

Support After Amputation:

A Guide for Families

What to Expect After Amputation

The recovery process after an amputation involves physical and emotional challenges.

After surgery, your loved one may experience pain, swelling, and limited mobility. They may require help with basic tasks such as dressing, bathing, and moving around.

Over time, they may begin physical therapy to help regain strength and mobility, and it's important to support them through this process.

Nursing and Care Requirements

Depending on the type of amputation and their health condition, short or long term nursing care may be needed. Hospital staff will help arrange this before your family member comes home.

This could include:

- **Wound care**
- **Medication management**

A home health nurse or other professional services may be available to assist with ongoing care. Speak with healthcare providers to get the support your family needs.

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Rehabilitation

After an amputation, rehabilitation is an important part of recovery and learning to adapt to everyday life. It helps with building strength, improving mobility, and gaining confidence in using mobility aids or prosthetics.

Regular check-ups with your GP, specialist doctors, surgeons, and physiotherapists, podiatrist, orthotist and prosthetist will help to monitor healing, address any challenges, and provide ongoing support. Staying connected with healthcare professionals will make sure your family member receives the best care, guidance, and treatment options.

This process can take time and patience, but with the right support, progress can be made.

As a family member, there are many ways you can support your loved one through rehabilitation:

- **Ask questions yourself of the healthcare team so you understand the amputation journey too.**
- **Speak up for your family member with the healthcare team if they wish you too.**
- **Offer words of encouragement and celebrate their progress, no matter how small.**
- **Gently remind them to do their exercises and assist when needed.**
- **Help them practice using mobility aids to build confidence and independence.**
- **Ensure your home is set up safely to support their recovery, making adjustments as needed.**

Your support can make a big difference in their healing journey, helping them regain strength and adapt to new routines.

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Managing Pain

After an amputation, your family member may experience pain in the remaining limb or other areas where muscles have become tense or imbalanced.

They may also have phantom limb sensation or pain, where they feel sensations like itching, burning, or cramping in the limb that is no longer there. This is a common experience, but it can be hard to deal with.

Pain levels can vary, and finding the right management approach takes time. If your loved one is struggling with ongoing sensations or pain, working with their healthcare provider can help find the right treatment options to bring relief.

As a family member, you can offer support by:

- **Encouraging them to talk openly with healthcare providers to find the best pain management strategies.**
- **Attending medical appointments to help advocate for their needs.**
- **Assisting with therapies to help with their sensations or pain.**

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Understanding Prosthetics

Once the recovery from amputation has progressed, your family member may begin the process of getting a prosthetic limb.

A prosthetic limb is an artificial body part used to replace a missing limb or other part of the body, helping a person regain function and mobility.

You can play a supportive role in this process by helping them through the stages of fitting, adjustments, and learning how to use the prosthetic.

It can take time to get used to using a prosthetic limb. You can make a big difference in their recovery by encouraging them to practice and providing patience and emotional support during hard times.

Prosthetics are usually funded by NDIS or state government funding schemes.

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Supporting Their Emotional Wellbeing

Losing a limb can be hard, and it's normal to feel sad, frustrated, or overwhelmed when returning home after surgery. As a family member, being there to listen and offer support can make a big difference. Encourage them to talk about how they're feeling and let them know they're not alone.

Support groups for amputees and their families can offer advice, emotional support, and a sense of community with others who understand the experience who can provide encouragement and practical tips.

It is also important to watch for signs of depression or anxiety and encourage your loved one to get help when needed. If these feelings persist, professional counseling could help. Encourage them to reach out for support, and if you're concerned, your GP or organisations like WellMob, 13YARN and Beyond Blue offer 24/7 guidance and support.

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Your Wellbeing and Respite

Caring for someone after an amputation can be physically and emotionally demanding. It's important that you look after your own well-being to avoid feeling overwhelmed so you can continue providing support.

There are a number of resources to help you manage the challenges of caregiving:

- Carer support services, like Carer Gateway, can connect you with support networks, keep you linked in with community, and financial assistance.
- Mental health support is available for caregivers who may be struggling with stress, anxiety, or burnout. Speaking to a counsellor or support group can be invaluable during difficult times.
- Respite services provide the opportunity to take a break and recharge while knowing your loved one is in safe hands. These services may include in-home care, day programs, or short-term stays in residential care.
- Practical support, advocacy and resources are available to help you in your caring role, such as helping you to continue your education whilst you have caring responsibilities.

Speak with your GP, healthcare provider or local community services to find out about options available in your area. Taking care of yourself will help ensure you can continue to care for your loved one without becoming overwhelmed.

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Financial Assistance and Practical Support

There are various government programs and non-profit organisations that can offer financial assistance, either for the cost of care or the costs associated with the amputation and prosthetics.

- **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS):** the NDIS provides support for Australians under 65yrs of age at the time of their amputation, including funding for prosthetic limbs and related services. It's important to consult with your social worker or NDIS representatives to understand the support available to you.
- **My Aged Care:** is available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the age of 50 who require support to stay in their home or transition to an aged care home. Again, speaking with your social worker or visiting the website is a great starting place to learn what help you can get.
- **Centrelink:** Centrelink offers financial assistance and employment support to individuals with disabilities, including those recovering from amputations. Carer allowances are also available.
- **State-Based Prosthetic Services:** Each Australian state has its own prosthetic services that offer financial assistance and support. Be sure to check with local health centres, hospitals, or community organisations to learn about what's available in your area.

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How can I find out more?

Carer Gateway:

<https://www.carergateway.gov.au/>

Carer Gateway is an Australian Government program providing free services and support for carers.

Carers SA

Information and support for First Nations carers, young carers and their families, including peer support, respite advice, counselling, coaching, advocacy, and practical support.

<https://www.carerssa.com.au/about-us/first-nations/>

WellMob

<https://wellmob.org.au/>

Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

13Yarn

13 92 76 / www.13yarn.org.au/

National support line for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in crisis.

Preventative Health SA

<https://www.preventivehealth.sa.gov.au/healthy-living/aboriginal-health-wellbeing/services-support-for-aboriginal-people>

List of services and support for Aboriginal people to stay connected.

Services Australia

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/caring-for-someone>

Support including carer financial payments.

NDIS

www.ndis.gov.au/

Federal Government program to support Australians with disability to live more independently and achieve their goals.

My Aged Care

www.myagedcare.gov.au/

Federal government support program for Indigenous Australians aged over 50 years.

Limbs4life - Peer Support

<https://www.limbs4life.org.au/peer-support>

Connecting individuals and their families pre or post amputation with trained amputees who have experience living with, and adapting to limb loss.

Limbs for Life also have a closed Facebook group where you can connect with others in a similar situation –

Search on Facebook for: Amputees Australia - Limbs 4 Life.

State-based prosthetic funding

<https://www.limbs4life.org.au/funding/artificial-limb-schemes>

State based prosthetic services.

The websites above may change over time, ask your health care team for suggestions if you need support.

We recognise First Nations peoples' cultural, spiritual, physical and emotional connection with their land. We honour and pay our respects to First Nations Elders, both past and present. We acknowledge and thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who shared their stories and expertise to codevelop these resources.



To view the videos that support this booklet, please scan this qr code or visit the Limbs 4 Life website.

<https://www.limbs4life.org.au/aboriginal-resources>

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