

Emotional support following limb amputation

Introduction

This leaflet is for anyone who may soon have, or has had, a limb amputation. It gives you information about the emotional aspects of amputation. Also included is information about what to expect and what to look out for, as well as providing access for further support, if you need it.

Why might this leaflet be useful?

Having an amputation is a major event that can bring many emotional challenges. Coming to terms with the psychological impact of an amputation is often as important as coping with the physical demands.

Maintaining and improving your emotional health and wellbeing can help you come to terms with your limb loss, as well as support your rehabilitation and longer-term health.

The psychological impact of losing a limb

It is normal to experience different emotions in both the run up to and immediately after an amputation.

Common emotions include:

- Anxiety
- Grief
- Anger or agitation
- Shock and disbelief
- Body image and self-esteem worries

Everyone is different. Some people struggle immediately after the operation, while for others the problems might show in the weeks, months or years afterwards. You might feel fine most of the time but it is important to look out for signs that you could benefit from extra support.

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Patient Information

Speak to your GP if you notice any of the following in the months after amputation:

- Constant sadness or mood swings
- Deep anxiety or panic attacks
- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Trouble sleeping
- Changes in appetite
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

While managing difficult emotions is a common part of your recovery, some people report feelings of **relief** after having an amputation. This may be true if you have struggled with pain in the affected limb for a while. In this case, amputation may mean improved function and signal the end of a long struggle to save the limb.

Going through an amputation may also lead to a sense of inner strength, purpose and confidence to overcome the challenges ahead.

It is important to remember that you may experience a mixture of emotions. Some people describe their feelings like being on a rollercoaster ride, with highs and lows throughout recovery. Like a rollercoaster, it may feel like you have little control over these emotions. However, it is also important to remember that these feelings are typical, expected and part of the healing process.

What can I do to help?

Taking active steps can increase your ability to cope and improve your quality of life in the future.

In the early days it may be helpful to:

- Take control of decision making as soon as you are able.
- Be clear about what you are capable of doing for yourself and how others can help, if needed.
- Recognise that the frustration of being dependent on others will reduce as you regain your independence.
- Talking from an early stage to family, friends and professionals can help you identify your emotions, making it easier to recognise if and when you need extra support.

Patient Information

Other areas to consider include:

- Appreciate how your body still works for you.
- Talk with others, this could be family, friends, others who have had an amputation or professionals.
- Find activities you enjoy.
- Monitor your pain levels and seek advice from your GP, if needed.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle.

What if I need more support?

Your GP will be able to direct you to support for any emotional difficulties you might face in the months following amputation. In addition, some key organisations and charities are listed below.

Limbless Association

This is the largest civilian limb loss charity in the UK. They provide information, advice and support to amputees and their families and friends. Their Volunteer Visitor scheme will pair you up with another amputee who will offer support and answer any questions you may have.

Website: www.limbless-association.org

Tel: 0800 644 0185

Amputation Foundation

Provides information about benefits, legal information, prosthetics advice and amputee support groups.

Website: www.amputationfoundation.org

Tel: 01744 808 850

Limb Power

A charity which encourages amputees to take part in physical activity, sport and the arts to improve quality of life and aid lifelong rehabilitation.

Website: www.limbpower.com

**Patient
Information**
Samaritans

Free and anonymous helpline available 24/7 where you can talk to a Samaritans volunteer who will listen with no judgement and help you work through what is on your mind.

Tel: 116 123

Please ask a member of staff if you would like access to further support resources. We have an extensive list of local and national charities and services which may be able to help.

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Making a choice

Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling. 2011;84:379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>