgh**

SMaRT Services  
Astley Ainslie Hospital  
133 Grange Loan  
Edinburgh EH9 2HL  
031 537 9444

### **Satellite Limb Centres in Ayr and Inverness**

**Murray Foundation, 1st Floor, Broomloan House, Ibrox , Glasgow, G51 2XD**  
**Tel: 0141 580 8564**  
**Fax: 0141 427 7241**  
**Freephone Helpline: 0800 0282822**  
**E-mail: [info@murray-foundation.org.uk](mailto:info@murray-foundation.org.uk)**  
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