INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Rehabilitation following lower limb amputation

Introduction
This leaflet is intended to give you, your family and carers information about your stay and rehabilitation following a lower limb amputation.

Included within this leaflet is:
- An introduction to the rehabilitation team
- Discussion of the rehabilitation journey following amputation
- Useful contacts

We hope this information will be useful. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask a member of the team.

Who will be involved in my rehabilitation?
You will meet a range of health professionals who will be involved in your rehabilitation.

Amputee Therapy Team
Physiotherapists, an occupational therapist (OT) and a rehabilitation assistant make up this team. The physiotherapists will focus on exercise, strength, balance and mobility. The occupational therapist will look into functional tasks and the home environment.

Other professionals you may meet:
- Specialist nursing staff
- Social worker
- Orthotist
- Consultant in rehabilitation and their team of doctors
- Prosthetists

What happens before my surgery?
We try to meet all patients before their operation so we can explain the rehabilitation process that will follow your surgery.

This gives you and your family the opportunity to ask any questions and gain as much information as possible.

The physiotherapist and OT will want to know how you have been managing your daily activities before coming into hospital. The physiotherapist will look at how you move and how strong you are as this will help to plan your rehabilitation after surgery.

The OT will look at your home environment and how you perform functional or everyday tasks.
**What happens after my surgery?**

When you return to the ward your leg will be bandaged and there may be a tube coming from the bandages. This drains the wound to prevent it from becoming too swollen. It will be removed a few days later and replaced by a smaller bandage.

It is important to start moving as soon as possible and the team will see you starting from the day after your operation.

The physiotherapist will guide your exercise programme. On the second day after your surgery, the physiotherapist and OT will show you how to start moving around and how to get out of bed. The OT will provide a wheelchair and show you how to use this to move around and increase your independence on the ward.

**Pain**

Your amputated limb may feel quite sore in the beginning and you will be given medication to help the pain.

**Phantom sensation and phantom pain**

Experiencing a feeling you still have your absent limb is common and is known as phantom sensation. The feeling of pain in the absent limb is known as phantom pain.

There are different ways of handling these sensations. It is important you are aware they are common and well recognised medically. Please let the nursing staff and doctors know if you are experiencing them.

We encourage you to look at and touch your amputated limb following your surgery as this can help reduce these sensations.

**Rehabilitation**

The team will set realistic goals with you and continue to review these throughout your rehabilitation.

They will aim for you to achieve your goals and have as much independence and function as possible following amputation.

**Physiotherapy**

The physiotherapist will look at your strength, movement and balance. You will be given an exercise programme tailored to your individual needs.

It is important to carry out this programme every day, even after you are discharged from hospital.

As you become stronger you may be asked to come to the physiotherapy gym to progress your exercises and rehabilitation. You should wear comfortable loose-fitting clothing for this.
Not everyone who has an amputation will be able, or will necessarily want, to be a limb wearer.

As the pain and swelling improves in your amputated limb you may be ready to practise walking to see if a prosthetic limb would be suitable for you.

Patients who are suitable will start using a ‘practice limb’ in physiotherapy. This will allow the physiotherapist to see if a prosthetic limb would be suitable for you and prepare you for using one.

It takes time to assess whether a prosthetic limb is suitable for your needs. This involves assessment by your physiotherapist and the rehabilitation team at your local prosthetic centre. Your prosthetic centre could be Nottingham, Derby or Sheffield depending on where you live.

Your physiotherapy treatment might continue once you are discharged home. You may return to the hospital as an outpatient to continue your rehabilitation.

**Occupational Therapy**

The OT will liaise with your family or friends to look at your home environment and recommend any home adaptations, to enable you to maintain independence once you are home. As an acute hospital in-patient service, we are limited to assessing only the issues which relate to your safe discharge home from hospital. If we feel you need more major adaptations, we will refer you to the Social Services Occupational Therapy team in the community.

The OT will help to identify and overcome the physical and environmental obstacles following your amputation. We will support you in being able to complete your normal activities of daily living. This may include dressing, undressing, personal hygiene, and transferring from bed to chair, wheelchair, car, toilet etc.

The OT will spend time with you to teach you different ways of doing such activities and identify if you need any pieces of equipment to support you in being independent at home. This might include grab rails, temporary ramps, commode and raised toilet seats.

You will be issued with a wheelchair, which will be suitable for your home environment, and you will be taught how to use it. If you live in a house, the OT will recommend that you sleep downstairs on discharge from hospital. We do not advise patients to use the stairs initially due to possible injury to your amputated side.

Once you are well enough the OT will arrange a home visit. The aim of this visit is to allow you and your OT the opportunity to see how you will manage on discharge. You will be brought back to hospital afterwards so that your discharge can be planned.

**How will I adjust to my new life following amputation?**

It is normal and completely understandable that you may feel a range of emotions following your amputation.

Talking to relatives and the therapy team can often be helpful at this time.
Care of your amputated limb

- Touch and massage your limb as early as possible following your surgery
- If you have a below knee amputation, it is important to keep your leg elevated when you are sitting to prevent limb swelling or joint contracture. The OT will provide a support for when you are sat in your wheelchair
- Once you no longer wear a dressing on your limb, wash your limb daily with warm water and a mild unperfumed soap
- A daily bath or shower is recommended to maintain your personal hygiene and ensure you are washing away the general bacteria that live on your skin
- If your limb still requires dressings, arrange with the community nurse a suitable time to wash your amputated limb so it can be dressed again soon afterwards
- If special dressings are being used, this may prevent you from washing the wound yourself. Check with the specialist nurse first
- Apply an unperfumed moisturiser each day. Apply in the direction of hair growth, avoiding rubbing in circular movements as this will clog up the hairs
- Check your skin daily for any broken areas. You may need to use a mirror or have someone help to check it for you.

Seek medical advice if you find any broken skin, blisters or red areas
- Wash your foot daily with soap and warm water. Ensure you test the water, preferably with your elbow before putting your foot into the water
- Dry your foot thoroughly, especially between the toes
- Apply an unperfumed moisturiser daily
- Check your footwear regularly for rough edges. Ensure your footwear fits properly and there is enough room so your toes are not cramped
- Check your socks are not too tight around your ankle and do not mark your skin
- Continue with the exercises given to you by the physiotherapist as these will benefit your circulation and help with muscle tightness and strength
- Do not hop. This will put extra strain on your joints and foot
- Take care to avoid knocking your leg and foot on the footplates of your wheelchair. Remember to move your footplates out of the way when getting in and out of your wheelchair.

Useful contacts

- King’s Mill Hospital Physiotherapy & Occupational Therapy (Clinic 10) 01623 672384
- Mansfield Wheelchair Services 01623 785076
- British Red Cross (Equipment Service) 0845 1272911
- Mansfield and Ashfield Social Services 0844 9808080

Care of your remaining limb

- Check your foot every day with the help of someone if needed.
Related information leaflets

- “Preventing and Managing Falls - Advice if you have had a lower limb amputation” (available from a member of the rehabilitation team)

Useful website

http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/amputation/Pages/Introduction.aspx

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Further sources of information

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. Stating a web address does not imply we endorse a particular site. Neither does not stating a web address imply lack of endorsement.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

The PALS team is available to help with any of your comments, compliments or concerns and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.