

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Rehabilitation following lower limb amputation

This leaflet is intended to provide information and try to reduce some of the worries you may have when going into hospital to have an amputation. We will support you, your family and carers as much as possible. Our Amputee Rehabilitation Team is based at King's Mill Hospital. We are a team of occupational therapists, physiotherapists and therapy assistants. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us on:

Amputee Rehabilitation Team - 01623 672384
(Please state your message is for the Amputee Team)

Glossary – some new words you may hear and their meanings (Written in *bold italic* throughout this leaflet)

- **Access visit:** A visit to your home to assess wheelchair suitability and identify potential issues which we can support you with.
- **Compression sock:** A sock used to reduce swelling in your stump.
- **Femurett:** A training limb used in physiotherapy.
- **Home visit:** A visit with you to your home to practice activities of daily living in preparation for you returning home.
- **Knee disarticulation:** Through-knee amputation.
- **Limb centre:** Regional prosthetic centres, which are responsible for assessing and providing prosthetic limbs.
- **PPAM aid:** A training limb used in physiotherapy.
- **Prosthesis/prosthetic limb:** Artificial limb.
- **Prosthetist:** Professional who is responsible for your prosthetic needs.
- **Remaining limb:** Non-amputated limb.
- **Stump/residual limb:** Amputated limb.
- **Stump board:** Support attached to the wheelchair to support limbs amputated below the knee.
- **Transfemoral amputation:** Above the knee amputation.
- **Transfers:** The way you will move from a chair/bed/toilet.
- **Transtibial amputation:** Below the knee amputation.

Early rehabilitation

We will teach you exercises to help keep your joints moving and your muscles strong. It is important that you complete these between therapy sessions and continue once you leave hospital. We will teach you how to **transfer** and provide or recommend any necessary equipment to help you when you leave hospital. We will support you to set realistic goals.

You will have the opportunity to practice washing, dressing, using the toilet and making meals/drinks. We will advise you on how to do this as safely and independently as possible.

How to get the most out of your rehabilitation

We will guide and support you to get washed, dressed and sit out of bed daily. We will also encourage you to engage in therapy sessions to reach your potential.

What to wear

It will help you to have plenty of loose fitting clothing. Wear supportive footwear, which is comfortable and not too tight.

Wheelchair

Wheelchair use is recommended following an amputation. Your occupational therapist will provide a wheelchair for you and support you to use it safely and efficiently.

Falls

It is important to try to reduce the risk of falling as much as possible following an amputation. You can be at higher risk of falling due to changes to your balance and muscle strength.

You may also feel that the amputated limb is still there (phantom sensations), which may cause you to try to stand on it or use it to steady yourself if you lose your balance. You can help to avoid falls by ensuring:

- Brakes are applied when your wheelchair is stationary.
- You are concentrating on your current task.
- You take your time to complete your current task.

The use of crutches to hop is not advised due to the increased risk of falls and potential damage to your remaining foot and residual limb. Swelling and wound healing can also be affected. These can all impact on your progress in rehabilitation.

Your home

As you will be going home in a wheelchair, your occupational therapist will complete an **access visit** to help plan for your discharge from hospital.

Your occupational therapist may also take you for a **home visit**.

Common issues include:

- **Getting in and out your home**

If you have steps into your property, your occupational therapist may be able to provide you with a temporary ramp if your steps are suitable. Someone will then need to help you get in and out of your home.

- **Door widths**

Not being wide enough for wheelchair access. Bathroom doors are often narrow.

- **Stairs**

We advise against going upstairs as this may cause damage to your **stump** and **remaining limb**. If you live in a house we will advise you to sleep downstairs. Your occupational therapist can advise on suitability and layout of rooms as well as creating enough space for a wheelchair.

Adaptations to your home

Your occupational therapist can recommend and refer you to Social Services' occupational therapist for adaptations to your home. Please note that these cannot be completed in time for your discharge home, so it may be necessary to go home with temporary solutions in place until major adaptations are complete.

If it is necessary to consider re-housing your occupational therapist will be able to advise and support you with the application and write a supporting letter.

