

Advice for children undergoing amputation

Children's Hospital

Information for Parents

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What is an amputation?

Amputation is an operation. In this operation a surgeon removes parts of your body. This can be an arm, leg, finger, or toe. They can also remove just a part of your arm, leg, finger, or toe, not the entire thing.

Why do we amputate?

We need to amputate if you have:

- an injury where the limb cannot be saved
- abnormalities since birth (congenital)
- problems with how the limb has formed. Removing the limb would make it easier to move. This can be with an artificial (prosthetic) limb.
- death of tissue (necrosis). This can be after a bloodstream infection (meningococcal septicaemia).
- tumours or cancers in that part of your body

We will do amputation at the lowest level. This makes sure that there is enough healthy tissue. This will let the stump heal and fit a prosthetic limb.

The surgeon can speak with the prosthetist (a specialist in prosthetics). They will look at the amputation and what prosthesis fitting is best for you.

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After surgery care

After surgery your child will return to the ward. The nurse will:

- carry out routine observations.
- give you pain relief. This can be an epidural. We would have talked to you before surgery about this. Your child may also need a medicine called diazepam to control any muscle spasms.
- help you reduce swelling by raising the foot end of the bed. Do not raise the limb.
- help you to correctly position your child in bed and on wheelchair.
- make sure your child sees a physiotherapist. This is for exercises to strengthen the muscles. It is also to stop joint stiffness and abnormalities in joint flexion (contractures).
- make sure your child sees an occupational therapist. This is to prepare for going home and coping at home with mobility.

Bandaging and wound care

Bandaging and wound care is really important in the healing process. This will let the stump take shape to wear a prosthetic limb comfortably. This will let your child walk and run to the best of their ability.

- The wound will be re-dressed as the surgeon instructs.
- You must keep the dressing clean and dry.
- You should use the correct dressing to cover the wound.
- We remove the stitches 2 weeks after the operation.
- You can start bathing after the wound has fully healed. Your doctor or nurse will talk to you about this.
- You must take care to stop the wound getting infected. Any signs of infection must be treated immediately. Your nurse will talk to you about this before going home.

Bandaging technique

You must use the correct bandaging technique. This is to make sure the correct shape is kept for the prosthetic limb.

- Bandaging should be a diagonal figure of '8' technique. Do this with a crepe or elastic bandage.
- Circular turns of the bandage can stop proper blood flow.
- Bandages must be wrinkle free to stop blisters developing.
- You must reapply bandages 2 times daily and replace it if it slips.

Physiotherapy

Your child must go to physiotherapy to strengthen their limb. It is also to prepare the stump for the prosthesis fitting.

When the wound has healed you can massage the stump. This helps to prepare it for wearing a prosthetic limb.

Planning for when you go home

Losing a limb is a life changing event for people. It can be traumatic. You may need psychological and emotional support. You may need to develop coping strategies and accepting a new body image. Physiotherapy and occupational therapy will continue after you go home. You will have outpatient appointments to check your wound. They will also review your progress.

Possible complications

Here are the possible complication and what to do for them:

- Bleeding: You can raise the end of the bed and apply pressure bandage.
- Swelling: You can raise the end of the bed.
- Infection: You can swab for infection and treat it with antibiotics.

Positioning for above knee amputation:

Do:

- Raise the foot of the bed to elevate
- Keep legs together
- Lie on stomach, bed flat
- Move stump back and forth as if foot there, rest with stump down

Do not:

- Place pillow under the stump
- Place pillow between thighs
- Sit or lie with head of bed up for long periods
- Walk or rest with stump up

Positioning for below knee amputation:

Do:

- Raise the foot of the bed to elevate
- Keep legs together
- Lie on stomach, bed flat
- Place board under stump
- Move stump back and forth as if the foot there, rest with stump back

Do not:

- Place pillow under the knee
- Hang stump over bed
- Sit or lie with head of bed up for long periods
- Lie or sit with knees bent
- Walk or rest with stump forward

Contacts:

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Previous reference: unknown

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