Stump Care, Prosthesis

Sometimes, an arm or leg must be removed (*amputated*). An artificial body part (*prosthesis*) can help you return to a more normal life. The prosthesis needs to be cared for, as does the end of your arm or leg. This is sometimes called a stump. Your caregiver might call it a residual limb. It will need some protection. Also, your skin will need special care. It takes time to get used to this. Try to be patient. Good stump care will help you be comfortable, active, and healthy.

SKIN CARE

- Each day, look closely at the skin on your stump.
  - Use a mirror with a long handle to check areas you cannot see or ask a friend or family member to look.
  - Check for areas that look irritated. They might be reddish or swollen. Make sure there are no open sores. If there are, call your caregiver.
- Keep the skin of the stump clean and dry. You should:
  - Wash with a mild, antibacterial soap at least once a day. This is a special soap to fight germs. Wash more often if you get dirty or sweaty often.
  - **Do not** soak in a warm or hot bath for long periods.
  - Use a cotton towel to pat the stump dry. Let it air-dry for another 5 to 10 minutes.
  - **Do not** use lotions that contain petroleum jelly. **Do not** use skin care products with an alcohol base. These products can be harmful to your skin. They can also damage the lining of the prosthesis.
  - Put creams and lotions on your stump only if your caregiver says it is okay to do so.
  - **Do not** shave the stump. Hair that grows out after being shaved is more easily irritated by the prosthesis.
  - Consider using an antiperspirant spray on the skin of the stump.
- Take care of the surgical scar. Your caregiver may instruct you to rub an ointment on it. This can keep the scar soft and help it heal.
- Pay attention to pressure points. These are places where the prosthesis and stump rub together. Even little contact areas can become sore. Ask your caregiver if adjustments need to be made.

PROSTHESIS CARE

How you take care of the prosthesis can affect the stump, too.

- Make sure it is clean before you attach it.
  - Clean all the parts that touch your skin. This includes the prosthesis and padding. Use hot water and antibacterial soap. Make sure everything is dry before you attach the prosthesis.
  - Make sure the place where the stump fits into the prosthesis (*socket*) is clean and dry.
- Be sure you understand how to attach the prosthesis. Your caregiver can show you how to do this. It is a good idea to practice several times while he or she watches.
- You may have been given wraps or clothing to wear under the prosthesis. Make sure you use them.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take any medicine that your caregiver has suggested. This may include pain medicine.
- Some people have what is called phantom limb pain. You feel pain or tingling just like you would if the limb you lost was still there. Tell your caregiver about this. Treatment may be possible.
- You might need to wear a compression garment (elastic bandage or sock) when you are not wearing the prosthesis. These are often called "stump shrinkers."
- Limit the amount of time you wear your prosthesis. This is especially important at first. You may want to increase the time a little bit each day. Ask your caregiver for suggestions.
- Learn how to sit and lie down in a way that will not cause changes in your stump or adjacent joints. Otherwise, this can affect how the prosthesis fits. For example, do not put pillows under the stump.
- Do whatever exercises and movements your physical therapist recommended. This might include practicing everyday tasks.

- Keep your weight stable. Losing or gaining weight will quickly change the way the prosthesis fits.
  - It is okay to lose weight gradually. Just check with your caregiver every so often to make sure the prosthesis still fits well.
- Keep all follow-up appointments. This is important to make sure the stump is healthy and the prosthesis is working as it should.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have any questions about medicine.
- Pain continues, even after taking pain medicine.
- The prosthesis does not seem to fit correctly or it starts to rub unevenly.
- The amount of padding between the prosthesis and the stump needs to be changed.
- Sweating between the stump and the prosthesis is heavy and efforts to control it do not work.
- An itchy rash develops on the stump.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your residual limb feels markedly colder than the upper part of the limb.
- A sore on the stump is not healing.
- The stump is red, swollen, or hot. It may be sore to touch. These could be signs of an infection.
- Your skin looks gray or black.
- A bad smell develops around the stump.

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