Fire service referral

If you are unable to get in and out of your home by yourself, your occupational therapist can refer you to the Fire Service for advice and a home fire safety check.

Health and wellbeing

It is important to eat a well-balanced diet and drink well to aid wound healing and recovery following your amputation.

If you smoke, then continuing to smoke following your amputation can cause further damage to your **remaining leg** and affect wound healing. There is support to help you to stop smoking. Please speak to your therapist, nurse or doctor who will be happy to help you.

Exercise is an important part of living a healthy lifestyle and can improve the management of different medical conditions. Your physiotherapist will provide you with suitable exercises and advice.

Psychological and emotional impact

The loss of a limb can have a considerable psychological impact. Many people who have had an amputation report feeling emotions such as grief and bereavement, similar to experiencing the death of a loved one.

Coming to terms with the psychological impact of an amputation is often as important as coping with the physical demands. This is due to:

- The loss of sensation from your amputated limb.
- The loss of function from your amputated limb.
- Your sense of body image and other people's perception of your body image changing.

Talking often helps. Try to talk about your thoughts and feelings. There are free counselling services for you to use - please see the contact numbers at the end of this booklet.

Pain control

Following your operation you may experience pain in your amputated limb. This should be well controlled with pain medication. If you are experiencing any pain or discomfort it is important to let your doctor, nurse or therapist know.

Phantom sensations - when you can feel the limb that is no longer there. They are very common and experienced by most amputees. The limb may feel a normal size, shape and sensation or it may feel different. You may feel the phantom limb moving as you move your **residual limb** and it can vary in intensity.

Phantom pain - a painful feeling in the limb that is no longer there. It can be triggered by stressful emotions, physical triggers, changes in weather and temperature and also memories of what your limb felt like if it was painful before the amputation.

If you are worried about these or are experiencing phantom pain or sensation please talk to your therapist, doctor or nurse who may be able to suggest things to help such as:

- Warm bath/shower.
- Touching your **stump**.
- Gentle massage.
- Exercising your **stump**.
- Relaxation.
- Visualisation of your missing limb.
- Identifying triggers that set off the sensations.
- Your doctor may prescribe specific medication to help.

Care of your residual limb/stump:

- Check your skin daily for any redness, wounds or blisters. You may need to use a mirror or ask someone to check for you.
- Wash your **stump** daily.
- Dry your skin thoroughly and use a non-perfumed moisturiser, avoiding open areas.
- You may be given a **compression sock** to wear to help reduce swelling in your residual limb.
- If you have a **transtibial amputation** it is important to rest your **stump** on the wheelchair **stump board** with your knee straight to prevent any swelling or loss of knee movement.
- Gentle massage of your limb encourages blood supply, aids wound healing and can reduce phantom pain and sensations.

If you are concerned about any skin breakdown, scabs or unhealed areas please contact your GP or nurse.

Care of your remaining leg:

- Wash your foot daily.
- Dry your leg and foot thoroughly, especially between the toes.
- Check your foot daily and seek medical advice if you have any wounds or skin breakdown.
- Make sure your socks are not too tight around your ankle/calf.
- Wear supportive footwear which is comfortable and not too tight.

Once you are home

You will be contacted by an occupational therapist to ask how you are managing. They may arrange to visit you at home to support you with any issues. Things commonly discussed and practised include shopping, housework, making meals, leisure activities, driving, falls and personal care.

Outpatient physiotherapy

Depending on your wishes and ability, you may be placed on a waiting list to be contacted and invited to attend a physiotherapy assessment at King's Mill Hospital to assess your potential for further rehabilitation. You can arrange hospital transport if required and if you are eligible to use this service.

We will ask how you are managing everyday activities, assess how you are able to **transfer** e.g. wheelchair to bed, measure your muscle strength and also see how your joints are moving. We will help you to set realistic goals and explain how we can work with you towards achieving these. We will teach you exercises to target areas for improvement. If we need to visit you at home, this can also be arranged.

Prosthetic assessment and rehabilitation

If you are interested in being assessed for a prosthetic limb, we will explain the process to you. We work very closely with Nottingham Mobility Centre (regional limb centre) which is based at Nottingham City Hospital.

