



Phantom sensation and phantom pain

Unique to some amputees is phantom pain and phantom sensation. Phantom pain is commonly experienced by amputees in the early stages following surgery. While some amputees will experience varying degrees of pain or sensation in the limb that is no longer there, others may never experience these feelings. Like other bodily sensations, everyone's experience of phantom sensation or pain will be unique to the individual.

What is phantom pain?

Some amputees experience phantom pain. Phantom pain can feel like an electric shock, sharp, burning or stabbing sensation in the limb that is no longer there. Phantom pain can reduce over time and the intensity can become weaker. Some people find this pain very uncomfortable. Phantom pain can be triggered in a variety of ways and vary in severity from person to person.

What is phantom sensation?

Phantom sensation is a feeling in the limb which is no longer there. Some people feel like their amputated limb is still there, even after surgery. This is normal. You may have feelings or sensations in the whole limb or in parts of the missing limb (e.g. the toes or the fingers, ankle, or the knee). You may experience sensations such as pins and needles, an itch, or tingling sensations.



How can I manage phantom pain and phantom sensation?

One of the successful ways to manage phantom pain is diversion therapy. Diversion therapy is when you try to focus your attention on doing something else (e.g. moving if you have been sitting still for a while, or touching and massaging your residual limb). Some people listen to music, talk to a friend or play a game, to help take their mind off the pain. Put simply, diversion is anything that helps to take your mind away from the phantom pain and can be a useful way to assist in reducing the pain.

The use of other therapies may be helpful as well including, massage, acupuncture, stretching and/or mirror therapy. Other people are comforted by the use of heat or cold packs (these should only be used if you can feel hot or cold sensations).

Some people also find Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS) machines assist in reducing pain. TENS machines generate electrical impulses through the skin surface.

It is not uncommon for people to take medication for phantom pain and your healthcare providers will discuss this with you. If you have any concerns speak with your healthcare team to discuss the use of treatments for phantom pain to ensure you are using a method that is safe and effective for you. You may be referred to a specialist pain consultant to assist in developing a treatment plan that is specifically for you.

If you are experiencing pain please speak to your healthcare provider.

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This Information Sheet forms part of the Victorian Limb Loss Empowerment Project Toolkit.
This project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.