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## PHANTOM LIMB FOLLOWING AMPUTATION

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Immediately following your surgery, it may feel as if the limb that has just been amputated is still there. Do not worry about this as it is extremely common and occurs because the brain is still sending signals to the part that is no longer there. This happens as the brain retains a “memory” of the nerves that used to supply that limb. In time that memory will fade. Initially, your ‘phantom’ may even feel bigger in size than the original limb, but it will quickly settle down. Be careful in the first few months after your surgery as many people report occasionally forgetting that their limb is no longer there and try to use it. This is common just after waking up or after sitting for a prolonged period of time. Sensations in the phantom can be described as tingling, numb, pins and needles, itchy or just being there. Over time you might find that you only experience the very end of the limb, e.g. your foot if it is a lower limb, or your hand if it is an upper limb. It may also be the case that over time you feel this foot or hand getting closer in distance to your body. Again, don’t worry about this, as it is perfectly normal. When you are fitted with your artificial limb, the sensation of your phantom can be very useful as it can make you more aware of where your artificial limb is in relation to you and your surroundings.

Usually, you reach a point where you are not aware of your phantom at all. However, sometimes people find that the phantom can become uncomfortable because either it becomes intense, or just goes on for a very long time. In this case, many people report that gently rubbing their stump can help, particularly with ‘pins and needles or’ itching’ sensations. Some people also describe the pain as shooting, shocking, cramping or aching, which can be distressing and may continue for many years. This discomfort can occur at irregular and infrequent intervals with episodes lasting anything from a few minutes to several hours. Several things are thought to trigger these episodes such as illness, damp or cold weather, stress, or exertion.

Treatment options are limited, although there are a number of medications that your doctor may try. However, there are alternative to conventional medicine, some of which have been developed by amputees themselves

- **TENS** (sends small electrical pulses through electrodes placed on the skin to underlying nerve fibres)
- **Acupuncture** (uses fine needles to stimulate the nerves fibres and releases the body’s natural pain killers)
- **Stump massage** (many use an aromatherapy oil such as lavender)
- **Exercise** (particularly swimming)
- **Heat** (either a warm bath or a hot water bottle on the stump)
- Either taking your limb off or putting it

Finally, if you are distressed by phantom pain, then please speak to someone about it, either a member of the medical or rehabilitation staff or another amputee.

For more information on this, or any other aspect of aspect of amputee rehabilitation – please contact the Murray Foundation on

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