We can arrange an appointment for you to meet the team to discuss your options and suitability for achieving successful use of a prosthetic limb.

There are many factors that can impact on achieving success with a prosthetic limb including wound healing, safety, cognitive function and general health. These will be discussed and assessed with you on an individual basis.

Amputee Wheelchair Group

Our therapy group for amputee wheelchair users is aimed at people who are unable or choose not to use a prosthetic limb following amputation. It runs once a month at King's Mill Hospital. The group aims to promote health and wellbeing in a fun and friendly way by targeting general fitness, movement, strength, balance, confidence, everyday function, teamwork, health education, social integration, relaxation and falls prevention.

Sexual relationships

Sexual relationships may be resumed once you feel comfortable.

Employment and benefits

Our team will support you in returning to or finding new suitable employment if this is one of your goals. We can provide:

- Physical support to achieve employment-centred goals.
- Professional support to return to employment.
- Benefits information.
- Support group information, e.g. Midlands Amputees and Friends (MAAF).

Driving

Driving is still possible following an amputation. You will need an automatic car or a car with some adaptations.

It is a legal requirement to notify the DVLA and your insurance company if you have a disability.

Please see the leaflet 'Driving after an amputation', which is available from your occupational therapist or physiotherapist, for more information.

Your occupational therapist can refer you to Derby Driveability for a driving assessment. Derby Driveability can advise on car adaptations, hoists and mobility allowance.

Useful telephone numbers and websites (for websites either click on the link or copy and paste into your browser)	
Midlands Association for Amputees and Friends (MAAF) MAAF provides free, confidential and impartial advice and information to all amputees and their families, carers and friends; e.g. benefits, grants for access and adaptations to your property, transport, driving and holidays.	Telephone: 01773 872922 Website: www.midlandsamputees.org.uk
Nottingham Mobility Centre This service prescribes and maintains prosthetic/artificial limbs.	Telephone: 0115 9691169, extension 55688
Talking services The services below provide psychological assessment and treatment (talking therapies) for common mental health problems. This includes depression, anxiety, trauma and stress. Let's Talk Wellbeing Insight NHS talking therapy - free and confidential.	Telephone: 0300 3002200 Website: letstalknottingham@nottshc.nhs.uk Telephone: 0300 555 5582 Website: https://www.insighthealthcare.org
Nottinghamshire Social Services 'Golden Number' Occupational therapy for equipment and adaptations, blue badge scheme, carers, help with benefits and carer's support.	Telephone: 0300 500 8080
Age UK Age UK Connect is a free, friendly and problem-solving service who can help with e.g. benefits/financial advice and finding cleaners and gardeners, and managing long term conditions including dementia and carers support. Other services include social activities and exercise groups.	Telephone: 01623 488217 Website: https://www.ageuk.org.uk/notts

British Red Cross (equipment loan service) Please ring for repairs and collections.	Telephone: 0345 127 2911
Disability Sport England Sport and activities including wheelchair sports. Speak to your therapists for more information	Telephone: 0345 850 8508
Tuvida Nottinghamshire carer's hub This service offers advice and information to support carers.	Telephone: 0115 824 8824 Website: https://www.carerstrustem.org/hub
Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO) A national charity working with former miners and their families.	Telephone: 01623 625767 Website: www.ciswo.org
British Limbless Association for ex-Service Men and Women (BLESMA)	Telephone: 0208 5901124 Website: https://blesma.org
Diabetes UK Information, advice and support for people with diabetes.	Telephone: 0345 123 2399 Website: https://www.diabetes.org.uk
Limbless Association helpline Information, advice and support for amputees, peer support and welfare/benefits.	Telephone: 0800 6440185 Website: http://www.limbless-association.org
Derby Drivability Offer a service to anyone who requires advice or help about matters related to driving and car adaptations. A driving assessment is offered. Speak to your therapists for more information.	Telephone: 01332 371929 Website: www.uhdb.nhs.uk/service-drivability
Wheelchair Services Provide NHS wheelchairs. Based in Mansfield	Telephone: 01623 785076
Rosscare Please ring for maintenance and repairs of your NHS wheelchairs.	Telephone: 0845 2301557

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

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

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. 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. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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